

The University of Western Ontario  
The Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

# An Erosophy of Culture

(CL 9614A)

Wednesdays 2:30-5:30 in AHB 3B04

**Instructor: Călin Mihăilescu**

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## Course Description

Theology creates transcendence; philosophy creates immanence; erosophy creates intimacy. Culture in general and literature in particular have been customarily studied from the perspective of the first two; as culture is being comprehensively ambushed by technology (as *Kultur* has been dismantled by the Great War), its erosophical understanding claims a sense of urgency that has abandoned contemporary theologies and philosophies. Thus, this is a course in the history of love (of the wisdom of culture).

Erosophy creates, rather than reproduce or interpret intimacy. The latter figures across these semantic fields: interiority • filiation • familiarity • uncanniness; metonymy • vicinity • contagion; sexuality • Biblical knowledge • incarnation; proxemics • counter-abstraction • aesthetics; habit • closeness • belief; essence • inwardness • warmth.

Intimacy either ignores or overcomes judgmental schemas—truth / lie; subject / object; public / private; legal / a-legal; human / inhuman; power-thinking, pornography and other ISMs. Understood erosophically, intimacy is corporeal, inductive, counter-conceptual, and genealogical. Here immediacy, which always comes too late, is warped and melancholy; as its present pre-senses, interpretation and prediction are tendencies absorbed in creation. The truth (*pace* Heidegger) lies in the dormant revelation of the exactitude of intimacy.

## Course Requirements

**A. Class Participation (20%)**

**B. Midterm paper (due Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>) / class presentation (25%)**

**C. Final essay (due December 27<sup>th</sup>) (55%)**

# Syllabus

**Sept 23 Opening public lecture: “Trying to fix what dad did to grandpa”**

**1 Sept 30 – Rounding up the PreSocratics**

Plato’s *Symposium*

Heraclitus & Empedocles fragments

& one of: Steven Berg’s *Eros and the Intoxications of Enlightenment*; Richard Hunter’s *Plato’s Symposium*;

Frisbee Sheffield’s *Plato’s Symposium. The Ethics of Desire*

**2 Oct 7 – Don’t Mess with Mr. In Between**

Goethe, *Werther*

Roland Barthes, *Fragments of a Lover’s Discourse*

Extra: Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text*

**3 Oct 14 – Once upon a Culture**

Theodor Adorno, “Kultur and Culture”; *The Culture Industry* (chs. 2, 3 & 4)

\_\_\_\_, and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”

Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (ch. 1; extra, chs. 11 & 12)

Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem. On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture: 29-38*

Extra: Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

**4 Oct 21 – Beginning Forever**

Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book* (and Peter Greenaway’s homonymous film)

Emily Dickinson, selected poems

**5 Oct 28 – Assorted Cruelties**

de Sade, *120 Days of Sodom*

Gustave Flaubert, *The Sentimental Education*

Extra: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Novel Gazing*

**6 Nov 4 – Prousting None and All (twenty years since Deleuze’s passing)**

Marcel Proust, *Swan’s Way*

Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* ; **Mid-term papers due**

**7 Nov 11 The Brain around the Heart**

Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*; Tarkovsky’s homonymous film

Extra: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*

**8 Nov 18 – Humans around**

Phillip Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*; Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*

Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*

Extra: Erik Davis, *TechGnosis*

**9 Nov 25 – We Correspond**

Elizabeth Bishop & Robert Lowell, *Words in Air*

**Invited speaker: David Janzen** – The Adorno–Benjamin Correspondence

**10 Dec 2 – Daily Confessions**

St Augustine, *The Confessions*

Julien Green, *Diary*

**11 Dec. 9 – Utopias Warm and Lethal**

Andrei Platonov, *Chevangur*