Rights to Pleasure:
Representations of Female Sexuality and Social Taboos in Philosophy and Cinema
Alhelí de María Alvarado-Díaz

Louis Garrel, Eva Green and Michael Pitt in a scene from Bernardo Bertolucci’s The Dreamers

Rights to Pleasure will confront the ethics of female sexuality, the polemics of erotic awakening and sexual freedoms, and the history of social taboo in women’s history. The seminar will focus on reading and analysis of key philosophical thinkers as well as discussion of cinematic representations on the topic. Seminar discussions will question the concept of identity and established female roles, examining the lives and writings of women faced with situations of gender conflict. Rights to Pleasure will rethink the concept of individual freedom as well as the experience of embracing women’s ambiguities and their right to remain in permanent flux, outside the official labels and categories of fixed normalized sexuality and established social norms. How are sexual rights connected to political freedoms? How is female pleasure a precondition for contemporary understandings of justice, liberty and equality? This course will establish meaningful connections between the ethics of difference and current definitions and practices of democracy as well as the intersections between cinema and philosophy.

Rights to Pleasure will teach students to connect films with philosophical texts. Students will learn to analyze films as visual narratives and philosophical statements. Students will develop writing and speech skills as film critics, establishing connections between cinema and other cultural fields including ethics, literature and politics. Each student will have the opportunity to present an original interpretation of one of the
assigned films from the program, demonstrating the afterlives of films for viewers inside and outside the academic setting.

**Evaluation and Grad Breakdown**

Active Class Participation 20%
Oral Presentation 20%
Bibliography and Abstract of Final Paper 10%
Final Paper 50%

**Texts**

Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Dover, 1996)
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Vintage, 1989)
Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Fordham University Press, 2008)
Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3 The Care of the Self* (Vintage, 1988)
Luce Irigaray, *Democracy begins between Two* (Routledge, 2001)
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 2006)
Texts marked with * will be posted online
Reading and Discussion Program

Week 1: The Polemic of Religion and Female Sexuality

*Excerpts from Genesis (Hebrew Bible)
Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women
Scenes from The Magdalene Sisters (Peter Mullan, 2002)

Week 2: Erotic Awakening and the Narrative of Hysteria

* Freud, Anna O. & Studies on Hysteria
Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, Vol. 3 The Care of the Self
Scenes from A Dangerous Method (David Cronenberg, 2011)

Week 3: Women and Colonization

Scenes from White Material (Claire Denis, 2009)
* Cornelia Ruhe, “Beyond Post-Colonialism? From Chocolat to White Material” in

Week 4: Women & Sexual Tourism

Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Intruder”, Corpus
*Scenes from Heading South (Laurent Cantet, 2005)
Simone Beauvoir, “Part One”, The Second Sex

Week 5: The Sexual Lives of Female Activists

Scenes from Carlos (Olivier Assayas, 2010) & The Baader Meinhof Complex (Uli Edel, 2008)

Week 6: The School of Shame

“Natural History of Morals”, Beyond Good and Evil
* Scenes from The Holy Girl (Lucrecia Martel, 2005)

Week 7: The Right to Ambiguity

Judith Butler, “Subject of Sex/Gender/Desire”, “Prohibition, Psychoanalysis and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix”, Gender Trouble
La vie d’Adèle (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2013)

Week 8: The Ethics of Difference
Judith Butler, “Subversive Bodily Acts”, *Gender Trouble*  
*XXY* (Lucía Puenzo, 2007)

**Week 9: Neither Nuns, nor Sluts: Women as Friends & Lovers**

Luce Irigaray, *Democracy begins between Two*  
*Scenes from The Intruder* (Claire Denis, 2004)

**Week 10: The Rejection of Domesticity**

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest and a Dream*  
Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*  
*Scenes from Vagabond* (Agnès Varda, 1985) and *Sex and Lucía* (Julio Medem, 2002)

**Week 11: The Pleasures of Revolutionaries**

Kate Evans, *Red Rosa*  
Scenes from *Rosa Luxemburg* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1987)

**Week 12: Castrating Mothers, Insubordinate Daughters**

Michel Foucault, “Dreaming One’s Pleasures”, “The Wife”, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 3 The Care of the Self*  

**Week 13: Cultural Double Standards & The Judgment of Women**

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest and a Dream*  
Scenes from *The Stoning of Soraya* (Cyrus Nowrasteh, 2009)

**Week 14: The Issue of the Female Body**

Simone de Beauvoir, “History”, *The Second Sex*  
Scenes from *Fat Girl* (Catherine Breillat, 2001)

**Week 15: Female Sexuality as Freedom & Power**

*Luce Irigaray, In the Beginning, She Was*  