

A Poetics of Approach: Love and texts

"But once the realization is accepted that even between the closest people infinite distances exist, a marvellous living side-by-side can grow up for them, if they succeed in loving the expanse between them, which gives them the possibility of always seeing each other as a whole and before an immense sky."

(Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*)

My research has two primary concerns:

First, following from WJT Mitchell's proposition that the question to ask of texts is not what they mean or what they do to us, but what they *want*, I extend this question to texts in order to demonstrate that texts too desire *to be asked what they want*, and that asking this question is part of a loving method of reading.

Asking a text or picture what it wants requires attention to the text as a sort of 'other'. Using Teresa Brennan's definition of love as a living attention, I designate the attitude of a reader in close and responsive attention to a text as a way of loving. Via Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* and Jean Luc Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, I argue for a textual ontology in which the being of texts is always already a being-in-relation. I then trace a genealogy of the presence and non-presence of love in recent Continental philosophy in order to show the relation of love to a text, a relation which I argue has most recently been enacted through deconstruction. First, I look at a phenomenon identified both by Barthes and by Luce Irigaray, which they identify as a space or site of love which occurs between two people. I find a similar idea in the writings of the poet Rilke, for whom acknowledged difference between people who love one another is essential, and without which love cannot occur. This difference creates an 'expanse' between people who love one another, but it is this expanse which *allows* love to take place. From Rilke's 'expanse' I move to an interview given by Jacques Derrida, in which he is asked about the relation between love and deconstruction, which is often thought of as a particularly negative model for working with texts. Deconstruction is an essentially textual interaction; it is not so generally practised in supermarkets, cafés, or swimming pools. The textual nature of deconstruction and Derrida's statements that "love means an affirmative desire towards the Other...[which is] an irreducible affirmation...the original ethics" indicate that love has an important part to play in how we understand the world and interact with its parts, including texts.

Secondly, I use three case studies to explore narratives in which love as a site or space of creative interaction between people calls for a reading of the texts which is itself creative, attentive, and listening, in order to demonstrate the approach I outline in the first three chapters.

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