

CLC 1023: Sex and Culture
Lecture Four: Spaces and Acts

PLAY (while class is entering): “I’m Walking on Sunshine” : Katrina and the Waves, 1985.

Slide 1: Title – Sexual Spaces / Sexual Acts [Astrological Image of Virgo / Photo of Diver]

Slide 2: Topics Covered Last Class

1. Erotic Icon → revealed through many “sexual personas”
2. Ancient Erotic Icons: Venus (Beauty Queen); Earth Mother, Sky Father
3. Singing Vulva as sexual persona of the Earth Mother Icon
4. Trope #4: Sexual Hyperbole (transgressive exaggeration)
5. Iconographic Analysis of “Venus” lyrics → as a member of the class pointed out to me recently, the Bananarama hit was originally composed and recorded by the Dutch band Shocking Blue in 1969.

Slide 3: Announcements → Virgo Icon

1. Only one announcement today, and it’s a bit post-dated. Last Saturday was my birthday, which makes me (somewhat ironically) a *total* Virgo...

So I’ve been “walking on sunshine” all week – yeah! → so this is what 58 looks like! As astrologers will tell you, total Virgos are inclined to question everything, which means that very few Virgos actually believe in astrology. We’re quite a critical bunch on the whole.

Though I’m pretty typical in this respect, I am critically interested in astrology as a Sex and Culture phenomenon → it’s another cultural “vehicle” for understanding the mysterious domain of Sex as well as the sexual destiny of individuals.

Slide 4: Celebrity Virgos

QUESTION: Any Virgos in the class? [I said Virgos, not virgins!]

If you’re like me, you’re probably curious to know who else was born under your sign. Are your fellow Virgos like you? Do you see yourself reflected in them?

Here are a few celebrity Virgos: the Virgin Queen herself (Elizabeth I)

‘
Beyoncé

Greta Garbo, who always wanted to be alone.

The great Chinese Basketball star Yao Ming

Fine company to be in, though I don’t think I’m very much like any of these celebs.

Slide 5: Virgo as Erotic Icon: The Virgin

Nevertheless – as a Virgo – I got to thinking about my September star-sign as an ancient EROTIC ICON → “The Virgin” → as you can tell from the image of Virgo, she was associated with flourishing vegetation and fertility (hence the morning glories trailing from her in the picture.) She is traditionally shown holding a wheat sheaf, which makes her a harvest goddess closely related to the Earth Mother. In fact, Virgo here seems to be emerging out of the earth and yearning to walk on sunshine right back to the sexually promiscuous Sky Father hidden behind the clouds.

I naturally had to check out my horoscope on Astrology.com, which confirmed my suspicion that Virgo (despite -- or maybe because – of her virginity) had a close connection with romance and sex.

Slide 6: Virgo horoscope → Virgo and Love

From Astrology.com:

“Virgo and Romance: A natural state for Virgo in love is to analyze the situation while exploring it deeply. This will show off the Virgin as steady, solid and far from a flirt. Virgos are much more the true romantic; they love giving as well as receiving, passion and uninhibited joy. Virgos really know how to make their partner feel special, so some heat between the sheets is likely to occur! Love comes to Virgo slowly, carefully and sweetly, and the desire to learn all about their lover makes those born under this sign ideal lovers themselves.”

Well, that seems to fit a Virgo Professor!

Slide 7: Virgo horoscope → Virgo and Sex

From Astrology.com:

“Virgo and Sex: So often, the sizzle in sex is in the details, and Virgo is a master of minutiae. The lover as perfectionist is Virgo personified: someone who will see to it that the little things are never overlooked. Virgos finish what they start in the bedroom, and this cozy chamber is likely to be a dreamy den decorated with discriminating taste. A cool exterior tends to mask Virgo's wild side, **often a fantasy world filled with erotica safely under wraps.**

I was surprised to discover an interesting definition of culture embedded in this astrological text:

Slide 8: Sex and Culture

Culture (as explored in this course): “often a fantasy world filled with erotica safely under wraps.”

Slide 9-10-11-12: Sex and Culture (cont’d)

This term we’ll be exploring erotic cultures in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and throughout this long period, a notion of culture as an education system gradually developed. Culture would come to be defined as a system of knowledge passed down the generations through a series of interlinking subjects:

Astronomy (Astrology)
Music
Geometry
Arithmetic

THE QUADRIVIUM

Logic
Rhetoric
Grammar

THE TRIVIUM

On Monday we began to explore The Rhetoric of Sex → sexual tropes.

On Wednesday, we started to explore erotic icons → which, like Virgo, often have a connection with the stars. So I guess we’re beginning to trace our way back to an Astronomy (or really an Astrology) of Sex.

We’ll be returning to Virgo later in the term, when we come to Ovid’s ROME. Let’s go for a moment to Hollywood. Here’s today’s Big Q:

Slide 13: The Big Q

Keira Knightley (as Elizabeth Swann) in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is a sexual persona of what ancient Erotic Icon?

Slide 14: Answer

The Venus Icon → which I also call “The Beauty Queen”
Keira isn’t really a persona of the Virgo Icon, though Elizabeth Swann may indeed be virginal at the start of the movie.

Slide 15: The Two Venuses in *Pirates of the Caribbean II*

The symbolic clue to her Venus identity is, of course, her windblown hairdo and her association with the sea and the beach...(rather than fields and harvests).

I expect that lots of you have seen *Pirates in the Caribbean*. When Professor Olson and I saw part two in August of last year, we were both struck by how the two female leads reflect the contrasting powers of the two Venuses. The sexual persona of Blonde Venus underlies the role of Elizabeth Swann, played by the perpetually windblown Kiera Knightley.

Slide 16: The Two Venuses cont'd

The sexual persona of Black Venus underlies the role of Tia Dalma, the sensuous sorceress played by the British actress Naomie Harris. Poor Johnny Depp (in the gayest pirate role *ever*) is queerly caught between them. Neither version of Venus is quite able to make a “man” out of him in the usual venereal sense: hence much of the comedy in the series.

Slide 17: Conceptual Foundations

Since Erotic Icons don't exist in a vacuum – their sexual personas occupy cultural domains and move about in different environments as they perform their different roles – I'd like to turn our attention today to the concept of sexual space and the activities that go on in it.

REVIEW

For the past three lectures we've been laying down the conceptual foundations of CLC 1023. We began by reflecting on the tension between Taboo and Transgression in erotic culture. Then, related the dynamic interplay of Taboo and Transgression to sexual discourse, we considered the competing terms and tropes from which a culture constructs its understandings of sex. Because images as well as words are bound up with cultural constructions of the erotic life, we spent last class distinguishing the concepts of “Erotic Icon” and “Sexual Persona.”

Slide 18: Conceptual Foundations (Cont'd)

The concepts I'll define for you today – Sexual Spaces and Acts – are both suggested by the modern term “erogenous zone.”

What does this term usually mean in modern sexual discourse?

Slide 19: Erogenous Zones

The surface of the body mapped out as a fully explored space with certain “areas” (individual parts or combinations of parts) designated as sexual stimuli or “turn-ons” or as sites for sexual activity. Hence, the notion of “sexual space” is inseparable from the concept of “sexual act.”

This cartoon pokes fun at how differently men and women are supposed to perceive the “map” of their erogenous zones.

Slide 20: Erogenous Zones → Taboo or Transgression?

Needless to say, erogenous zones (wherever you locate them on your body) are perfect domains for observing the interplay between taboo and transgression.

Whenever you cover up an erogenous zone with strategically placed clothing – such as a bathing suit – you’re telling the world that you are respectful or at least mindful of the taboo on nudity (which presupposes the taboo on sex).

Ironically, of course, the very act of covering up an erogenous zone immediately draws transgressive erotic attention to it → as in these images. The top image is an ancient Roman mosaic of women in what appears to be early versions of the bikini. The bottom image is taken from a modern fashion runway. The Sex and Culture implications of the two images are the same. Taboo and Transgression are always at play with each other, and so too are the sexualizations of space and action.

The interplay of Sexual Spaces and Sexual Acts might be called a “synergy”.

Slide 21: Synergy

DEFINITION: literally “working together” → the interaction of forces or agents or things in which their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

Socially/Sexually → co-operative interplay.

The cultural forces of TABOO and TRANSGRESSION also function as a synergy in so far as they work together to produce the distinctive dynamics of a city’s erotic culture.

The SPACE / ACT synergy is of course related to the TABOO / TRANSGRESSION synergy, as the following slides will suggest.

Slide 22: Synergies

In fact, all our foundations concepts may be related to each other synergistically, within each pair as well as among all the pairs.

Slide 23: Tom of Finland drawing [boot camp]

What Sex Act is taking place in this drawing by Tom of Finland?

“Boot Worship” → a Master / Slave game in gay SM [Sadomasochism]

What Sexual Space is imaginatively constructed (though not pictured) here?
Police Station? Barracks? Tiled Floor of a Prison Shower-room?
A military stable → since the boots are riding boots with spurs
Fantasy space → cavalry officer's barracks?

NOTE how the boots are sexual metonymies for the officers' (unseen) penises, which are both holding down and "entering" the nude slave's rump.

How does the implied space make the sex act all the more transgressive?

The strict (homophobic) environment of military space suggests TABOO, but the erotic action of subordination happening here is clearly breaking the taboo on male-male sex even as it is exposing male compliance with the hierarchical system of gender dominance.

Slide 24: Viagra ad

Consider the synergies at work in this Viagra ad.

Note the synergy of tropes

1. sexual metaphor → erect penis is as rigid/strong/long as a high bar or pole
2. sexual metonymy → high bar/pole is associated with vigorous athleticism
Sex as competitive gymnastic activity
3. sexual hyperbole → the woman gains extreme athletic strength/flexibility from the man's superior "gymnastic equipment"

Note the synergy of sexual space [bedroom as spectacularized Olympian arena] and sexual act [handjob as extreme gymnastic performance]

Slides 25-26-27-28: erotic highlights of the Olympics

ASK Class to comment on the relation between sexual space and sexual acts at the Beijing Olympics

NOTE: The Olympic venues (e.g. the beach volleyball court, the diving pool) were manifestly NOT meant to be viewed as erotic domains

YET: the constant display of "hot bodies" at the Olympics – bodies meant to be admired in public for athletic qualities (e.g. flexibility, strength, endurance) – were often transgressively admired for their sexual attractiveness. Certainly the movements of the athletes and their tight Lycra fashions (in certain events) did little to dispel the erotic allure.

Slide 29: Does sexual activity make a space sexual? [Bada Bing Club sign]

QUESTION: Does sexual activity make a space sexual?

The sexual activity of stripping makes Tony Soprano's bar/clubhouse a sexual space. This is literally signalled in the sign for the Bada Bing club → note the exclamation point serving as a metonymy for the mafia boss's menacing phallus (a sign of his dominance over women, obviously, but also over his men – the “club/phallus” in the sense of a weapon). Inside the club, the poles around which the female strippers writhe and gyrate are also fairly obvious metonymies for the mobsters' aggressive phalluses (hyperbolically enlarged or elongated and presented as objects of obsessive worship by the strippers).

Slide 30: Does sexual space make an activity sexual? [medieval illustrations of coitus]

QUESTION: Does sexual space make an activity sexual?

Take a look at these medieval illustrations of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere in bed together.

Can anyone spot a sexual metonymy/metaphor in these illustrations of sexual intercourse?

ANSWER: Curtains as Labia [The Bedroom as Vulva]

Door as Vagina

Not just the bed and the bedroom but the whole castle has become a figuratively sexualized space within which the knight and his lady CONCEAL their adulterous affair. It's the space, however, that REVEALS what they are doing.

Why these metonymies (verging on metaphors)?

They reveal the impact of TABOO, operating through the Christian virtue of modesty.

Sometimes a private space is strategically represented in public as totally devoid of any erotic activity or erotic agents → NON-SEXUAL SPACE. For instance, this is how The University of Western Ontario represents the rooms in Saugeen-Maitland residence on its official website:

Slide 31: Saugeen-Maitland Hall → Floorplan of Residence Rooms

Looking at these pictures, you would never suspect that any erotic beings *ever* lived here, or that any sexual activity *ever* took place in these ideally peaceful empty rooms.

A few years ago, however, a glimpse into the secret transgressive world of Saugeen-Maitland Hall was afforded by the ever-voyeuristic power of the Internet when photos of a female student scandalously performing an amateur strip act at a male friends's birthday party were posted on various websites and turned up all over the Internet.

Slide 32: The Saugeen Stripper → Internet photos [identity of stripper concealed]

Suddenly it looked like the Bada Bing Club had suddenly invaded the taboo-bound world of the Residence. These images (and many more from the same scene) provoked a predictably angry/defensive response from the Powers That Be → as well as from editorial writers in “respectable” newspapers across Canada, including the Toronto Sun.

Note how the Saugeen Stripper’s costume (nurse’s white uniform in shiny plastic) evokes another space where bodies are subjected to stripping and examination → the Hospital, which like the Residence is an institutional workplace *normally* function under the regime of strict taboos against sexual activity. These images – as do the comments posted by their viewers on the Internet – clearly reflect the synergy of sexual space and action and the synergy of taboo and transgression.

Slide 33: Wikipedia article on the Saugeen Stripper

“To some degree, Saugeen is responsible for UWO's reputation as a "party school", an image university officials have been trying for years to change. This has not been helped by events as recently as October 2005, when an 18-year-old student performed a striptease at a birthday party, with dozens of digital images of the party loaded onto the Internet. According to UWO sources, she was not acting in any way against her will and was aware of the photographs being taken.”

Clearly the Internet is collapsing the old binary opposition of PUBLIC SPACE and PRIVATE SPACE. Under the regime of taboo, sex is supposed to happen well away from the public eye and the public domain. Traditionally it’s been an activity reserved for private space → behind closed doors, in the bedroom, at “home” (even when the Beatles sang “Why don’t we do it in the street?”: not many people in the sixties, however radical they were, acted on John Lennon’s suggestion!). Now, in the ultra-transgressive erotic culture of Cyberspace, there is no private space → even when you think you’re paying for it (e.g. private views of kinky webcam imagery).

Slide 34: “Walking on Sunshine” by Katrina and the Waves (1985)

I’d like to conclude my lecture today by illustrating the SPACE / ACTION synergy in the lyrics of today’s theme song, another “oldie” from the 1980s.

Slide 35: Lyrics for “Walking on Sunshine” (Katrina and the Waves, 1985)

Song written by Kimberley Rew for Katrina and the Waves (1985).

I used to think maybe you loved me now baby I'm sure
And I just can't wait till the day when you knock on my door
Now every time I go for the mailbox, gotta hold myself down
Cause I just wait till you write me your coming around

I'm walking on sunshine , wooah! and don't it feel good!!
Hey , alright now, and dont it feel good!! hey yeh

I feel the love, I feel the love, I feel the love that's really real
I feel the love, I feel the love, I feel the love that's really real

Slide 36: Metonymies / Metaphors of Space and Action

NOTE the sexual implications of spatial terms and actions words (verbs) in the lyrics

ACTS

knock on my door -----> sexual trope (metonymy + metaphor) for courtship/foreplay

go to the mailbox -----> sexual trope for vaginal masturbation

Further implications: pen/letter slipped through slot

MALE SEXUALITY AS TEXTUALITY

(The phallic “pen”)

gotta hold myself down —> sexual trope for restraint/self-control (Taboo response)

but also for excitement /anticipation (Transgression)

coming around -----> sexual trope for approach / penetrative entrance

walking on sunshine ----> sexual trope for orgasmic elation

Slide 37: Interior and Exterior Space

NOTE how the interior space of a house (suggested by the image of someone inside waiting for a knock at the door, a letter through the mailbox) is contrasted with an exterior space – the sky, the air, heaven – flooded with sunshine.

This spatial divide formally corresponds to the division between the “verse” and the “chorus” in the lyrics. It’s also suggested in the music, which gets very excited (agitated) in the chorus to suggest the ecstatic release of the singer following the sexual return of her lover.

Slide 38: Metonymic Correspondences (House = Sexual Body, Sunny Air = Erotic Spirit)

NOTE how the interior space of the House clearly “stands in” (serves as a metonymic substitute) for the Sexual Body.

What does the exterior space symbolically correspond to? —> the erotic spirit in a state of orgasmic ecstasy – released from the gravity of the body and the social restraints of the house

The movement from interior space to the sunny outside air corresponds to sexual activity (entry, penetration etc.) moving towards orgasmic release.

What sexual persona is the singer adopting? THE SUNSHINE GIRL (Venus Icon)

Slide 39: Taboo / Transgression

We can also chart in this movement an erotic course from the restrained taboo zone of the “Body/House” to the free space of the transgressive “Beyond,” the sunny “outside world.”

My discussion of “Walking on Sunshine” is an example of the kind of analysis I’m expecting from you on your first assignment “Lay Down Your Tracks.”