

Dr Emmanouil Aretoulakis, University of Crete, Greece

Consuming Desires and Sexualities

aretoulakis@phl.uoc.gr

What does it mean to “institutionalize” sexuality in current social, cultural and philosophical discourse? Also, what does consumption have to do with this institutionalization? In my paper I give instances of engendering, covering, recovering, and killing sexuality as the latter has been conceptualized in the 20th and 21st century. In the first half of the previous century, Freud talked about how civilization repressed sexuality by prohibiting (or incriminating) human pleasure and calling attention to the need to comply with a “reality principle” rather than a “pleasure principle.” (under the circumstances, of course, desire went underground and continued to “thrive”). The two World Wars seemed to justify, in retrospect, the prioritizing of duty or work over human desire and sexuality. At the end of that century, however, and at the beginning of the next, prohibition and repression turned into an over-consumption of pleasure and an excess of sexual expression. Thus, the former duty to abstain from pleasure became a duty or demand to enjoy oneself as well as indulge into one’s own sexuality. Such a demand, strangely but not unnaturally, led to a kind of de-sexualization of society and civilization in the sense that an enjoyment that is commanded is simply not an enjoyment. In this light, and as Lacan would inform us, the signifier (the articulation of desire) would be there, but the signified (real pleasure) would not. In essence, the explicit utterance of desire would signify the lack of any real desire underneath. I want to argue that sexuality is institutionalized and “normalized” in contemporary discourse precisely because it is not sexual anymore. I would like to exemplify the debunking of desire and sexuality through their association with duty by referring, amongst others, to Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989). In this novel, duty and sexuality stand at the liminal point between the two tendencies described, namely, the sexualizing repression of pleasure and the desexualizing over-consumption of duty as pleasure.

Dr. Emmanouel Aretoulakis is a Lecturer at the School of Philosophy of the University of Crete, Greece. He holds a Ph.D in English Renaissance Literature from the University of Athens, and an M.A in Literary Theory from the State University of Illinois, USA. He has taught English Poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries, the English Novel, and Literary

Theory, and he has published articles in international academic journals on Anthony Burgess' fiction, Renaissance Prose, Ecology and Literature. He has edited two volumes on Lyotard and Chaos Theory. His latest work called "Aesthetic Appreciation, Ethics and 9/11" was published in the American Philosophical Journal Contemporary Aesthetics. His current interests are related to the philosophy and aesthetics of the 18th century