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On love

Alfred Gell

[Editor's note: A French translation of this article by Alfred Gell was originally published in September 1996 in the anthropological journal Terrain – and is available on the journal's website (<http://terrain.revues.org>). As will be obvious, the article served as the introduction for a special issue on the subject of love. It is published here for the first time in English with the kind permission of Simeran Gell and the editor of Terrain, Christine Langlois.]

Georg Simmel was certainly justified in embedding his brief discussion of love and marriage within a broader discussion of secrecy and lies in social life (Simmel 1906). Love is the ultimate indiscretion. What most unifies this collection of papers – none of them, it must be said, taking a very optimistic stance towards the subject – is the question of knowledge and concealment. These papers are, of course, ‘contributions to knowledge’ in the standard acceptance of the phrase; like any research papers, they inform us about the world. But knowledge about love is not like knowledge about cabbages, which do not mind being known about. Love is constituted through the dual process of mutual exposure (between lovers) combined with concealment (from everybody else). To discuss love at all as a topic for research papers is in some ways to contradict the essence of love. Of course, I know that many loving couples conduct themselves in a very amorous way in public; but nonetheless these public displays only serve to hint at much more spectacular and shameful goings-on which take place behind closed doors. I know too that when questioned by researchers individuals and couples will speak at length, and often with alarming frankness, about their sex-lives. But these confessions are made, usually, with the assurance that the information divulged will never be traced back to the individuals concerned and will, with luck, be tucked away from public gaze in statistical tables published in journals only read by desiccated academics, who might as well come from outer space. Moreover, the social-scientific confessional mode deals with sex, rather than love, which I regard as somewhat distinct. What I consider impossible is that social scientific interrogation will ever be able to unearth true, authentic, love-secrets, just because once such secrets are surrendered to the public they are automatically devalued. When one of Princess Diana’s lovers goes public, he is disqualified as a lover and becomes a cad and an exploiter. What can such a person tell us of love, since he is obviously incapable of it? Hence we can never know about love because the process of coming to know about love, from the third-party standpoint, annihilates the very entity about which we seek to know.



How do love and knowledge come to be so intimately connected? It seems to me that we can trace the origin of love to the birth of the specific type of intelligence which distinguishes our species among the higher primates. Psychologists have chosen to call this intelligence 'Machiavellian' because it first manifests itself, among primates, as the ability to engage in covert action and misdirection. Chimpanzees, for instance, go to great lengths to conceal their copulatory intentions from animals higher up in the dominance hierarchy. They are adept at sauntering off into the bushes, apparently innocently in search of food, there to meet, by pre-arrangement, for a passionate tryst. The fundamentals of the love situation are already present. Such pre-arranged trysts involve, first of all, the exchange of pre-copulatory messages between the would-be lovers. The exchange of these messages (which consist of physical gestures, furtive genital displays, etc.) must be covertly done, or more dominant animals will intervene. Here we do not just have communication between partners, but exclusive, 'confidential' communication. Then the copulation itself is conducted out of sight, a second type of socially strategic information-control, and of course the phylogenetic origin of human unwillingness to indulge in public copulation except in special circumstances. According to psychologists and others, it is from the apes' awareness of 'how they seem to others' that intentionality and self-awareness – the basis of human intelligence as such – come about. Secrecy, misdirection (lying), and the exchange of intimacies which must at all costs remain concealed from third parties, are connected to sexuality intrinsically, via the evolution of pongid/hominid sexual competition and dominance. Sexual display, rivalry, and conflict are more or less universal features of human life, but what characterizes us (and to a lesser extent the Chimpanzees) is this sexual deviousness, which in the end means that, for us, access to sexual partners and the manipulation of information flows have become inextricably fused together. Thus we have come to speak of 'carnal knowledge', which it would be mistaken to treat as a metaphor or a circumlocution for some species of carnality which did not take the form of knowledge. Even sex is knowledge (of a lower type) and love, especially, is knowledge. Or, to be more precise, love is a knowledge system, a procedure for obtaining, distributing and transforming knowledge of preeminent social value.

One may show that love is knowledge by considering the matter from a comparative point of view. Every society is an informational universe of some kind. Within any social universe (I am not suggesting that such universes have distinct boundaries, though they may have) there is the stock of information that everybody has, that most people have, that only a few have, and that only one or two have. The pattern of the social distribution of knowledge varies according to the parameters of society at large. Some of the papers in this collection deal with advanced urban societies in which the informational universe is structured in a particular way, i.e. everybody (relevant) has a large stock of 'general' information appertaining to a mass of people, only few of whom are known even slightly, and even fewer intimately. The French are highly informed about French society as a totality, with the possible exception of certain minorities. A middle class French person 'knows' (generically) all about the French working class and upper class, to the extent of being able to get on terms with members of these social classes without undue difficulty. A rich system of typifications enables any French person to feel more or less at home in any town, in any social context which is likely to arise. But at the same time the ratio between personal friends and kin, and the mass of persons who are only known via their 'typical' characteristics, is very, very unequal. At the opposite end of the spectrum is a society like Umeda (in the Sepik District of New Guinea, where I conducted some field research) where the ratio between specific and general information about other members of the society is quite the opposite; even on the battle-field the Umedas aimed their arrows at warriors whom they knew personally, whose kinship connections they also knew, and so on. Only very distant enemy villages contained actual 'strangers' and about these strangers the Umedas possessed little reliable general information, certainly not enough to sustain a relationship. My point is that the characteristic forms taken by 'love' in different societies is a predictable outcome of the type and distribution of social knowledge in these societies.

In Umeda, love as we know it is impossible, i.e. romantic love with a relative stranger whom one chooses, out of all the possible candidates, as the one to love. The Umedas married cross-cousins, by sister-exchange, and prospective marriages were planned long before the girl was adult (usually boys were older, because of an unbalanced ratio between the sexes). The boys just had to wait as the girls they had been promised grew, centimetre by centimetre, like fruit trees. The small absolute size of the population (not more than circa 750 persons, very few of whom would be potential spouses according to the accepted marriage-rules) meant that there were no unmarried girls for boys to court, let alone 'fall in love with' in the Western manner. Nonetheless, Umeda boys (I do not know about girls) did fantasise about love as an abstract possibility. 'Not so long ago', the boys of my hamlet told me, 'three fabulous girls from the opposite end of the village came looking for men, fully grown they were, no husbands, amazing! Nothing like that happens nowadays. All the girls around here are just little kids, and they are all promised anyway.' These were dreams about having girls fall in love with them, rather than falling in love themselves. They were in no position to be discriminating. Fantasies such as these aside, love in Umeda had only one possible context of occurrence, i.e. adultery, or one-sided adultery between an unmarried boy and a married woman. In fact, I would claim that in a place like Umeda, love and adultery are necessarily identical. If cross-cousin marriage is the 'elementary form' of kinship alliance, then the elementary form of love is

adultery. Umedas liked to discuss illicit affairs with me very much, concentrating particularly on the mechanics rather than the sentiments involved, like the country people described in the contribution to this collection by Bernadette Bucher. I have no means of knowing how much sexual gossip in Umeda actually corresponded to the truth.

Nonetheless, assuming that I was not simply being regaled with fiction, Umedas had real love affairs, ones that involved personal choice (at least by the woman) and strict secrecy. Discovery could provoke retribution, by assault, or more likely, by sorcery. Even without accidental discovery, there was great risk, since it was believed that women who conducted surreptitious affairs often extricated themselves by addressing a sorcerer, with a request that he eliminate the superfluous lover. Thus love and knowledge (and death) became entangled.

First of all, secret affairs were the only route to sexual (self-) knowledge for most Umeda boys, who remained in prolonged bachelorhood for the reason mentioned. Sexual desire could hardly be assuaged for long by the fleeting encounters which took place in the bush, but the knowledge, the experience, was priceless, a permanent acquisition and a basic component of identity. Moreover, such affairs generated information, lethal information. 'Fidelity', in the Umeda scheme of things, was not sexual fidelity as we understand it, i.e. chastity, but informational fidelity, i.e. keeping information about liaisons secret. Women were not mistrusted for dishonouring their husbands physically, but because they might betray their lovers (or husbands) verbally. Or their husbands might betray them, not by being sexually unfaithful, but by giving way to – perhaps baseless – jealousy and 'speaking' to a sorcerer. In either case it was not bodily behaviour as such, but disclosure, or the possibility of disclosure, which mattered.

What about married love – was that possible? Only to the extent that it could not be acknowledged, and therefore resembled adultery without actually being adulterous. As is commonly the case in 'total information' societies like Umeda, where everybody knows everybody else's business, there were no accepted ways in which married couples could demonstrate not just affection in public, but any kind of relationship excluding the others present (and there almost always were others present). Husbands and wives had to tryst in the forest, just as if they were not married, taking just as much care not to be discovered. To be sure, married couples had greater opportunities for 'safe' – secret – sex than illicit partners, but ran essentially the same risks of betrayal and sorcery. Husband and wife, according to the Umeda view, had the power of life and death over the other. Married love manifested itself as a compact not to exploit the consequences of mutual knowledge, generated by intimacy and secrecy.

In Umeda, love consisted of the generation, at the margins of society (in the bush, away from other people) of lethal knowledge, and the creation of pacts between those who generated and exchanged this knowledge, to preserve secrecy and discretion. Of course, the Umedas had no word for 'love' as such, since the phenomenon only existed inasmuch as it was unacknowledged. Umeda social institutions operated entirely without the assistance of love as a motive, or as a basis for recognized relationships. Love was extra-structural, and its only importance, so far as public life was concerned was that it was always the factor to which deaths were attributed, since sorcery attacks were all triggered

by love-entanglements or their aftermath. And this is logical; in a society in which, ostensibly, everybody knows everything about everybody and is equally intimate with everybody, love as knowledge can only go outside society, into the dark secret region the Umedas associated with love and death, the benighted forest in which ghosts and lovers wander.

Now let us switch to the other end of the informational spectrum, to modern societies in which love, far from being unacknowledged, is structurally essential, or at least is believed to be. Here people are taught to believe that one day they will discover, through elective affinity, out of the indefinite number of social others of whom they have generic knowledge, some particular one to love, with whom they will live in predestined harmony, have children, and so on. I do not need to say that this idea is as arbitrary, as fantastic, as anything the Umedas believe on the subject of sorcery. It is, however, necessary, given the fact that in modern society choice of mates is not institutionalised at the level of individuals (though of course it is highly institutionalised in others ways, i.e. by class, educational experience, locality, etc.). Umedas never have to ponder the opportunity costs of having one marriage partner rather than another; for them, the only recognised opportunity costs are those attendant on not having a partner at all. In modern urban societies it is different. Everybody is aware that, at a certain point, they are supposed to make a once-and-for-all choice, on the basis of inadequate information, the consequences of which may be incalculable, for good or ill. Because, pecuniary advantage aside, there are no really good reasons for committing oneself to one person rather than another, and very good reasons for fearing the worst, the essentially arbitrary choice is rationalised as fixed in advance by the wiles of the love-god, whose intervention relieves us of the burden of responsibility for our actions, which, in fact, is necessary for us to act at all, rather than hover interminably in a state of radical indecision. Whereas, in Umeda, love is outside the social system (generating death), in our own society love has licence and is supposed to make the world turn round, to be the very principle upon which sociality rests, as Schneider has made clear in *American kinship* (1968). And yet at the same time love is supposed to be irrational and disinterested, the unsearchable causal principle which unites loving couples and divides them from everybody else, even though, among the 'everybody else' there are hundreds, even thousands, of others who are 'just like' the particular pair whom love has brought together, and who might be arbitrarily substituted for them.

What is the relation between love and knowledge in a system like this? The effect of love, in modern society, is to reproduce, fictionally, the kind of pre-structured affinities which are taken for granted in a society like Umeda, thus converting the arbitrary into the inevitable. In Umeda, as Strathern (1990) has suggested in relation to Melanesian societies more generally, social relations are constructed directly out of other (pre-existing) social relations – who you marry is part of your personal make-up, just as much as your red hair or snub nose, or the fact that you have a brother called Amasu. All these things are known in advance, so that couples are committed to the relationships which are structurally significant well before these relationships come into practical effect. In the

absence of this structural predestination, modern couples have to convert abstract, generic, relations between categories of persons into specific, grounded, historically embedded relations between specific individuals which will bear the structural loadings which will be imposed on them. Courting and falling in love provide the means for endowing relationships with histories which make subsequent commitment to their consequences (more or less) secure. They obviate the spectre of the opportunity costs that choice of partners implies. A married B, when C and D were also possible partners. A must have access to a kind of knowledge which, in retrospect, shows that C and D were not really possible at all, were only generically possible, but not specifically possible. Through the reciprocal exchange of a graded series of indiscretions, the courting couple convert a relation for whose existence no particular reasons exist, into one which must be preserved because knowledge has come into existence which necessitates the lovers' pact, not to be incontinent, sexually or verbally.

As has often been remarked, modern love is very conversational. It begins, in England, with a procedure called 'chatting up'. Seduction is carried on by forming a joking-relation of an increasingly transgressive character. This hilarity partly reflects the tension and ambivalence produced by the huge potential opportunity costs of transactions ostensibly undertaken 'for a bit of a laugh', and partly the need to produce a space, through the ritual transgressions of joking, for the much more significant transgressions implied by the eventual exchange of love-confidences. Eventually, the couple must be brought to a stage where they utter to one another words which they would never utter before an audience, for fear of ridicule. They pour out their souls to one another in such a manner as to make the initiation of a physical relationship, if it has not occurred in the initial stages, hardly a great step. They have become lovers because of what they have said, not because of what they have done. The furtive exchange of signals of mutual attraction, which is all that love needs in Umeda, has, in the modern world, become a torrent of confidential information, which, for each couple, constitutes a fund of emotional capital, which can secure the relationship for just as long as neither feels that their own particular confidences are at risk.

But where does this confidential information come from, ultimately? If the structurally essential, but individually arbitrary, relations between modern couples repose on mutual confidences and shared indiscretions, what are the raw materials for these histories? Are they as individual and personal as they seem to the participants? Here we have to introduce a fresh theme, which is very important in the context of a number of the papers in this collection (particularly that by Chalvon-Demersay). This is the fictionalization of love, the fact that the confidences that couples exchange are provided for them, structurally, because it is structurally necessary that these confidences be exchanged. Modern love would be unthinkable without fiction, romantic fiction in particular. In Umeda, there was no love-fiction, no popular culture of love; there was only sexual gossip, which was risible, dangerous, and structurally occulted. But consider the modern situation. Each modern couple has to devise for itself a history which will justify its existence as a couple, on the basis of zero personal experience. Lovers cannot model their conduct on that of siblings or friends because even the best of friends or the closest of siblings have to hold back, for the sake of discretion. Hence it is necessary that

sentimental education should take place via fictional rather than real exemplars, relayed via romantic novels, films and soaps on the TV. Fictions are plentiful, life-chances are few; it is not a condemnation of modern society to remark, as has often been done, that popular fiction proceeds and guides the actions of real-life lovers, rather than representing real life after the fact. Fiction is a giant simulation, an external thought-process, which provides individuals with the scripts they cannot do without and which non-fictional experience cannot supply. This means that we cannot put love-fiction to one side as if it were less authentic than real life. Fiction is, where modern societies are concerned, what genealogy is in those societies which have marriage rules, i.e. the means of producing the relationships on which social life depends. Fiction, re-enacted as real life, produces the histories on which relationships and society at large are grounded. Thus, despite the apparent arbitrariness of modern love, and the theoretical substitutability of lovers, in the end modern love is no more generated at the level of the individual and the personal than marriage (not on the basis of personal choice) is in Umeda. We just have to look elsewhere for the fundamental social institutions which produce knowledge, personhood and history.

Now let me offer a few remarks on the papers in this collection in light of the foregoing. In terms of the structure of the knowledge systems involved, we can arrange these papers on a kind of scale. There are no Umedas here, but there are examples of love systems which come midway between the Umeda pole (total particularistic knowledge of consociates distributed throughout the society) versus the 'modern' pole (social knowledge overwhelmingly generic rather than particularistic). Nearest the Umeda pole lie the Bengalis described by Kate Gavron. 'Arranged marriage' is a scandal according to the British media, and is one of the main reasons Anglo-Saxons believe in their ethnic superiority to Asians, including not just the Asians who are economically depressed, like the Bengalis in the East End, but also prosperous Asians, like the Sikhs and Gujaratis who arrived from East Africa with business skills and who have done pretty well for themselves. Bengali arranged marriage, which is predicated on egalitarian kinship and locality ties, is structurally predestined, and is preceded by careful investigations and calculations by the parents of the bride and groom, as Gavron relates. Because the procedure is designed to produce maximal life chances for both partners by the use of entirely rational procedures – within the culturally recognised realm of the possible – it is regarded as very backward by the British, who think that relying on the whims of media-besotted young adults to arrange their own destinies is a whole lot more sensible. Such is the nature of race prejudice. It is patently obvious to Bengalis, on the other hand, that daughters should be bestowed on persons of known characteristics and attributes, and that reliable information is primarily available through kinship channels and appertains to kin. Arranged marriage is rational, safe, confined by the information available to parents who have their children's best interests, in the longer term, at heart. But love has nothing to do with it of course. The subcontinental theory of love (whether marriages are between cousins, as with Muslims, or relative strangers, as with most north Indians) is that it transpires as the couple come to know one another, after marriage, and come to possess and share the confidential information on which family respectability and honour depend.

Marriage generates love rather than the other way around. There is an enormous body of ethnographic evidence which supports the Indian view of the growth of love, and moreover it is easy to confirm that even in the West couples are often much more in love after a few years, or even after very many years of marriage, than they were at the outset, at which time a good deal of make-believe was involved.

Gavron reports that Bengali adolescents are becoming restive under this, to my mind, perfectly sensible regime. What has happened is that these adolescents have made the discovery that Anglo-Saxon love-lives follow the pattern laid down in Anglo-Saxon love-fictions, or are at least supposed to. The cultures of the subcontinent are no less replete with love-fictions (especially films dealing with doomy passions) than our own; the difference being that romantic fiction is much less structurally essential and much more transgressive in relation to real life on the subcontinent than here. The screen lovers of Bombay and Tollygunge are the anti-types of real life, impossible dream characters, not practical exemplars. Screen love is marginal, escapist, and fantastic, but nobody mistakes their life partner for such gods and goddesses. However, the Western context narrows the gap between fiction and reality, with the result that the hold of rationality over romance is weakened, while the social context of the British state weakens parental coercion. We await developments, not with unbounded optimism.

Bernadette Bucher's contribution from ultra-rural Picardie relates directly to my discussion (which, of course, it partly inspired) in that she describes a regime, not unlike Umeda in certain respects, in which there is a sharp contrast between a certain type of jokey sexual discourse, combined with a very tight social control over the integrity of really salient love-information. Concealment is the basis of humanity (i.e. sociality) versus animality, in a landscape where domestic animals are significant, not just numerically, but also as a 'ground' from which aspects of social identity emerge. Bucher also raises the question of the status of the ethnographer, who is supposed to disseminate knowledge, even knowledge which would tend to degrade to the status of an animal (informationally incontinent) the informant who provides it. Should one pass on confidences in the name of science? – surely not. And when does the anonymization of information actually shade over into the practice of fiction, the acceptable format for the public circulation of truly intimate information, the very substance of love? Novelists claim to do 'research', so should we, professional researchers, adopt their *irrealis* modality for circulating our own results? But would funding agencies stump up the cash if social scientists promised to produce novels rather than 'factual' reports?

Next I turn to the contribution by Michel Bozon and Maria Luiza Heilborn, which charts a discontinuity between two systems for the production of love as knowledge. The contrast here is between two modes of generating the shared information on which love feeds. In Brazil, where values associated with older Mediterranean civilizations persist in modified form, love generates information wordlessly via physical acts which lead up to the crucial act of defloration and the commitment of honour that implies. Such a code of love can be enacted semi-publicly (until the last moment), and it accords with the greater

degree of hierarchy and particularization of social relations in Brazil, as compared to France. It is interesting that among the elite sections of Indian society, where arranged marriages of the traditional kind are being phased out, something akin to the Brazilian pattern of 'going out together' (*frequentation* – a word we need in English) is emerging, though I have no details on the bodily code involved. It would be interesting to pursue this further. In Brazil, this pattern is strongly institutionalised. In France, on the other hand, the physical side of things is less significant than verbal avowals of love and conformity to the 'script' for sentimental love. Here the code of love is verbal from the very beginning and 'shame' stems not from bodily acts but from betrayal of confidences, or recalcitrance in providing them.

Rather to one side, but related to the Brazilian situation described in Bozon and Heilborn's contribution, is the account given by Kostas Yannakopoulos of erotic friendships between Greek men in the Piraeus and Athens. The author adds to the number of recent studies which show that erotic transactions among men in no way imply 'gay' identity in an all-or-nothing sense, not even 'bisexuality' as the gay community understand it. In fact, men who enjoy sex with other men can be wholehearted homophobes, just very desirous ones. From my point of view, the interest of this paper lies in the detailed description Yannakopoulos gives of the intense nature of male friendship in the pre-erotic stage, and the way in which this passionate desire to get to know the male Other as a friend seems sometimes to culminate almost accidentally in sex, though sex was not the issue to being with. I suggest that there is something intrinsically erotic about the huge wave of information-exchange which occurs when two persons (who can be of the same gender) meet in a context in which each is determined to come to know as much as possible about the other. This tidal wave of information seems to me to be a factor in the genesis of heterosexual relations (especially in verbally-based love systems) so it is not surprising to find that it can culminate in eroticism where the inhibiting factor of assuming the burden of gay identity will not ensue, as is the case in Greece. At the same time, the erotic male friendship, in the absence of gay identity, does seem to be a function of the simultaneous presence of a 'Mediterranean' system of control over heterosexual relations. This type of homosexual love is marginal – a verbal, but inconsequential, counterpart to the management of heterosexual love as a graded series of bodily transactions, in the manner described for Brazil.

This brings us to the two papers describing modern France. It is not surprising that these are both 'media studies' papers, the one (by Smaïn Laacher) dealing with radio confessions, the other (by Sabine Chalvon-Demersay) dealing with soap opera. These studies, as well as others in the collection, in various ways, underline the central position of the media in modern love, their scripting function which generates our private histories. The paper by Laacher deals with the *coup de foudre*, a concept unknown to the English, but in practice equivalent to our more prosaic 'love at first sight'. At least we have the experience, as one of our national poets testifies:

I did but see her passing by, and I shall love her till I die

(Wordsworth, 'The Highland Maid')

Radio listeners (virtually all women) responded by letter to an appeal by the radio presenter M^énie Gr^égoire for accounts of love at first sight, and these are submitted to a detailed analysis. How does love at first sight coincide with the thesis that love is knowledge? At first sight, it seems blatantly contradictory. Simmel's claim, that love depends on the restricted exchange of confidential personal information, seems light years away from a kind of love which rests on no knowledge of the beloved whatsoever. A purely generic 'typical' other becomes the object of a passionate and individualized attachment, of which the other may remain totally unaware. In fact, however, this is just the extreme instance of the 'scripted' characteristic of modern love, in that here all the information concerning the other is supplied from fictional sources, in advance of any confirmation or collaboration from the other party. Love at first sight originated in mediaeval romances which corresponded (in their relation to real life) to the escapism of oriental love-poetry (see Abu-Lughod 1989) and contemporary Bombay love-films. In 20th century France, however, poetic devices which were once enjoyed as fantasies have been domesticated and internalized (since the last century) as models for reality, the Madame Bovary syndrome. I think that all of M^énie Gr^égoire's correspondents actually hoped, at some level, that the experience of love at first sight would happen to them, and that in fact the Others with whom they fell in love 'out of the blue' actually had 'genealogies' in specific romances and films, could one but reconstruct the diet of fictions on which these correspondents had been nourished. They did not need to know any more about their love-objects, through mere interaction, because they already knew everything, they had already concocted every detail. Love at first sight is a love choice which seems absolutely predestined and which banishes the oppressive sense of sacrificing one love-possibility in favour of another, at some potentially great opportunity cost, which more thoughtful approaches to the selection of a lover entail. It is thus both the ideal type of modern love in being both arbitrary and predestined, and perhaps also the model for the next stage of love, postmodern love, which will be 100% solipsistic. At the moment, though, it has to be a marginal phenomenon, since Laacher makes clear that the outcome was rarely favourable, or even tolerable, in conventional social terms.

Finally, I turn to Sabine Chalvon-Demersay on Soap Opera (television). I think I have already said enough to indicate why I agree entirely with her conviction that soap opera is anthropologically relevant, not just as a representation of social reality, like an ethnography, but as a component part of social reality, i.e. as a source of scripts. At the end of her paper, though, the author makes a prediction which it is interesting to set against the one that I have just made, namely, that as time goes by all love will become more and more fictional, to the extent that lovers will no longer really need to interact or exchange anything, everything will be supplied in advance by the fictional prototypes each will instantly recognize in the other. There is another possibility. The soap operas described in Chalvon-Demersay's paper are very gloomy and reflective; they express a profound disenchantment with 'choice'. Reason suggests that this disenchantment is produced more by the failure of the world to live up to ever-rising expectations than by a serious collapse of the basic mechanisms which sustain society, but nonetheless, the disenchantment is real. Choice itself is seen as a problem, and the answer, surprise surprise, is genealogy, blood, relationships based on physical substance. Only these are really dependable. I think it is interesting to consider this yearning for a 'biological'

relationship in conjunction with the rising concern with human genetics, genetic disease, genetic counseling, etc., behind which looms the eventual implications of the Human Genome Project and a genetically engineered future for us all. In years to come, perhaps, lovers will exchange knowingly what they always did exchange unknowingly, i.e. genetic information. Who you love and who you marry will be decided by matching genetic profiles. Genetic matching will ensure an optimum outcome in the form of total compatibility of innate behavioural and psychological characteristics, not to mention offspring with the best possible genes. Then love will be harmonious and all lovers permanently happy. When we all have machine-readable DNA, our genetic information, in diskette form, will become the ultimate confidence, the ultimate token of love – “you show me your DNA and I’ll show you mine”.

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