

# Mathematics and Music: Aesthetic Links, Spring 2012

## Paper on *The Botany of Desire*

**Due: Friday, March 30, Start of Class**

Your assignment is to write an essay responding to one of the three topics described below. The paper should be typed and 3-4 double-spaced pages in length. This is not intended to be a “research paper” but rather a detailed and thoughtful response, supported with information and quotes from the text, to one of the given topics. You do not have to answer every question posed for a given topic. The questions are intended to provide an overall framework for a particular theme. Your ultimate goal is to construct a thorough and well-supported academic argument. You should make some claims and then support and develop them with thorough reasoning, evidence from the text and/or well-accepted postulates.

You will be given two grades – one for the quality of your argument, the other for the quality of the writing (correct grammar, spelling, sentence structure, organization, etc.). Your overall grade will be the average of these two grades. Be sure to read your paper over carefully several times before turning it in.

The specific topic you are addressing and your overall response to it should be clearly stated in the first paragraph. Your paper should have a clear and identifiable purpose, be well-organized and understandable. The body of the paper should contain your reasoning and the evidence that led to your conclusions. You do **not** need to summarize the book or any chapters from the book. You can assume that you are writing for someone who has read the book.

When quoting directly from the text, please include a reference to the page using the **precise format** demonstrated in the example below:

Pollan states, “Ironies of this kind are second nature to the gardener, who eventually learns that every advance in his control of the garden is also an invitation to a new disorder” (Pollan, p. 185).

You may utilize sources other than Pollan’s book, but this is not required. If you do use other sources and use quotations or other information, you should:

1. Identify direct quotations with quotes and a note in parentheses giving information where the quote can be found within your source (as shown above.)
2. List all your sources in a References section at the end of your paper:
  - a) Books: give the author, the title, the publisher and year of publication.
  - b) Magazine or newspaper articles: give the author, the title of the magazine or newspaper, the date of publication, and the starting and final page of the specific article.
  - c) Websites: give an author (if you can determine that), the full URL (Internet address) and the date you accessed it (since information on the Internet often changes).

# Topics

- *Compare and Contrast*

Write an essay in which you compare and contrast two chapters from the book. Some of the types of questions you could discuss include: What does the plant offer humans? What does the plant reveal about human behavior and society? What is the history of the plant and how has it been viewed differently over time? What biological facts about the plant does Pollan offer to demonstrate his points? What is the current status of the plant and its propagation? What lessons can we learn from it? How has your perception of this plant changed after reading the book?

- *Genetically Modified Food*

How do you feel about genetically modified food? Do you ever eat genetically modified foods? Do you know? Do you care? Pollan writes, “Monsanto likes to depict genetic engineering as just one more chapter in the ancient history of human modifications in nature, a story going back to fermentation” (Pollan, p. 195). What do you think of Monsanto’s comparison? Speaking on behalf of the company, Dave Hjelle says, “Trust us” (Pollan, p. 216). Does Pollan trust Monsanto? Do you? How should the public determine what companies it trusts? What role should the government play? What arguments does Pollan make to convince us we should be wary of genetic engineering? Do you agree with them? Are there other technologies that are relevant to this topic?

- *Hidden Theses*

While the overall intention of Pollan is to present a fresh approach to understanding human behavior and our relationship to nature from the viewpoint of four plants, there are many hidden themes running throughout the book. For example, the issue of monoculture versus biodiversity is prevalent in several chapters (it’s quite clear where Pollan stands on the issue). Another example is the use of the Greek gods Dionysus and Apollo to contrast the different ways humans view and experience nature. The two gods appear in each chapter as an illustrative metaphor. Come up with your own hidden thesis (you may use one of the two just mentioned) and explain how Pollan develops it throughout the book. What conclusion(s) is he leading you toward? How effectively does he support this hidden thesis? Explain with supporting evidence from the book.