

# Affect Theory and Power

COML 555/GSWS 554/RELS 552

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Office: Cohen 226 | Drop-in Hours: **Wed. 2:00-3:30** or by appointment

COVID POLICY: Drop-in hours **ON ZOOM**

**“Relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.”**

**Michel Foucault**, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 1976

**“We might note here that fear does something, it reestablishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading that produces the surface (shivering, recoloring).”**

**Sara Ahmed**, "Affective Economies," 2004

**“The cognition of the ideologue burns with a gem-like flame.”**

**Silvan Tomkins**, "The Quest for Primary Motives," 1981

## Course Description

This seminar will explore the links between the work of the late Foucault and the contemporary theoretical subfield of affect theory. We will begin by comprehensively mapping out Foucault's theory of power as developed in *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* and several related works. We will then move into a series of reactions and interpretations responding to Foucault, all of which centralize the force of power beyond the traditional domains of political rationality, discourse, and liberal subjectivity. We will pay special attention to the queer reading of Foucault developed in affect theory. Along the way, we will consider formations of religion, sexuality, race, and visual culture, especially in the US context.

## Coursework

Each student will be expected to contribute **responses on Canvas** over the course of the semester (grad students: 400-600 words; undergrads: 300-500 words). These will be assigned the week before class. You'll post your response on Canvas in the appropriate [Discussion](#) thread no later than **7:00 pm** the day before our seminar. I'll comment on a selection of these each week by the morning of the class. Those who submitted responses for the week will then be expected to kickstart the conversation in class the next day. **All students** are expected to **read all of these discussion posts** in addition to the readings for the week.

As a concluding project, you'll submit a **term paper** that critically assesses the issues of the class. For undergrads, this will be 12-15 pages (3000-4000 words); for graduate students, **20-25 pages (5000-6000 words, exclusive of bibliography and references)**. The paper should make primary reference to sources presented within the class but may also use outside material. This will be due **May 8**. The paper should make primary reference to sources presented within the class but may also use outside material. On **April 25**, you'll turn in a **2-3 page proposal** outlining your field of interest and the specific intervention you see yourself making. We'll discuss both of these assignments in more detail closer to the date. More information is available [here](#).

The default configuration is that the final paper will serve as your entire grade. But all students may, as you wish, **opt in** to take a midterm take-home exam around **Week 8**. The take-home exam will consist of a 48-hour window within which you will respond to two questions about the course material. This option is available for those who are uncomfortable with the prospect of having your entire grade based on your final paper. The exam can be worth **up to 50%** of your final grade; the length guidelines will be set in proportion to how much of your grade you want the exam to be worth. In other words, this is all up for negotiation: if you opt in for the exam, you and I will have a conversation about length and weighting to figure out what makes the most sense for your needs. You must email me by **Feb. 21** if you wish to elect for the midterm option.

## Texts

We'll be spending some time with a different book almost every week in this course. The majority of these are available online through the library. All are linked from the [syllabus](#) page. Our first reading, selections from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* will be made available as PDF files. However, if you can get your own copy, that would be ideal--it's a good text to have in your library.

The books not available online are these:

- Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1.*
- Silvan Tomkins. *Shame and Its Sisters.* (Sedgwick and Frank, eds.)

Rather than routing this process through the bookstore, please set about acquiring these books as you see fit. All of these books have been placed on reserve at Van Pelt, though you can also purchase your own copies.

All other course materials will be posted on the course Canvas site.

## Class Conduct

The classroom is a community of learning. The foundation of this community is respect. Disagreement is productive, but learning how to create a space within which we can constructively disagree with one another will be one of the projects of this class.

At the same time, this class is going to challenge you with difficult readings and concepts. Some of these may provoke or discomfit you, which I encourage you to explore as best you can. I respect your willingness to tax yourself intellectually, and to allow yourself to be frustrated and to take risks with this material. If you find some of the material distressing, let me know. I'm happy to flag up any content you may find upsetting in advance or to discuss anything you're struggling with in my drop-in hours.

Building a community of learning also requires a full commitment to academic integrity. The course will follow all relevant procedures for any academically dishonest behavior, which sabotages trust between you and me and you and other students. Please spend some time with Penn's [Code of Academic Integrity](#) to make sure you're aware of these parameters. And see me (in advance!) if you are unsure about citations or **anything else** you're worried might be a violation of good academic practice.

## Attendance

Like all seminars, this is a conversation class, which means a major part of the work of the class comes from our discussions. **The texts are not the class!** Attendance at all sessions is important. Unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade, at my discretion.

## Canvas

This class has a Canvas site where most of the materials will be posted. It's also where you'll submit your weekly responses, in the appropriate [Discussion](#) tab. And I'll use Canvas to make announcements to everyone in the class. I encourage you to keep your notifications set to "on" (the default) for the site.

## Individual Priorities

I'm available to talk about any needed accommodations for this class based on the impact of a documented disability. We should talk about this within the first 2 weeks of the semester. Anyone requesting these accommodations will of course need to be registered with [Student Disabilities Services](#), who will help us determine the right strategies.

## Grading

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
97-100	94-96	90-93	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	60-69	<60

**A-range** grades are given for truly exceptional scholarship. They are assigned to work that goes above and beyond, demonstrating a clear mastery of the material, a unified and focused argument, and an innovative approach.

**B-range** grades are given for very good work. They reflect a skillful argument that is perhaps a bit distracted in places, but still in excess of expectations. The engagement with the material is nonetheless comprehensive and rich.

**C-range** grades are given for work that is satisfactory. It shows evidence of thoughtful engagement with the material, but perhaps with some redundancy in the writing or shallowness in the argument.

**D-range** grades are given for work that is unsatisfactory. The material is only shallowly encountered and the analysis weak or haphazard. It is applied to work that merely restates other sources or appears to have been hastily thrown together the night before.

A **failing** grade is given for scholarship that shows little or no engagement with the material and is often applied to work that misses a key criterion such as a minimum word count or number of sources used

## Late Policy

For every day late, an essay will be assigned a 3-point penalty. If you need to submit work on a date other than the assigned due date (due to a religious holiday or sports event, e.g.), let me know in advance and we'll work something out.

## COVID Policy

COVID is still having profound effects in our lives and our communities. Even for those of us who are healthy, many people are struggling with long-term effects of stress, exhaustion, and the illness itself. One thing we've learned from COVID is that its effects are hard to predict. Our main task will be to be flexible and responsive to new situations as they arise. Although we are beginning the semester in-person and without a mask requirement, we should be prepared to adapt to new developments as the semester unfolds. Needless to say, anyone who wishes to wear a mask should do so.

One thing I started doing during COVID was allowing folks to join the class informally on Zoom in case of illness or forced absence. Zoom is far less than ideal (and takes work to manage) so this is a bare-bones set-up: I can't promise flattering camera angles or that I'll be able to take real-time questions. But given how important class discussions are in this course, being able to listen in is **much** better than nothing.

Another thing I started doing during COVID was encouraging everyone to proceed through this class with patience. That means patience with other people, who are probably going through things that we don't have a clear picture of. It means being patient with me, since, like you, I'm trying to adapt on the fly to new situations. And, crucially, it means being patient with yourself: you all expect a lot from yourselves, and that's good, but it's important to recognize how much and how rapidly things have changed over the last several years. Expect that you may not be the same kind of student you were back in 2020, and allow things to not go perfectly if that's what's happening. Even if you're not at 100%, you're going to learn a **lot** in this class.

## Schedule of Readings

### INTRODUCTIONS

#### Week 1 – Jan. 18

- Colin Koopman. "The Power Thinker." [ONLINE](#)
- Dean Mitchell & Daniel Zamora. "The True Story of Michel Foucault's LSD Trip that Changed History." [ONLINE](#)
- Lauren Berlant. "Trump, or Political Emotions." [ONLINE](#)

### POWER IN THE LATE FOUCAULT

#### Week 2 – Jan. 25

- Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. [PDF](#)
  - Part I (all)
  - Part III (all)

#### Week 3 – Feb. 1

- Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Vol I*. **LIBRARY/PURCHASE**
  - Parts 1–3

#### Week 4 – Feb. 8

- Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality, Vol I*. **LIBRARY/PURCHASE**
  - Parts 4–5

#### Week 5 – Feb. 15

- David Halperin. *Saint Foucault*. [PDF](#)

- "Saint Foucault"
- "The Queer Politics of Michel Foucault"
- Giorgio Agamben. "Biosecurity and Politics." [ONLINE](#)

## **AFFECT THEORY: INTRODUCTION**

### **Week 6 – Feb. 22**

- Eve Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - "Introduction"
  - "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity" (pp 35-38 + 61-65)
  - "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading."
- And skim "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold."
- *REVISIT*: Lauren Berlant. "Trump, or Political Emotions." [ONLINE](#)

### **Week 7 – Mar. 1**

- Silvan Tomkins, "The Quest for Primary Motives." [PDF](#)
- Silvan Tomkins. *Shame and Its Sisters*. **LIBRARY/PURCHASE**
  - *Read in the following order:*
  - "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" (Sedgwick and Frank's introduction)
  - Ch. 2, Ch. 6
  - Ch. 1
  - One other chapter of your choice. (Please briefly mention/discuss your chosen chapter in your response.)

### **Week 8 – Mar. 8**

**NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK**

### **Week 9 – Mar. 15**

- Brian Massumi. *Parables of the Virtual*. [PDF](#)
  - "Introduction" (skim)

- "The Autonomy of Affect."
- Donovan Schaefer. *The Evolution of Affect Theory*. [PDF](#)
  - Introduction
  - Sections I-III
  - Conclusion (pp 1-53, 61-66).

## AFFECT THEORY AND POWER

### Week 10 – Mar. 22

- Deborah Gould. *Moving Politics*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Introduction
  - Intro to Part I
  - Ch 1
  - Intro to Part II
  - Ch 3
  - Intro to Part III
  - Ch 6
- Ann Pellegrini. "Signaling through the Flames." [PDF](#)

### Week 11 – Mar. 29

- William Connolly. *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Preface
  - Introduction
  - Chs. 1-2.
- *Film*: Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady. *Jesus Camp*. [DIGITAL RESERVE](#)

### Week 12 – Apr. 5

- Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies." [PDF](#)
- Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Introduction
  - Ch. 1
  - Conclusion

### Week 13 – Apr. 12

- José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Chs. 1–2, 5, 10

#### **Week 14 – Apr. 19**

- Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics." [PDF](#)
- Saba Mahmood. *Politics of Piety*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Preface
  - Chs. 1, 4, and 5
  - Epilogue

#### **SUBMIT PROPOSAL FOR FINAL ESSAY**

#### **Week 15 – Apr. 26**

- Jasbir Puar. *Terrorist Assemblages*. [LIBRARY ONLINE](#)
  - Preface
  - Introduction
  - Conclusion
- *Optional Film*: Hany Abu-Assad. *Paradise Now*. [DIGITAL RESERVE](#)

**May 8 – [FINAL ESSAY DUE](#)**