COURSE SYLLABUS
POLI 5440  The Politics of Affect: Theories of Emotion and Political Life

Department of Political Science
Dalhousie University

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An exploration in contemporary political theory, this course draws on recent developments in the burgeoning field of affect studies to address the relation of both conscious and non-conscious emotive experience to public and political life. Drawing on the insights and scholarship from different disciplines, we will examine the social, political and cultural theories of affect, and, more generally, emotion, to explore their role in political decision-making and public responses.

A central focus of this course will be the relation between affect and social movements (i.e., the affective and emotional politics of collective identity and mobilization. Topics will include the affective logic of public threat, the cultural politics of emotion such as fear and shame; sensorial responses to moralistic rhetoric; visceral responses to social groups and/or cultural practices. We will also look at how sensibility, feeling, and affect have operated in social and political movements, including a consideration of emotions such as fear, disgust, and disdain, and compassion in social conflict, and in the formative approaches to retribution and reconciliation.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS:

- Course Reading Package, including supplementary readings, available through the Dalhousie print shop (Basement of Henry Hicks/Life Sciences Building).
• Articles in peer-reviewed journals that are accessible through the library (students are asked to download, through access to the library via their Dal account, articles that are neither from the reading package nor from the required textbook, but that are listed on syllabus with the reference to the journal in which they appear)

EVALUATION PROFILE

Class Participation 10%
Presentation: 30%
Research Essay: 60%

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

1. Research Essay (4000-5500 words max)

You are asked to choose a topic from any of those listed on the course syllabus and/or discussed in class. **Drawing on a wide range of readings from the course syllabus**, and making use of additional research materials (specifically articles from scholarly peer-reviewed journals or recent book publications) to assist you in sharpening your topic and focusing your argument, develop a coherent discussion and/or analysis of either a current or historical debate; a significant question or line of inquiry; or a persistent theme or problematic relating to this topic.

A central objective of this assignment will be to **show your mastery of a wide selection of the course reading materials, and of the questions by different authors discussed in different weeks for this course. How you make use of these materials will depend on your topic.** You are encouraged to take time within the first three weeks of the course to skim or read all of the chapters in the text, the articles in the course pack, and the to get a sense of the types of questions covered by these authors, and the ways that some of their insights or arguments are related to each other.

There is plenty of room for you to choose topics of interest to you. You are encouraged to discuss your topic with me, by the 4th week of the course, especially if you wish to consider a topic that is not squarely related to the material on the syllabus. Ideally, you will spend a term developing your understanding of the facts, issues, leading debates, and scholarship relating to your topic, and take up a clearly focused question addressing and applying a theoretical account of affect or affective politics in relation to it.

2. Participation

Participation is based on regular attendance, thorough preparation for seminar discussion, demonstration of your familiarity with the readings for each week, and your respectful and active participation in each seminar.

3. Class Presentation
In the first week of classes, please review the syllabus, and choose a weekly topic that interests you. Please email me (at m.denike@dal.ca) your first two choices of topics/dates. On a first-come, first-serve basis, I will do my best to assign you to your first choice.

Your task will be to lead a class lecture and discussion (for approximately 60 minutes), presenting on the material, and clarifying its argument, implication, contribution, etc. to the class. In other words, your challenge will include “teaching” a brief class and/or leading a discussion on a reading/topic of your choice.

You are encouraged to approach the topic or issue creatively, bringing to bear any other material, readings, brief media or film clips, power-point slides, images, handouts; etc. that may assist you in engaging the class on the topic.

You are asked to submit an outline of your presentation, including lecture notes or any handouts by midnight, the night before you are scheduled to present.

Presentations will be evaluated on the basis of:

1. Content: the appropriateness of the detail covered; accuracy of information; scope of the material addressed; the use of relevant additional resources (50%)

2. Form/approach: effectiveness in teaching materials to the class; ability to distill and clarify key and relevant points of the material and subject; ability to engage the class in discussion (50%)

Schedule of Weekly Topics and Readings
Weeks and Topics

1. Sept. 5
   Introduction and Overview

2. Sept 12
   Affect Theory Across the Disciplines:
   The Politics of Intensities and Feelings

Additional recommended resources

Discussion questions:
• What is Affect? Affect theory? And why does it matter?
• What is ‘the body’? and how might we understand its appearance in political thought?
• What accounts for the “turn” to affect? And what else should be taken into account?

3. Sept. 19
Foundational Themes in Affect Studies
Framing questions about Bodies, Intensities, Non-Cognitive responses

• Ruth Leys, The Turn to Affect: A Critique, Critical Inquiry, 37:3, pp. ?? (this is a great accompaniment to Massumi, as she critically engages with the insistent separation of cognition and affect that is presumed by Massumi). Tomkins, Damasio are also discussed


Recommended resources
• Etienne Balibar, Spinoza and Politics (selections)
**Discussion questions:**

- What is ‘autonomous’ about affect?
- Why would Gregg and Seigworth mark Massumi’s essay as foundational?
- How does Spinoza’s Ethics ‘fit’ into the canon of western philosophy? What strikes you as particularly unique?
- Against the grain of contemporary political theory, what themes and terms stand out in Sedgwick and Frank’s essay?
- What do you make of the attention to the brain/mind?

4. **Sept 26**

**Spinoza and Deleuze: Configuring the Material and Ideal in Contemporary Theory**

  a wonderfully succinct and well written summary of Spinoza on ‘ideas’, which reflects his view of humans in the greater materials / ideational world (in *Ethics*).

**Additional recommended resources:**

- Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*....

5. **Oct 3**

**The Affected Body: Bodies without Images**

  (this is a very nicely written, clear and sophisticated discussion of what Patricia Clough has called the ‘biomediataed body’... looking at the emergence of new frames of thinking of the body and the difference that new media (via Hansen) makes.

**Additional recommendations:**

6. Oct 10
The Materialist Context:
Embodied Minds, Emergent Properties, and the Post-Human


Additional Readings (with a technological focus)


7. Oct 17: In Class Test

8. Oct. 24
Affect and Power: Biopolitics and the Cultural Politics of Emotion

Discussion questions:
• How might we understand the relations between affect and power?
• What does Anderson refer to when he speaks of ‘power’? How about for Ahmed?
• Provide/consider examples in which affect is ‘modulated’ today, in what contexts and how?
• What are ‘cultural politics’?
• How does happiness ‘function’ for Ahmed.
• How might what Ahmed does with ‘happiness’ be extended or applied elsewhere? Examples?

9. Oct. 31
Subliminal Influence and Moral Psychology


10. Nov. 7
Micropolitics, Moralism, Public Life


Additional resources:
Discussion Questions

- Who is George Lakoff, and what previous work informs this analysis of ‘moral politics’?
- What do you make of Lakoff’s distinction between the underlying structures of liberal vs conservative frames of thought?
- How might we characterize the (non)religious Left’s ‘emotional cultural war,’ were we to apply Stein’s approach to the question.

11. Nov. 14
Emotion and Political Identity in the International Politics
Resonance Machines


Additional considerations:


Discussion questions

- What is the role of affect in the forging of political identities?
- How might Ross’s account—or that of any other theorist—help account for specific ethnic or other conflicts?
- What do you make of the idea of ‘resonance’? and how might it be made to work in different contexts?

12. Nov. 21
Emotions and Social Movements
Queer Politics and AIDS Activism


Additional suggestions:


13. Nov. 28

A Politics of Hope: Affective Philosophies of Change


Additional considerations:
