The Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions
Theories, Practices, Rhetorics

This seminar proceeds from the assumption that studying the theorization, rhetorics, and expression of the emotions is itself a study in the politics and values of a culture. In the West, for instance, the emotions have been figured predominantly as feminine and in opposition to reason, with reason (or rationality) accorded the higher value. “The Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions” will examine this implicit ideology of the emotions and explore emotions themselves as a source of knowledge. That the emotions do not only vary from culture to culture but also have histories within cultures are guiding suppositions.

The first half of the course will be devoted to material on the emotions from anthropology, social and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, history, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies that will serve as a crossdisciplinary introduction to the study of the emotions as well as to the methodology of a phenomenology of the emotions. We will read work from anthropologists Catherine Lutz and Emily Martin; philosophers Alison Jaggar and Elizabeth Spellman; historian Peter Stearns; sociologist Arlie Hochschild; and social and cultural theorists Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson. We will also read some key work on the emotions from psychoanalysis, including Freud, Melanie Klein, and Christopher Bollas as well as work on trauma and teaching by Shoshana Felman, Megan Boler, and Michalinos Zembylas.

The second half of the course will be dedicated to specific emotions (or affects and sensations): shame (with a focus on raciosity); sentimentality and compassion in literary studies; grief as a diasporic emotion; and structures of affect in modernity and postmodernity, with a focus on nostalgia and panic.

Texts include Toni Morrison’s novel The Bluest Eye (1970); excerpts from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852); Milan Kundera’s novel Ignorance (2002); Korean-born Deann Borshay’s film First Person Plural (2000), about her adoption by an American family; and Yvonne Rainer’s film (and its transcription) MURDER and murder (1997), about the power of statistics in our everyday lives. We will read work by literary and cultural critics Jane Tompkins, Lauren Berlant, June Howard, Cindy Weinstein, Svetlana Boym, Saidiya Hartman, David Eng, Judith Halberstam, Ann Cvetkovich, and Jackie Orr. The introduction and epilogue to my book in progress on the cultural politics and poetics of the emotions are also included in the course packet along with my essay on “Statistical Panic.”

In addition to contributing fully in terms of reading and engaged discussion, I will be asking everyone to:

- participate in a small group project that will focus on a particular emotion and result in a collective bibliography of both critical texts and expressive texts to be presented to the class in mid-February
- present an example of rhetorics of the emotions as they appear in an issue of the New York Times
write a fifteen-page essay, due at the end of the quarter
attend at least two of the lectures scheduled outside of class.

**Due Dates:**
- Wednesday, February 21: group project
- Wednesday, March 14: final papers due

**Some Distinctions:**

For analytical and heuristic reasons we will want to make distinctions among the passions, emotions, sensations, and moods.

We can distinguish families of emotions, organized according to different structuring principles: rage, anger, and irritation; terror, panic, fear, anxiety, depression, and indifference; gratitude and envy, compassion and resentment; nostalgia and hope; aesthetic emotions, such as the sublime; nationalist emotions, such as patriotism; humiliation, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and self-disgust; happiness, joy, and ecstasy; grief, sorrow, and regret; religious emotions, including piety; what I have called the bureaucratic emotions, including bureaucratic depression and bureaucratic paranoia; and what I have called postmodern affects, such as statistical panic.

We will also want to pay attention to the sequencing of emotions, or what might be called narratives of emotions.

**Note:** Several other faculty members in literary and cultural studies at the University of Washington are also working on the emotions, including Carolyn Allen (English), Eric Ames (Germanics), and Eva Cherniavsky (English).

**Books for Purchase:**
- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
- Milun Kundera, *Ignorance*

**Course Packet:**
Avenue Copy Center
4141 University Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 633-1837

**Screenings:**
We will try to find times for screenings outside of class.

**No Class:**
- Monday, January 15 (Martin Luther King Day)
- Wednesday, February 14 (work on group projects)
- Monday, February 19 (President’s Day)
- Wednesday, March 7 (time for papers)
Associated Lectures:

- **Sandra Gilbert** (English, University of California, Davis)
  Thursday, January 18, 7:00 pm, Communications 120
  Sandra Gilbert is the co-author of *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) and the co-editor of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women.* Her most recent book is *Death’s Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (2006).

- **Evelyne Ender** (French, Hunter College and City University of New York)
  “Déjà vu Revisited: Time and the Mind in a Literary Framework”
  Monday, January 22, 3:30 pm, Communications 202

- **Niklaus Largier** (German, University of California, Berkeley)
  “Theaters of Arousal: The Animation of the Senses & the Phenomenology of Rhetorical Effects.”
  Wednesday, January 24, 4:30 pm, Art 317
  An internationally recognized expert on mystical traditions in German literature and thought, Largier is currently working on the history of fantasy and the emotions from the Middle Ages to the Baroque era, and the history of the senses, of sense experience, and of the stimulation of the senses—especially taste and touch—in medieval, early modern, and modern cultures. His book *In Praise of the Whip: A Cultural History of Arousal* is forthcoming in 2007.

- **Odai Johnson** (Drama, University of Washington)
  “Buried Rage: History and Genocidal Memory”
  Friday, February 23, 11:00 am, Walker-Ames Room, Kane Hall
  Odai Johnson is the author of *Absence and Memory on the Colonial American Stage* (2005), *The Colonial American Stage* (2001), and *Rehearsing the Revolution* (2000) and heads the Ph.D. program at the University of Washington’s School of Drama. His talk is part of the February 22-23 conference entitled “Performance and History: What History” (see [www.simpsoncenter.org](http://www.simpsoncenter.org) for information about the conference).

- **Cynthia Breazeal** (Media Arts & Sciences, MIT)
  “The Art and Science of Social Robots”
  Thursday, March 1, 7:00 pm, Kane Hall 120
  Breazeal, director of the Robotic Life Group at the MIT Media Lab, is internationally known for seamlessly blending scientific theories, artistic insights, and engineering principles to create compelling robotic creatures that have a lively social presence to those who interact with them, including the upper torso humanoid robot, Cog, and the sociable robot, Kismet.
Schedule

**PART I: THEORETICAL AND CROSSDISCIPLINARY READINGS**

Wed Jan 3
**Introduction**

Mon Jan 8
**Anthropological and Philosophical Perspectives**


Wed Jan 10
**Structures of Feeling and Literary Studies of the 18th and 19th Centuries**


Wed Jan 17
**Historical Perspectives with a Focus on the 20th Century**

Mon Jan 22

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Emotions


Wed Jan 24

Trauma, Testimony, and Education


PART II: SPECIFIC EMOTIONS AND CULTURAL OBJECTS

Mon Jan 29

A Literary Anatomy of Shame, Humiliation, and Embarrassment


Wed Jan 31

Theorizing Shame


Mon Feb 5

Suffering, Sentimentality, and Compassion (1)

• Lauren Berlant, “Poor Eliza,” American Literature 70.3 (September 1998): 635-68.

Wed Feb 7
Suffering, Sentimentality, and Compassion (2)


Mon Feb 12
Nostalgia


Wed Feb 14 and Wed Feb 21
Group Work and Presentations on Specific Emotions

Mon Feb 26
Trauma and Grief (1)


Wed Feb 28
Trauma and Grief (2)

Mon, Mar 5

Panic


Wed Mar 14

Short Presentations on Papers

Some Recent Work on the Emotions
(culled largely from the press ads in the December 2006 MLA Convention Program):

- Peter Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Univ. of Virginia Press, 2006).
Recent Work on the Emotions at the December 2006 Convention of the Modern Language Association (phrases from paper titles and titles of sessions):

- masculinity and mourning
- nostalgia and American modernity
- political emotions: Aristotle and the symphony of reason
- on mourning
- affective and erotic bonds
- “queer” beyond nostalgia
- literature and terror
- from sympathy to romanticism
- feminine melancholic thinking
- sympathy for the other
- the agony of “mediated feeling”
- figure and affect in the novel
- the grief market
- orphan of sadness
- subjectivity and love in contemporary German literature
- emigres’ nostalgia
- war, poetry, and mourning
- queer subjects of the nostalgic metropolises
- feeling robot
- Latina performativity and affect
- Dickens and affect
- mountain envy
- poetic anger and interracial drama
- Hume, sensation, sympathy, and the history of criticism
- apprehending anxiety
- the affects of innocence
- politics of feeling: affect and Asian-American literature
- medical science, melancholy, and the objects of sublime poetry
- traumatic shock and World War I
- memory in Nostalgia
- Wordsworth’s emotives
- the feeling of the opposite
- love’s descent into melancholy