

Theory in Anthropology: Anthropology of Affect**Professor Margot Weiss****Email:** mdweiss@wesleyan.edu**Phone:** (860) 685-5754**Office Hours:** Mon and Tues -- make an appointment: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>

Theory in Anthropology courses are core courses for the Anthropology major, designed to elucidate historical influences on contemporary anthropological theory.

This semester, our focus is on affect theory and the anthropology of affect. **Affect:** to affect and be affected. Anthropologists and other social theorists from Durkheim onward have considered questions of bodies, sensation, emotion, and social change. In recent years, the "affective turn" in the humanities and humanistic social sciences has brought renewed attention to these questions. For some, affect is contrasted with emotion; it is potential or capacity, not set cultural meaning. For others, affect is contrasted with structure or form; it is bodily sensation or intensity--dynamic, energetic, mobile. And for others still, affect might enable us to grasp how it feels to inhabit a life world, a particular atmosphere, texture, sensuality, the feel of things.

This course explores the genealogy and range of theories of affect, foregrounding anthropology's distinctive contributions to and critiques of the study of affect. We'll discuss ways that centralizing affect might disrupt dichotomies of structure/agency, opening up modes of analysis that are not centered on cultural meaning-making, and enabling us to explore forms of life that exceed human subjects and socialities. Readings will tack between more theoretical essays and ethnographic representations of affect, sensuality, mobility, and emotion. Weekly experimental/experiential sensoria, designed to attune us to the world, are a central component of the course.

Course Readings

All essays are available on the course Moodle & also as a course pack via your portfolio. We will choose one or two books to read together in the last few weeks of the semester.

Course Assignments

- (Attendance and) Participation – 15%
- 10 Sensoria Workshop/Writing Exercises – 35%
- Discussion Leading – 15%
- Final Paper/Project (~10 pages) – OR – Two (~5-page) Papers -- 35%

Participation. This is an intensive, reading-heavy course designed for an active learner. You will get out of it what you put in to it; your participation is crucial to its success. We will be reading challenging theoretical essays, so participation in this course means coming to class ready to ask questions, to think about what is at stake, and to begin to forge your own analysis. Your participation should be grounded in the reading; pointing us to relevant sections of an article or to a particular quote is most productive. Remember, participation does not just talking, it means contributing to our collective learning – asking questions and expanding others' insights is often as useful as (maybe even more useful than) making declarations.

10 Sensoria Workshop/Writing Exercises. Each week you will be doing an ethnographic sensorium workshop or writing assignment, sometimes during class, sometimes before class. The projects will give you a practical, embodied, ethnographic way to approach the core concepts we are exploring that week. You'll get detail about each Sensoria as we go along. **This aspect of the course is ungraded, as it is experimental--meant to give you a chance to try things out and experiment without fear of evaluation. Grading is based on completion.

Discussion Leading. Once during the semester, you will lead ~15 minutes of our discussion on the readings for that day through a combination of presentation and discussion questions. You'll turn in a Memo for your discussion, which should have:

- 1) two passages from the readings that you think are especially interesting, important, provocative, challenging, or that will otherwise prompt meaningful discussion about the core issues at hand. Please type them out; a passage can be anywhere from 1 sentence to 1 paragraph. Along with the passages, include some brief notes, comments, or questions about each of the passages.
- 2) two discussion questions for the class. You will likely need a few sentences to explicate your questions: make sure you give enough information for your question to be generative (aim for questions you think link to other important ideas or topics, get at the heart of some theoretical issue, or open up a new way of thinking).

While you should take the time to read carefully and reflect on the course material, you are decisively **not** expected to master it before our session--whether you are leading discussion or not. Instead, the Memo will allow you to raise questions *you* have about the theories and approaches we are considering, try out ideas, and direct our discussion in ways conducive to your learning and interests.

Final Paper/Project – OR – Two Papers. You pick your track: either a final paper (or other substantive ethnographic project) of ~10 pages, or two 5-page papers due at the midterm and the last day of classes. Either way, you have the choice of exploring any aspect of affect + anthropology; papers can be more conceptual/theoretical, more ethnographic/descriptive, or a combination of both. They can build on Sensoria projects, or take up a new topic entirely. You'll want to meet with me at least once to discuss both your plan for track and the particular directions you are considering for your paper(s).

A Note on Our Seminar: Let's pledge to be patient and kind with each other in these challenging times. One of the best things about a Wesleyan seminar is being able to think together, learn from and challenge each other. This kind of space doesn't just happen; it is something we need to build together, proactively. So if there are things that are not working for you –format, class dynamics, work or reading load – and/or if you have ideas for making our class better, please bring them to me!

Policy on Absences: You may miss 1 class without explanation or penalty: think of this as a sick (or health) day, and take it when you see fit. There is no need to email me unless you are dealing with something serious, in which case we should have a more detailed conversation that might

include your Class Dean. Missing 3 or more classes is grounds for No Credit.

Policy on extensions: I have found that extensions can be worse for the procrastinators and anxious among us (myself included), and a crappy draft of a paper that you can go back to is often better than a “perfect” one that is never turned in. Therefore, in a typical semester, I discourage extensions (except for emergencies or as accommodations). However, this semester there is the small matter of the Global Pandemic. So, if you are having any difficulty with deadlines, please be in touch.

Office Hours: I have set office hours Mondays and Tuesdays both on Zoom and in person; schedule an appointment using my online calendar: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>. If you cannot make any of my available times, email me and we will work out an alternative time to meet. You can talk to me about course material or any concerns or ideas you might have – or sign up just to chat so we can get to know each other!

Students with Disabilities: I am including the official Wesleyan statement below, but please know that I want to work with you on access issues that might fall outside of these "official" channels. If there is anything that might make our class more accessible for you, let me know.

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible. If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact [Accessibility Services](#) in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, room 021, or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-2332).

Religious/Spiritual Observance Resources: If you anticipate that your religious/spiritual observance may conflict with academic obligations such as attending class, taking examinations, or submitting assignments, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements. Should you require additional support or guidance, please feel free to reach out to Rabbi David Teva, Director of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at dleipziger@wesleyan.edu or any of the chaplains in the [Office of Religious and Spiritual Life](#).

Title IX Resources: If trauma inhibits your ability to fully participate in class, please contact Debbie Colucci, Title IX Coordinator, at dcolucci@wesleyan.edu, or your class dean. Additionally, if you are comfortable, you can work directly with me to make reasonable arrangements.

Honor Code: All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the Writing Workshop: <https://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/writingworkshop/index.html>

Course Schedule

Tuesday, Sept. 7: Course Introduction: The Affective Turn (WTF affect)

- Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010), “An Inventory of Shimmers” *The Affect Theory Reader*
 - Kathleen Stewart (2017), “In the World that Affect Proposed” *Cultural Anthropology*
 - (rec) Yael Navaro (2017), “Diversifying Affect” *Cultural Anthropology*
 - (rec): Bonnie McElhinny, “The Audacity of Affect: Gender, Race, and History in Linguistic Accounts of Legitimacy and Belonging” *Annual Review of Anthropology*
 - (rec) “Anthropology & Affect” (online): <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/affect>
- SENSORIUM #1 in class**

(Re)theorizing Affect I: Communitas and Collectivity

Tuesday, Sept. 14: “Collective Effervescence” & Communitas

- Émile Durkheim (1915), excerpts from *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*
 - Victor Turner (1969), “Liminality and Communitas,” in *The Ritual Process*
 - Edith Turner (2012), “Introduction” to *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*
 - Deborah Gould (2009), “The Pleasures and Intensities of Activism; or, Making a Place for Yourself in the Universe” *Moving Politics*
- (rec) Nomi Stone (2017), “Living the Laughscream: Human Technology and Affective Maneuvers in the Iraq War” *Cultural Anthropology*
- SENSORIUM #2 in class**

Tuesday, Sept. 21: Collectivity, Diffusion, Attunement

- Teresa Brennan (2004), “Introduction” to *The Transmission of Affect*
 - Sara Ahmed (2004), “Collective Feelings, or, the Impressions Left by Others” *Theory, Culture & Society*
 - Sara Ahmed (2010), “Happy Objects,” *The Affect Theory Reader*
 - Nicholas Shapiro (2015), “Attuning to the Chemosphere: Domestic Formaldehyde, Bodily Reasoning, and the Chemical Sublime” *Cultural Anthropology*
- (rec): Kathleen Stewart (2011), “Atmospheric attunements” *Environment and Planning D*
- (rec): Jacques Rancière (2010), *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*
- SENSORIUM #3 do before class**

(Re)theorizing Affect II: Emotions vs. Affect
--

Tuesday, Sept. 28: Affect vs. Emotion?

- Brian Massumi (2002), “The Autonomy of Affect” in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (read the “Introduction” too if you have time)
- Emily Martin (2013), “The Potentiality of Ethnography and the Limits of Affect Theory” *Current Anthropology*
- John Leavitt (1996) “Meaning & Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions” *American Ethnologist*
- Julie Soleil Archambault (2016), “Taking Love Seriously in Human-Plant Relations in Mozambique: Toward an Anthropology of Affective Encounters” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec): Catherine Lutz, “What Matters” *Cultural Anthropology*
SENSORIUM #4 in class

Tuesday, Oct 5: Language, Culture, Emotion: Cross-Cultural Affect

- Renato Rosaldo (1989), “Grief and a Headhunter's Rage” in *Culture and Truth*
- Michelle Rosaldo, (1984) “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling” in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*
- Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1985), “Culture, Scarcity, and Material Thinking” *Ethos*
- Bianca Williams (2018), “More Than a Groove: Pursuing Happiness as a Political Project” in *The Pursuit of Happiness*

(rec) Catherine Lutz & Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), “Introduction” *Language & Politics of Emotion*
 (rec) essays on emotion, culture, and translation, esp. on “depression”

(rec) Catherine Lutz & Geoffrey White (1986), “Anthropology of Emotions” *Annual Rev. Anthro*
SENSORIUM #5 do before class

(Re)theorizing Affect III: Structures of Feeling / Affect and Capitalism

Tuesday, Oct 12: Structures of Feeling / The Feeling of Capitalism

- Raymond Williams (1977), “Structures of Feeling,” in *Marxism and Literature*
- Walter Benjamin (1927-40), selection from *The Arcades Project* (+ video)
- Michael Taussig (1991), “Tactility and Distraction” *Cultural Anthropology*
- Kathleen Stewart (1988), “Nostalgia—A Polemic” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec) Sianne Ngai (2004), “Introduction” to *Ugly Feelings*

(rec) Nigel Thrift (2010), “Understanding Material Practices of Glamour” *Affect Theory Reader*

(rec) Karen Engle and Yoke-Sum Wong, *Feelings of Structure: Explorations in Affect*

SENSORIUM #6 do before class

Tuesday, Oct 19: Economies of Affect / Affect and Precarity

- Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnykyj (2009), “Economies of Affect” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*
- Lauren Berlant (2011), “Introduction: Affect in the Present,” *Cruel Optimism*
- Ulla D. Berg and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas (2015), “Racializing Affect: A Theoretical Proposition” *Current Anthropology*
- Yarimar Bonilla (2020), “Postdisaster Futures: Hopeful Pessimism, Imperial Ruination, and La futura cuir” *Small Axe*

(rec): Sarah Luna (2018), “Affective Atmospheres of Terror on the Mexico–U.S. Border: Rumors of Violence in Reynosa’s Prostitution Zone” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec): Elysée Nouvet (2014), “Some Carry On, Some Stay in Bed: (In)convenient Affects and Agency in Neoliberal Nicaragua” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec): Bruce O’Neill (2014), “Cast Aside: Boredom, Downward Mobility, and Homelessness in Post-Communist Bucharest” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec): Carla Freeman (2020), “Feeling Neoliberal” *Feminist Anthropology*

(rec): Anne Allison (2012), “Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21st Century Japan” *Anthropological Quarterly*

(rec): Melissa Gregg (2010), "On Friday Night Drinks: Workplace Affects in the Age of the Cubicle" *The Affect Theory Reader* + snark/Passive-Aggressive Notes

SENSORIUM #7 in class

Paper 1 due: Friday, Oct 22

Tuesday, Oct 26: No class, FALL BREAK

Tuesday, Nov 2: Affective Labor

- Arlie Hochschild (2003), "Feeling Management: From Private to Commercial Uses," in *The Managed Heart*
- Andrea Muehlebach (2011) "Affective Labor in Post-Fordist Italy" *Cultural Anthropology*
- Gabriele Koch (2016), "Producing Iyashi: Healing and Labor in Tokyo's Sex Industry" *American Ethnologist*
- Purnima Mankekar & Akhil Gupta (2016), "Intimate Encounters: Affective Labor in Call Centers" *positions*

(rec) Kalindi Vora (2012), "Limits of 'Labor': Accounting for Affect and the Biological in Transnational Surrogacy and Service Work," *South Atlantic Quarterly*

(rec): Michael Hardt (1999), "Affective Labor"

SENSORIUM #8 do before class

(Re)theorizing Affect IV: Sensation / Sensuality

Tuesday, Nov 9: Intensity and Sensation, Place and Memory

- Giles Deleuze (1996), "Percept, Affect, Concept" in *What is Philosophy?*
- Yael Navaro (2009), "Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*
- Kiven Strohm (2019), "The Sensible Life of Return: Collaborative Experiments in Art and Anthropology in Palestine/Israel" *American Anthropologist*
- C. Nadia Seremetakis (1994), "The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity" *Visual Anthropology Review*

(rec): Ann Laura Stoler (2008), "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination" *Cult. Anth.*

(rec): Kathleen Stewart (2010), "Afterword: Worlding Refrains" *The Affect Theory Reader*

(rec): Nigel Thrift (2004), "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler*

(rec): Spinoza, Book III, Prop. 2 in *Ethics*

(rec): Félix Guattari (1996), "Ritornellos and Existential Affects," *The Guattari Reader*

SENSORIUM #9 do before class

Tuesday, Nov 16: Anthropology of the Senses

- Paul Stoller (1989) "Introduction" to *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*
- Read one from at least 3 senses:

Sound:

- Rayya El Zein (2020), "To Have Many Returns: Loss in the Presence of Others" *World Records*

- Charles Hirschkind (2001), “The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt” *American Ethnologist*
- Laura Kunreuther (2018), “Sounds of Democracy: Performance, Protest, and Political Subjectivity” *Cultural Anthropology*

Smell

- Kath Weston (2012), “Politics Ecologies of the Precarious” *Anthropological Quarterly*
- Martin Manalansan (2006), “Immigrant lives and the politics of olfaction in the global city” *Smell Culture Reader*
- Laurie Denyer Willis (2018), “‘It Smells Like A Thousand Angels Marching’: The Salvific Sensorium in Rio de Janeiro’s Western Suburbios” *Cultural Anthropology*

Touch:

- Elizabeth Povinelli (2006), “Rotten Worlds,” in *The Empire of Love*
- Eva Hayward (2010), “Fingeryeyes: Impressions of Cup Corals” *Cultural Anthropology*
- Juno Salazar Parrenas (2012), “Producing Affect: Transnational Volunteerism in A Malaysian Orangutan Rehabilitation Center” *American Ethnologist*

Taste

- Harris Solomon, “The Taste No Chef Can Give”: Processing Street Food in Mumbai” *Cultural Anthropology*
- Heather Paxson (2010), “Locating Value in Artisan Cheese: Reverse Engineering Terroir for New-World Landscapes” *American Anthropologist*
- Melissa L. Caldwell (2002), “The Taste of Nationalism: Food Politics in Postsocialist Moscow” *Ethnos*

(rec): Aisha Beliso-De Jesús (2014), “Santería Copresence and the Making of African Diaspora Bodies” *Cultural Anthropology*

(rec): Richard McGrail, Jesse Davie-Kessler, and Bascom Guffin (2013) “Affect, embodiment, and sense perception” : http://www.culanth.org/curated_collections/

SENSORIUM #10 in class**Conclusion: Ethnography’s Affect****Tuesday, Nov 23: Representing Affect**

TBD

Tuesday, Nov 30: Representing Affect

TBD

Tuesday, Dec 7: Course Wrap up and Ethnography’s Affect

- Ruth Behar (1996), excerpts from *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (“The Vulnerable Observer” and “Anthropology that Breaks your Heart”)

Paper 2 due: Dec 10**Final paper/Project due: Dec 18 by 5pm (last moment of exam week)**