

Carleton University
Fall 2022
Department of English Language and Literature
and
Graduate Program in Cultural Mediations (ICSLAC)
ENGL 5002F: Studies in Theory I
CLMD 6904F: Special Topic in Cultural Mediations
The Alt-Left Politics of Pleasure: Identity, Consent, and Cancel Culture

Course website (password protected):
<http://stuartjmurray.com/pleasure>

Mode of Delivery: in-person (pandemic permitting),
with the notable exception of two Zoom seminars (see below)

Tuesdays / 14:35 – 17:25

Location: SP 201D

Instructor: Prof. Stuart J. Murray

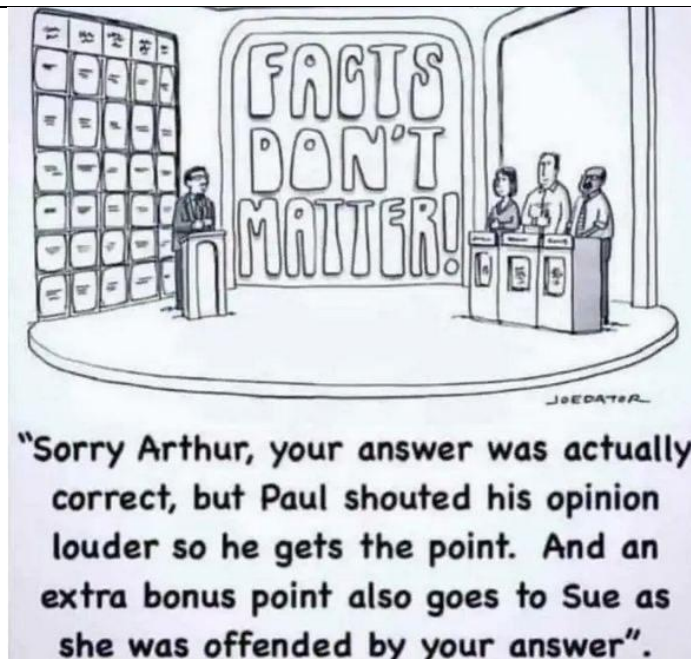
Email: stuart.murray@carleton.ca

Office: *online via Zoom by appointment* (please email me)

(To comply with FIPPA privacy legislation, any sensitive discussions
must take place in person, by phone, or via Microsoft Teams)

Important note:

For information on deadlines for withdrawal from courses, please consult the Academic Year
section of the University Calendar (<https://calendar.carleton.ca/academicyear/>).



*Cancellation Disclaimer: The above cartoon is meant to be satirical. And satire is meant to be funny, while also serving as a form of ideology critique.

I. Course description

This is a cross-listed course intended to be interdisciplinary and is open to the disciplinary perspectives and research interests that each student will bring to the course. Calendar descriptions are as follows. ENGL: Selected topics in literary and cultural theory. CLMD: This in-class course offers selected topics in interdisciplinary studies of culture not available in the regular course offerings.

Detailed Description

This course explores the perils and possibilities of “pleasure”—the sensuous and the sensual—in a social climate where bodily pleasures and their expression are increasingly sites of suspicion and subject to new normative constraints, regulatory measures, and moral approbations. The expression of passional pleasure, philosophers have long believed, runs counter to reason, counter to society, and counter to the free and forward march of history. But such a sexual ethic is surely neither a natural nor necessary, as countless feminist scholars have argued. Here, the (in)vocation of pleasure might be construed as erotic/sexual, but also, relatedly, as a host of “libidinal economies” (Lyotard) that are both embodied and political. Why are they unspeakable? Michel Foucault (1986) argues that there has been “a certain ‘elision’ of pleasure” (p. 42) in our culture because our “uses” of pleasure are informed by moralities that are both *intrinsic* (by virtue of one’s identity, or “subjectivation”) and *extrinsic* (through codes of conduct) (p. 29). But it is not at all easy to parse the tense relationship between the intrinsic and extrinsic—the individual and society—morals and laws: This is the place of politics, and a perennial site of struggle. Today, this site of struggle is highly mediatized across digital social media, in memes, partisan politics, cancel culture, and raging “culture wars,” which foster identity positions—and an identity politics—that blurs the lines between the personal and the political.

Taking “pleasure” as its site of discursive possibility, this course reads texts that will help us to reflect critically on three contemporary instances in which bodily pleasures are regulated and, arguably, “elided” in the political contest between moral codes of conduct and individual identities and rights: (1) affirmative sexual consent on campus; (2) cancel culture, triggers, and social media memes; and (3) academic freedom and the liberal political (re)investment in “free speech” on campus. Each of these sites demonstrates the profound entrenchment of identity politics across the political spectrum: identity, consent, and free speech are the available avatars in the contemporary games of pleasure, politics. Linking pleasure to identity, course texts—literary and theoretical—might offer a critique of identity politics and of political liberalism. If liberal individualism continues to be our basis for understanding pleasure and individual rights, what might this mean for political action beyond our highly scripted expressions of outrage or injury? Might we begin to reconceive a politics of pleasure that does not abandon responsibility or consent, but that re-thinks them, first and foremost, as necessarily social, aesthetic, and collective endeavours?

II. Preclusions

None.

III. Learning Outcomes

Students will develop advanced knowledge of key theoretical terms toward a poststructuralist and queer-feminist critical analytical understanding of pleasure, identity politics, and their cultural representations. Moreover, students will learn to exercise *applied* literary reading skills across distinct genres, including literary, sociocultural, historical, and political communicative practices. Other possible outcome: pleasure.

IV. Texts

Most required course texts will be made available online. However, please note that the following should be acquired (no particular edition required, ebooks okay if that's your thing):

Carson, Anne. *The Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. New York: Vintage, 1998.

Coetzee, J.M. *Diary of a Bad Year*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.

BOOKS WILL BE AVAILABLE AT:

Haven Books – Carleton University Students' Association | 613-730-9888

43 Seneca St., Ottawa, ON

[Website](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

V. Course Calendar

1. SEPT. 13, 2022

INTRODUCTION

Deneuve, Catherine, et al. « Nous défendons une liberté d'importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle », *Le Monde*, January 8, 2018.

http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html. This URL is paywalled, so I link two documents: (1) The French text saved archivally in ProQuest, curiously, as “Des femmes libèrent une autre parole.” (2) An acceptable English translation as “Full Translation Of French Anti-#MeToo Manifesto Signed By Catherine Deneuve,” from a contemporaneous blog, saved from archive.org.

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OPTIONAL SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS BY FEMINISTS IN THE MAINSTREAM PRESS

Kipnis, Laura. “Has #MeToo gone too far or not far enough? The answer is both.” *The Guardian*, January 13, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/13/has-me-too-catherine-deneuve-laura-kipnis>.

MacKinnon, Catherine A. “#MeToo has done what the law could not.” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/metoo-law-legal-system.html>.

2. **SEPT. 20, 2022****PLEASURE: INCITEMENT + REGULATION**

Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. New York: Random House, 1978, 1–49.

Foucault, Michel. *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*. New York: Picador, 2003, 231–62.

Dean, Tim. “The Biopolitics of Pleasure.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (2012): 477–96.

3. **SEPT. 27, 2022****USES OF PLEASURE**

Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*. New York: Random House, 1986. [Page selection TBA]

Foucault, Michel. “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom.” In *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, 432–49. New York: Semiotext(e), 1996.

4. **OCT. 4, 2022****A POETICS OF PLEASURE**

Carson, Anne. *The Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. New York: Vintage, 1998.

5. **OCT. 11, 2022****A POLITICS OF PLEASURE**

Foucault, Michel. “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” [interview]. In *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984*, 382–90. New York: Semiotext(e), 1996.

Foucault, Michel, Nicolae Morar, and Daniel W. Smith. “The Gay Science” [interview], *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 385–403.

Forster, E.M. “Arthur Snatchfold.” In *The Life to Come and Other Short Stories*, 97–112. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1987.

6. **OCT. 18, 2022 – VIA ZOOM <https://carleton-ca.zoom.us/j/9677751956>****IDENTITY POLITICS: EXPERIENCE + FEELING**

Scott, Joan W. “The Evidence of Experience.” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.

Berlant, Lauren. “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics.” In *Cultural Pluralism, Identity Politics, and the Law*, edited by Austin Sarat and Tomas R. Kearns, 49–84. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

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OPTIONAL

Fukuyama, Francis. “Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2018.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2018-08-14/against-identity-politics-tribalism-francis-fukuyama>.

[READING WEEK]

7. **NOV. 1, 2022 – VIA ZOOM <https://carleton-ca.zoom.us/j/9677751956>**

TEXTUAL PLEASURES

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. [Page selection TBA]

8. **NOV. 8, 2022**

DIARY OF PLEASURE

Coetzee, J.M. *Diary of a Bad Year*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

9. **NOV. 15, 2022**

THE THING

Macaskill, Brian. “Thinking Contingently: Reading, Writing, Listening, Walking, and Shooting Bodily, Slowly, and Musically

(Friedrich Nietzsche, J.M. Coetzee, Béla Tarr, and Other Enthusiasts of Slow Composition).”

Unpublished Manuscript, © 2022, courtesy of the author; not to be distributed without prior consent.

10. **NOV. 22, 2022**

PLEASURE AS POWER

Califa, Pat. “Public Sex.” In *Public Sex: The Cultural of Radical Sex*, 2nd ed., 14–27. Jersey City, NJ: Cleis Press, 2000.

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner. “Sex in Public.” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 547–66.

Lorde, Audre. “The Erotic as Power.” In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, 339–42. New York: Routledge, 1993.

11. **NOV. 29, 2022**

MONSTERS AND MACHINES

A bit of background reading: <https://www.history.com/news/frankenstein-true-story-mary-shelley>

Winterson, Jeanette. *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.

12. **DEC. 6, 2022**

TBA

VI. Evaluation

This is a course on the politics of pleasure. Our course readings will furnish us with theoretical and/or aesthetic lenses through which to perceive/interpret/analyze the many political stakes of pleasure, whether sensual, erotic, or through other libidinal economies. However, the *application* and the *political sites of analysis* I will leave to you: it is not my intention to politicize this course based on my own biases or pet projects. I encourage you to apply our course texts, creatively, in the assignments below. Here are some *suggested* Frames of Analysis to help organize your research:

1. Informed/Affirmative sexual consent on campus or in the workplace
2. Social media and meme culture
3. Cancel culture and deplatforming

4. “Free speech” wars on campus and in the press
5. Legislating for—or against—“free speech”
6. Identity and identity politics
7. Rhetorical/Textual/Artistic resistance
8. Sexbots and AI
9. The body and sex
10. ?

50% Essay(s) or Essay Equivalent(s), such as a Creative-Scholarly Project(s):

In these ongoing pandemic times, I am granting the widest possibly leeway for your scholarly (and creative) practices, and I encourage you to take the opportunity to experiment. You may also suggest a Digital Humanities project. I’m always delighted to discuss your early ideas for assignments in a scheduled office hour or if you hang back after class. I particularly encourage PhD students to develop work that might later be incorporated into their dissertation projects. Your work need not comment on a specific text or texts studied in the course, but projects should be resonant with course themes/problematics.

The end goal is that you will write a total of 15-20 pages this semester (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt font, max. margins 2.5 cm or 1 inch, consistently using the bibliographic style of your own choosing).

The total 15-20 pages can be submitted in one, two, or up to three distinct pieces of writing. The choice is yours.

Deadline(s): Again, it’s up to you, but the final assignment must be emailed to me by **December 14, 2022 at midnight**.

All assignments should be emailed to me, and I always acknowledge receipt by return email (so if my spam filter has eaten something and you don’t hear, please ping me!).

Halloween Special Offer: You may submit up to 5 pages of writing by **31 October 2022**. It can be experimental, a stand-alone piece, part of a larger essay, an engagement with a text, etc. I will read, make comments on it, and assign a **provisional letter grade**. You may choose to keep this grade, to revise and resubmit for a new grade, or simply scrap the assignment.

Assignment Weighting: Obviously, if you choose one assignment, it will be weighted at 50% of the final grade. For more than one assignment, the total of 50% will be pro-rated on the total pages written (e.g., two 10-page essays would be 25% + 25%; a 6-page essay and a 12-page essay would be 17% and 33%).

25% Seminar Presentation (is situated in a particular week’s readings)

I’m imagining a presentation of 10-15 minutes followed by a 15-minute moderated discussion on the text(s) we have read for that week (in weeks where there is more than one text you are free to choose just one or more). Rather than summarize the text, reflect on how it resonates in our particular socio-historical context: how can this week’s course reading(s) be deployed to help make sense of—or to question or critique—the intersection of pleasures and politics.

No “props” or PowerPoint expected, but they are welcome if you choose.

15% Show-and-Tell (relates to course problematics generally – not necessarily the week’s readings!)

Bring a cultural artifact to class discussion – perhaps an example of an artistic/creative response to the course themes/problematics or a relevant event that is in the news. Be creative, be controversial if you wish, have some fun with this. Show-and-Tell will typically kick off each week’s class as a kind of ice-breaker. I’m imagining an informal presentation that moderates a discussion of 10-15 minutes total.

“Course problematics” will emerge—and, I hope, transform—as we collectively engage course texts across the semester, and this is an occasion for you to help direct our discourse.

10% Participation

Active and thoughtful participation is appreciated.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

VII. Statement on Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” See: <https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy-2021.pdf>. According to the Department examples of plagiarism include the following:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire

course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to:
<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

VIII. Statement on Student Mental Health

As a University student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

Carleton Resources:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Off Campus Resources:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

IX. Information on Pandemic Measures

It is important to remember that COVID is still present in Ottawa. The situation can change at any time and the risks of new variants and outbreaks are very real. There are [a number of actions you can take](#) to lower your risk and the risk you pose to those around you including being vaccinated, wearing a mask, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands and maintaining proper respiratory and cough etiquette.

Feeling sick? Remaining vigilant and not attending work or school when sick or with symptoms is critically important. If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms do not come to class or campus. If you feel ill or exhibit symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately. In all situations, you must follow Carleton's [symptom reporting protocols](#).

Masks: Carleton has paused its mandatory mask mandate as of June 25, 2022. Even though masks will no longer be mandatory, **we continue to strongly recommend masking when indoors**, particularly if physical distancing cannot be maintained. For more information please visit <https://carleton.ca/covid19/policies-and-protocols/mask-policy/>.

Vaccines: While proof of vaccination is no longer required as of May 1 to attend campus or in-person activity, it may become necessary for the University to bring back proof of vaccination requirements on short notice if the situation and public health advice changes. Students are strongly encouraged to get a full course of vaccination, including booster doses as soon as they are eligible, and submit their booster dose information in [cuScreen](#) as soon as possible. Please note that Carleton cannot guarantee that it will be able to offer virtual or hybrid learning options for those who are unable to attend the campus.

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow requirements and guidelines regarding health and safety which may change from time to time. For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and health and safety requirements please see the [University's COVID-19 website](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca.

X. Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the [Pregnancy Accommodation Form](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

<https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>