OVERVIEW

French philosopher and cultural historian Michel Foucault (1926-1984) brought an innovative approach to the relationship between knowledge and power that created new forms of cultural study and bio-politics. His work has been broadly influential across the academy (humanities, social science, cultural studies, queer theory) and political activism (particularly ACT-UP and post-anarchy).

His later work on “cares of the self” reoriented his thinking about philosophy toward its roots as a way of life, a spiritual exercise, and a practice of freedom. This work has opened up new ways of thinking about ancient philosophy, religious studies, spiritual practices, and the arts and humanities. Plus, it too has been an inspiration to activists and beyond for working out ways of living in the contemporary world.
In view of Foucault’s wide influence across a variety of domains, we devote this class to close readings of his work and key concepts. Our readings are roughly chronological and are organized around the three themes that are central to Foucault’s writing: discourse, power, and cares of the self:

**Discourse**

*I have always been interested in the problem of the relationship between subject and truth. I mean, how does the subject fit into a certain [discourse or] game of truth? The first problem I examined was ... how... the mad subject [was] placed in this game of truth defined by a medical model.*

**Power**

*That sent me back to the problem of institutions of power... The word power... is simply a short hand for the expression I generally use: relations of power.*

**Cares of the Self**

*If I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.*

Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom (1984)

**TEXTS**

Joanna Oksala: *How to Read Foucault*
Michel Foucault: *Madness and Civilization*
Michel Foucault: *This is Not a Pipe*
Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish*
Michel Foucault: *History of Sexuality Vol I*
Paul Rabinow: *Michel Foucault: Ethics Subjectivity Truth*

**Class Schedule**

1.) Jan 29: Introduction

   Video: Foucault/Chomsky Debate (extracts)
   Handout: Foucault/Chomsky Debate

**DISCOURSE**

*I have always been interested in the problem of the relationship between subject and truth. I mean, how does the subject fit into a certain [discourse or] game of truth? The first problem I examined was ... how... the mad subject [was] placed in this game of truth defined by a medical model.*
2.) Feb 5: Post-structural Context

Oksala: Introduction
Sartre: Existentialism Is a Humanism
Belsey: *Very Short Introduction to Poststructuralism* (selections)
Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics* (selections)
Lewis: Dodging the Science Wars

3.) Feb 12: History of Madness

Oksala: Chapter 1 and 2
Foucault: Historical Constitution of Mental Illness
Foucault: *Madness and Civilization* (preface, Ch 2, 9, conclusion)

4.) Feb 19: Medicine and Human Sciences

Downing: Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault (Birth of the Clinic)
Foucault: Birth of Clinic (Preface, Visible Invisible excerpt, Conclusion)
McWhinney: Major Transformation of Clinical Method?
Oksala: Chapter 3
Foucault: *Order of Things* (Preface, Conclusion)

5.) Feb 26: Literature and Art

Oksala: Chapter 4
Foucault: Speaking and Seeing in Raymond Roussel
Foucault: *This is Not a Pipe*
Suggested: Foucault: What is an Author?

6.) Mar 4: Discourse

Foucault: The Discourse on Language
Andreason: History of Psychiatry
Lewis: The New Psychiatry as a Discursive Practice
Foucault: *Madness and Civilization* (Ch. 5—p117-135)

**First Paper Due Next Week**

Paper Topic: Please do your own “discourse on discourse” in Foucault—what are some pre-history moments of “discourse” in poststructural theory and the arts, how does the idea emerge in Foucault’s work, what are ways discourse operates or functions in different domains, and why does Foucault call discourse a “game of truth?”
POWER

*That sent me back to the problem of institutions of power... The word power... is simply a short hand for the expression I generally use: relations of power.*

7.) Mar 11: Power/Knowledge

- Foucault: *Truth and Power*
- Oksala: Chapter 5
- Foucault: *Discipline and Punishment*
  - Part I: Torture
    - Chapter 1: Body of the condemned

**First Paper Due**

Spring Break March 18

8.) Mar 25: Disciplinary Society and Docile Bodies

- Oksala: Chapter 6
- Foucault: *Discipline and Punishment*
  - Part III: Discipline
    - Chapter 1: Docile bodies
    - Chapter 2: The means of correct training
    - Chapter 3: Panopticism
  - Part IV: Prison
    - Chapter 3: The Carceral

Suggested: Foucault: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History

9.) April 1: Sexuality and Biopower

- Oksala: Chapter 7, 8
- Foucault: *History of Sexuality* (p. 1-15), (p. 92-115), (p. 133-159)
- Foucault: Herculine Barbin (introduction)

Suggested: Foucault: *History of Sexuality* (p. 17-51)

10.) April 8: Biopolitics and ACT-UP (professor away—Jo Rendell guest)

- Halperin: *Saint Foucault*
- Crimp and Treichler: *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*

Video: United in Anger: A History of ACT-UP
CARES OF THE SELF

If I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.

11.) April 15: Subject and Ethics

Oksala: Chapter 10
Foucault: Technologies of the Self (Ethics)
Foucault: Subject and Power (NYU Classes)
Foucault: Genealogy of Ethics (Ethics)

Video: Foucault lecture: The Culture of the Self

12.) April 22: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Epictitus and Marcus Aurelius
Foucault: Hermeneutics of the Subject (Ethics)
Foucault: Self-Writing (Ethics)
Hadot: Philosophy as Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault

Video: Foucault lecture: The Culture of the Self continued

13.) April 29: Practices of Freedom

Oksala: Chapter 9
Foucault: Friendship as a Way of Life (Ethics)
Foucault: Ethics of Concern as Practice of Freedom (Ethics)
Foucault: What is Enlightenment? (Ethics)

Video: Foucault lecture: The Culture of the Self continued

14.) May 6: Foucault Afterlife or Ways of Life after Foucault

Vintges: Endorsing Practices of Freedom: Feminism in Global Perspective
Shepard: ACT-UP to WTO
May: Is Post-Structuralist Political Theory Anarchist?
Shannon and Willis: Queering Anarchism
Heckert: An Other State of Mind is Possible
Kingston: Subversive Friendships

Suggested: Simpson: Life as Art (Foucault’s Aesthetics of Existance)
Caputo: Not Knowing Who We Are: Night of Truth in Foucault
Paper: Please discuss the three moments in Foucault’s work—Discourse, Power, and Cares of the Self—and their implications for ways of life and practices of freedom after Foucault.

***Final Paper due May 10th by 5 PM in my box***

Course Requirements

Grades are based on three parts: attendance/participation (20%) and 2 papers (40% each). Late papers are graded down. There will be an opportunity to rewrite the first paper if you desire. The attendance/participation grade is composed of weekly class attendance and participation.

On most days, class will begin with a short lecture on the material for that week. We then move to class discussion initiated by student selections from the material. To prepare for this part of the class, please type out a quote and short comment from each week’s reading (include page numbers so we can find your quotes). That means bringing in four quotes each week. We will initiate discussion from the quotes selected. Your quotes for each half of the class are turned in with your papers and should total about six pages.

The papers are 6-7 pages type written, double spaced. Please use the material from the class to develop the topic question I hand out. Back up your thesis with arguments and examples from the class readings (include internal citations with page numbers and a reference list at the end).

A good paper demonstrates that you have integrated the material from the class discussions and readings and can use it to analyze your topic. Use the bulk of your energy reading closely and thinking seriously about the materials you have (rather than doing outside research). Also, be sure and give your paper a title.

The grading scale for the class will be as follows: 93-100% (A) 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-86 (B), 80-82 (B-), 77-79 (C+), 70-76 (C), 63-69 (D), and below (F).