

# Power

## GPOL 5028, Summer 2008

*The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics.*

*- Bertrand Russell*

*When language has been butchered and bled of meaning, how do we understand “public power?” When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neoliberal capitalism, when reform means repression, when words like “empowerment” and “peacekeeping” make your blood run cold—why, then, “public power” could mean whatever you want it to mean. A biceps building machine, or a Community Power Shower. So, I’ll just have to define “public power” as I go along, in my own self-serving sort of way.*

*- Arundhati Roy*

*Take the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. Use this resistance as a chemical catalyst to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, analyze power relations through the antagonism of strategies.*

*-- Michel Foucault*

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Seminar Meetings:  
M/Th noon-3:50 p.m.  
Office Hours:  
by appointment

### Description

This course examines power: what it is, how to theorize, conceptualize, and research it, and how the study of power might itself constitute an exercise of power.

Our month-long exploration leads us through New Haven, Central Appalachia, the Danish town of Aalborg, a peasant village in Malaysia, and authoritarian Syria. We will study elementary schools, prison architecture, Danish bus depots, coal mines, foot dragging, character assassination, and the ritualized joke. These motley destinations are bound together by their demarcation as sites that illuminate various and often contesting approaches to the study of power in contemporary social science. Because power is a slippery beast, we will, whenever possible, keep our hands tightly wound around works that present situated studies *of* power rather than texts that theorize in the abstract *about* power. Admittedly, we will also dabble from time to time in the latter, but mostly for their capacity to illuminate, challenge, and engage the former.

We will read nine studies of power in their entirety (in a mere four weeks!). Many of these studies are classics in their respective disciplines and are often read, cited, and emulated across disciplinary boundaries. In and of itself, this might constitute our first lesson about the study of power in the social sciences: when done well, it transgresses boundaries of discipline, methodology, and ideological orthodoxy, and opens up—rather than shuts down—avenues of thinking and acting, both in the academic and larger world. If we follow this model of willful transgression at least some

distance in this seminar--learning to talk, think, write, and design studies of power in ways that articulate the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of approaches--then we shall judge our month of collective inquiry a success.

### Requirements

1. **Participation** (25%): This course would be demanding under normal circumstances; given the fact that we are covering a semester's worth of material in four weeks, it is exponentially more demanding. Thus, your preparation, presence, and participation are crucial. Please complete the required readings, be on time for each class, bring all relevant texts, and contribute intelligently and energetically to the discussions. Given that there are only eight class meetings, unexcused absences will count heavily against you. *In our first meeting, we will discuss shared strategies for covering this large amount of material in a compressed amount of time.*
2. **Reaction Papers** (25%): A concise, one single-spaced page (size 12 font, 1 inch margins) reaction to each class' readings is due via the class listserv by six a.m. on the day of class. Please paste your text in the body of the e-mail. The e-mail subject heading should contain your last name and the number of the class (e.g., Pachirat c3). Your reaction pieces should engage (i.e., question, critique, support, apply, argue against, signal areas of confusion, etc.) the readings: *do not write summaries!* For most classes, you will be free to choose a writing focus; in others, I may offer one or more questions for your consideration. Reaction papers are *not* due for the class for which you lead discussion, the class immediately following it, or for the final class (thus, each of you will submit a total of 5 reactions).
3. **Discussion Leading** (25%): You must sign up individually or with a partner to be a discussion leader for at least one class. Responsibilities of the discussion leader(s) include(s) summarizing the key points of the readings (no more than 10 minutes!), formulating provocative and engaging questions to encourage critical discussion, preparing at least one hand-out to facilitate discussion, and writing a one page narrative summary of the discussion to be e-mailed to the listserv before the start of the next class.
4. **Research Design** (25%): A portion of each class will be devoted to the development—individually or with a partner--of a research design for a paired comparison of two sites of power within 5 – 10 minutes walking distance of our seminar classroom. Possible locations include: Union Square / Washington Square Park; Whole Foods/ McDonald's; The 79 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue New School Entrance / the 65 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue New School Entrance; Fogelman Library / Bobst Library / Barnes and Noble 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue; The Union Square Subway Station; The Union Square Greenmarket / A Chain Supermarket, etc. You will have time each class to conduct participant-observation and/or secondary research on your selected sites. You can either analyze your selected locations broadly as sites of power or use them to frame specific interests in, for example, the relationship between power and built space; the performance of race, class, gender, or sexuality; capitalism and commercialization; advertising and mass consumption; formal and informal economies; language and symbolic power; civil society and the public sphere, etc. During our final class, you will give an on-site presentation of your research proposal which will be evaluated for its incorporation of the various approaches to studying power presented throughout the seminar and for its potential to push these approaches in new and productive directions. *Please note that this project is **not** meant to require extensive time outside of class.*

5. **Plagiarism** of any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course. The University Writing Center has prepared a useful handout on plagiarism, available at [www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter/documents/AvoidPlagiarism.pdf](http://www.newschool.edu/admin/writingcenter/documents/AvoidPlagiarism.pdf).
6. **There are no exams.**

### Texts

Readings marked \* are available for download and printing in the “File” section of [http://groups.google.com/group/power\\_sum08](http://groups.google.com/group/power_sum08). In addition, you will need to secure the following books—listed here in order of their appearance on the syllabus--from a library, bookstore, or online vendor.

- Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (Harper, 1974)  
C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2000)  
Robert Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Yale University Press, 2005)  
John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (University of Illinois Press, 1982)  
Clarissa Hayward, *De-Facing Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)  
Bent Flyvbjerg, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice* (Chicago University Press, 1998)  
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1979)  
James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985)  
Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago University Press, 1999)

### Schedule

#### **Monday, June 2: Electric Shocks and Psychological Humiliation: What can Obedience to Authority and The Stanford Prison Experiment Tell us about Power?**

Self-introductions; overview of the course.

Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (Harper, 1974), 224 pages.

Philip Zimbardo, Christina Maslach, and Craig Haney, *Reflections on the Stanford Prison Experiment: Genesis, Transformations, Consequences*, 35 pages. \*

In-class films (we may watch a selection of these):

- Obedience* (Stanley Milgram)
- Das Experiment* (Samuel Goldwyn Films)
- The Experiment* (BBC Education & Training)
- Quiet Rage* (PBS)

In-class discussion: What is power? Definitions from Weber, Arendt, etc.

Selection of research sites.

**Thursday, June 5: Power Elites or Ruling Class? C. Wright Mills and the Ship that Launched Three Faces**

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 382 pages.

Stanley Aronowitz, "A Mills Revival?" *Logos* (Summer), 67 – 93.\*

Paul Sweezy, "Power Elite or Ruling Class?" in G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B. Ballard, eds., *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite* (Beacon, 1968), pp. 115-32. \*

Clyde Barrows, "Plain Marxists, Sophisticated Marxists, and C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite*," *Science & Society* v. 71 no. 4, October 2007, pp. 400-430.\*

**Monday, June 9: Pluralist Democracy and Nondecisions: New Haven, Air Pollution, and the First and Second Faces of Power**

Robert Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Yale University Press, 2005), 384 pages.

Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2 (July, 1957), pp. 201-215.\*

Robert Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," *American Political Science Review* 52 (June): 463-9.\*

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* v 56 (1962), pp. 947-52.\*

Matthew Crenson, *The Un-Politics of Air Pollution: A Study of Non-Decisionmaking in the Cities* (Johns Hopkins, 1971), selections.\*

**Thursday, June 12: False Consciousness, Consent, and the Third Face of Power: Appalachian Miners and The Difference Realism Makes (or doesn't) to the Faces of Power Debate**

Steven Lukes, "Power: A Radical View," in *Power: A Radical View, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 14 – 59.\*

John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (University of Illinois Press, 1982), 267 pages.

Jeffrey Isaacs, "Beyond the Three Faces of Power: A Realist Critique" *Polity*, v. 20 n. 1 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 4-31.\*

Ian Shapiro and Alexander Wendt, "The Difference that Realism Makes: Social Science and the Politics of Consent" *Politics & Society*, v 20 n 2 (June, 1992), pp. 197-223.\*

**Monday, June 16: Between Habermas & Foucault: De-Facing Power, or, a Strategies-and-Tactics Approach to Danish Bus Depots**

Clarissa Hayward, *De-Facing Power* (Cambridge, 2000), 214 pages.

Bent Flyvbjerg, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice* (Chicago, 1998), 290 pages.

**Thursday, June 20: OK, Foucault: Disciplinary Power and the Terrible Death of Damians the Regicide**

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1979), 325 pages.

Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” “Governmentality,” “The Meshes of Power,” “Truth and Power,” “Power and Strategies,” “The Eye of Power,” “Body/Power,” and “Questions on Geography,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Harvester Press, 1980); *Space, Knowledge, and Power: Foucault and Geography*, Jeremy Carmpton and Stuart Elden, eds. (Ashgate, 2007); and Burchell Graham et. al. eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, 1991).\*

Nancy Fraser, “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions” in *Foucault on Modern Power* (Minnesota, 1989), pp. 17 – 34.\*

Sandra Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” in *Femininity and Domination* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 63 – 82.\*

**Monday, June 23: Between Hegemony and Resistance: Gossiping, Pilfering Peasants; Stooped, Hoarse, and Sluggish Cult Figures; and the Small Matter of Agency**

James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale, 1985), 389 pages.

Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago, 1999), 244 pages.

Amy Allen, *Feminist Perspectives on Power*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005). \*

Sandra Bartky, “On Psychological Oppression” in *Femininity and Domination* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 22-31.\*

**Thursday, June 26: Power or Complexity?**

Emory Roe, “Against Power: For the Politics of Complexity” and “Responses to Roe” in *Transition* Volume 0, Issue 62 (1993), pp. 90 – 169.

Presentation of research designs (on location).