

Professor Michael Rothberg
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Affect Theory, Fall 2007

Rage. Fear. Shame. Disgust. Love. Anxiety. Depression. Joy.

Why affect, why now? Fredric Jameson has claimed that we live in a time of “waning affect,” yet a growing number of scholars working within and across various disciplines have challenged this view. Especially since 9/11 and the ensuing “war on terror,” affect has emerged as a key site of political mobilization and critical concern. Scholars such as Sianne Ngai (*Ugly Feelings*) in literary/cultural studies and Antonio Damasio (*The Feeling of What Happens*) in neuroscience are convinced that affect has anything but waned in our time and are now producing a formidable body of knowledge on a subject that was once considered too nebulous for serious study.

This Unit seminar approaches “affect theory” as an open and exciting interdisciplinary field—one that traverses both the humanities and the sciences. We will examine several questions related to affect theory and its rise. First and foremost, what is affect? How is it different from emotion, feeling, or passion? How does affect work across disciplines? Can we study affect historically? How are certain affects racialized or gendered? How do affects and affect-laden signs flow among bodies, human and non-human? How might one theorize a politics of terror and other affects? How do affects lend force to ideas and ideologies, to causes such as the anti-globalization movement or the recent surge of nationalist sentiment in the U.S. and other countries? Finally, what does affect bring to the study of theory and criticism?

In conjunction with a Unit colloquium panel on “Affect Across the Disciplines” and a Unit-sponsored graduate student conference “Thinking Affect: Memory, Cognition, Language” (September 28-29), this seminar aims to create a space for dialogue among a wide range of disciplines, to address methodological concerns raised by affect theory, and to explore the political implications of affect.

Texts will be chosen from authors such as Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Teresa Brennan, Antonio Damasio, Lawrence Grossberg, Brian Massumi, Sianne Ngai, Phoebe Sengers, Eve Sedgwick, Ann Laura Stoler, and Sylvan Tomkins. Other texts will be added depending on the interests of the group.

For more information or to be included on the Affect Theory seminar mailing list, contact Michael Rothberg, Director of the Unit for Criticism (mpr@uiuc.edu).

Schedule

All meetings will take place on Monday evenings from 8:00 – 10:00 pm at the IPRH Building, 805 W. Pennsylvania, Urbana unless otherwise noted.

September 10: Introducing Affect Theory

Grossberg, Lawrence. “Ch. 2: Mapping popular culture.” *We gotta get ou of this place: popular conservatism and postmodern culture*. 1992. 69-87.

Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” [*Parables for the Virtual*](#) (23-45, plus notes)

Ngai, Sianne. “Introduction.” *Ugly feelings*. 2005. 1-37.

Tuesday, September 18, 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm, Place TBA: Special Session with Lauren Berlant (University of Chicago)

Berlant, Lauren. “Cruel optimism.” *Differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* 17.3 (2006).

Berlant, Lauren. “Love, a queer feeling.” *Homosexuality psychoanalysis*. Dean, Tim; Lane, Christopher (eds). U of Chicago Press, 2001. 432-451.

September 24: Affect and Cognition

Boehner, Kirsten, [et.al.]. “Affect: from information to interaction.” *Proceedings of the 4th decennial conference on Critical computing: between sense and sensibility*. ACM Press, 2005. 59-68.

Antonio Damassio, “[Introduction](#)” and “[Emotions and Feelings](#),” *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (xi-xix, 127-64, 269-70, 282-5)

Dror, Otniel E.. “Counting the affects: discoursing in numbers.” *Social Research* 68.2 (Summer 2001): 357-378.

Recommended:

Teresa Brennan, “The New Paradigm,” *The Transmission of Affect* (74-96, 182-88)

Blakeslee, Sandra. “Scientists Induce Out-of-Body Sensation.” *New York Times* (August 23, 2007): online.

September 28-29: [Thinking Affect: Memory, Language, and Cognition \(Graduate Student Conference\)](#)

October 15: Shame, Fear, and the Politics of Affect

Sarah Ahmed, "Shame Before Others," *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (101-21).

John Limon, "The Shame of Abu Ghraib," *Critical Inquiry* 33.3 (2007): 543-72.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," *Touching Feeling* (93-121).

Recommended:

Ruth Leys, "Shame Now," *From Shame to Guilt: Auschwitz and After* (123-56).

Silvan Tomkins, selection from *Shame and Its Sisters* (TBA)

November 12: Historicizing Affect

Coviello, Peter. "Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America." *Early American Literature* 37.3 (2002): 439-468.

William Reddy, "Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution," *Journal of Modern History* 72:1 (March 2000): 109-52

Stuart Airlie, "The History of Emotions and Emotional History," *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001): 235-41.

Mary Garrison, "The Study of Emotions in Early Eedieval History: Some Starting Points," *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001): 243-50.

Recommended:

Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107:3 (June 2002): 821-45.

Coviello, Peter. "Intimacy and Affliction: DuBois, Race, and Psychoanalysis." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 64.1 (March 2003): 1-32.

December 3: Affect Across the Disciplines: A Panel Discussion

8:00 pm, Levis Faculty Center

Samantha Frost, *Political Science and Gender and Women's Studies*

Justine Murison, *English*

Gabriel Solis, *Music*

Yasemin Yildiz, *German*