Affects in Modern Literature and Theory

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Within literary studies, interest in affects has grown enormously since Brian Massumi, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others prompted an ‘affective turn’ in theory in the mid-1990s. This course explores select instances of how advances in understanding affects have contributed significantly to a number of critical and theoretical areas, including performativity, postcolonialism, queer theory, race theory, Marxism, and the anthropocene. While discussing set examples of those advances each week, we will also read the theoretical/critical texts in relation to a selection of relevant literary ones. Thinking about the extent to which writers can figure distinctly literary forms of affect will be a primary concern for the course. The variety of theoretical approaches that we examine will be complemented by the range of literary genres that we consider (fiction, poetry, and drama), as well as by the array of affects and affective states that are set for discussion, including shame, solidarity, happiness, love, fear, terror, and misanthropy.

Students may write their course essay on relevant texts other than those set or suggested in the module. Students who wish to concentrate on a particular aspect covered in the general ambit of the course are also welcome to do so.

Short Weekly Responses
Each week students are required to post in the Forum of this course’s Moodle site a short response (around 250 words) to the set reading. The response doesn’t need to be beautifully crafted, and can be a list of points and questions. When referring to a text, please include page numbers. The responses will be used to foster discussion in and out of the seminars, and will serve as a collective diary of points and queries.

1. Introduction: Affects and Affect Theories

Set Reading:

Suggested Further Reading:
Derek Matravers, Art and Emotion (1998)
Rei Terada, Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the ‘Death of the Subject’ (2001)
Alex Houen (ed.), ‘Special Issue: Affects, Text, and Performativity’, *Textual Practice* 25:2 (April 2011)
Donald Wehrs and Thomas Blakes (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017)

2. Shame and Disgrace

**Set Reading:**
- Robert Hass, ‘Shame: An Aria’ [available on LION]

**Suggested Further Reading:**
- Pamela Fox, *Class fictions: shame and resistance in the British working-class novel, 1890-1945* (1994)
- Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark (eds), *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing* (1999)

3. Happiness and the Happenstance

**Set Reading:**

Suggested Further Reading:
Frank O’Hara, ‘Personal Poem’, in Lunch Poems (1964)
——. ‘Having a Coke with You’, in Love Poems (1965)
Alex Houen (ed.), 'Introduction: Affecting Words', in 'Special Issue: Affects, Text, and Performativity', Textual Practice 25:2 (April 2011)

4. Queer Affect

Set Reading:
James Baldwin, Giovanni’s Room (1956)
Lauren Berlant, ‘Love (A Queer Feeling)’, in Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis, ed. by Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (2000), 432-451
Richard Thompson Ford, ‘What’s Queer about Race?’ in After Sex?: On Writing since Queer Theory (2011), 121-9

Suggested Further Reading:
Christopher Nealon, Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall (2001)
Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (eds), After Sex?: On Writing since Queer Theory (2011)
Eileen Myles, Inferno: A Poet’s Novel (2010)
Jack Halberstam, Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal (2012)
Amber Musser, Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism (2014)

5. Fear and Trembling

Set Reading:
Selection of Sylvia Plath poems: ‘Black Rook in Rainy Weather’ (1956); ‘Whiteness I Remember’ (1958); ‘Widow’ (1961); ‘The Bee Meeting’ (1962); ‘Elm’ (1962) [all available on LION]
Don DeLillo, White Noise (1984)
Suggested Further Reading:
Kate Hebblethwaite and Elizabeth McCarthy (eds), *Fear: Essays on the Meaning and Experience of Fear* (2007)
Fredric Jameson, ‘The Twin Sources of Realism: Affect, or, the Body’s Present’, in *Antinomies of Realism* (2013), 27-44

6. The Misanthropocene

Set Reading:
Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, *#Misanthropocene: 24 Theses* [available as free download from Commune Editions: http://communeeditions.com/misanthropocene/]

Suggested Further Reading:
Special Issue of *New Literary History* 47:1 (2016) on ‘Climate, Species, The Anthropocene’, with contributions by Benjamin Morgan, Shital Pravinchandra, and Aaron R. Hanlon