

COMS 655

Media and the Senses: Affect Theory and Media Studies

Fall 2012

W-5 Arts Bldg.

Fridays, 2:35-5:25pm (see schedule for exceptions)

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Office hours: Fridays 11:00am-1:00pm

Course Description: COMS 655: “Media and the Senses: Affect Theory and Media Studies” explores the relationship between historical structures of feeling, affective cultural resonances and the politics of sensation, and their media environments. To help us conceptualize and analyze these connections, we will be reading a selected group of texts in feminist, queer, postcolonial theories and cultural studies of affect and the constitutive role of emotions and feeling in social life, alongside some recent work in media studies that draws from these theoretical frameworks.

Theories of affect shift the focus in social and cultural theory from that of meaning making and the propositional work of language and representation toward the dimensions of movement, resonance and the “felt” in human life and our capacities for agency and collectivity. Our readings and discussion will reflect on this shift, and what it might get us as cultural critics, theorists and researchers. Questions of subjectivity, agency, embodiment, context, identification, and affiliation will orient many of our conversations in the seminar. In particular, we will consider how cultural theories of emotion and affect re-figure the focus on questions of identity toward other embodied models of social and political subjectivity and ways of conceiving of action and the labors of mediation that work outside and alongside those of identity.

Course Readings: All readings for the course are required, except for those I have listed as suggested for further reading. Stable links to journal articles are available in WebCT (under the module “Journal Article Links”). The books listed below are available for purchase from Paragraphe Books (corner of Sherbrooke and McGill College); they are also on reserve for three-hour loan at McGill’s Redpath Library. To enable the proper citation of readings, the reading schedule below contains full bibliographic information.

- Sara Ahmed (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh Press.
- Lauren Berlant (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- Judith Butler (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Ann Cvetkovich (2003). *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegwirth, Eds. (2010). *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Adrienne Hurley (2011). *Revolutionary Suicide and other Desperate Measures: Narratives of Youth and Violence from Japan to the U.S.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sharon Sliwinski (2011). *Human Rights in Camera*. Chicago UP.
- Kathleen Stewart (2007). *Ordinary Affects*. Duke UP.

Assignments

In addition to attendance at every seminar session, you are expected to come to seminar ready to discuss our seminar readings in-depth. Bring hard copies of the readings with you to seminar. You can submit written work in either English or French. Discussion facilitation should be done in English.

Weekly Short Writing Assignments [15%]: For each seminar meeting, you will write a one-two page response to one of the readings for that day. The responses should offer a critical take on the reading, by which I mean you should aim to question some part of the reading in a way that is directed toward stimulating and opening up discussion. Submit your short weekly writing assignments by 5pm the day before our seminar meeting, and come prepared to say a few words about the short paper in the seminar session. Short papers should be submitted to me at: carrie.rentschler@mcgill.ca under the subject heading COMS 655 Response. The weekly writing assignments are meant to facilitate conversation and reflection and will not be graded.

Seminar Paper Proposal [20%]: On **Friday October 26th**, you will submit a 5-page term paper proposal. The proposal will present your plan for the final essay, including what you plan to write about, a short review of the existing literature on the topic, and a statement of its significance in light of the course and our readings. The proposal must include a bibliography of sources you will be drawing upon from the course, and any preliminary library research you have conducted.

Discussion Facilitation [15%]: Discussion facilitation is an essential skill to develop in academic milieus, and it takes practice. Part of our time in seminar will be devoted to student-facilitated discussion in order to develop and practice this skill. Each student will facilitate discussion one time during the term, which will consist of two main tasks:

- 1) The provision of 2 significant passages from text(s) we have read for that day (or from different chapters of a book under discussion), and
- 2) The offering of 2 well-crafted discussion questions that ask seminar participants to debate the argumentation and interpretation of the text(s) at hand.

The goal is to cultivate directed and serious discussion that meaningfully grapples with the texts at hand. Presenters should identify significant and/or particularly difficult passages in the reading, and discussion questions should help facilitate the discussion of their details through a line of directed questioning. Questions can probe the meaning of particular textual passages, offer interpretations of the concepts and objects of study our readings address, and/or ask us to consider the relationship between previous readings and the current ones under discussion, among other things. The more grounded in the texts your questions are, the better they will foster discussion. Questions that can be answered by “Yes” or “No” answers should be avoided.

Student facilitators must provide enough printed copies of their questions for each seminar participant on the day of presentation. It is the discussion facilitator’s job to open up and direct discussion from the outset, but it is everyone’s shared responsibility to engage in conversation about the texts and issues at hand.

Sign up for presentations will be held at the first seminar meeting. Please note that if you run into a scheduling problem around your date for discussion facilitation, it is your responsibility to find another seminar participant with whom to switch presentation dates.

Final Seminar Paper [50%]: The course will end with a 20-25 page term paper on a topic related directly to the course materials and the conceptual, theoretical and analytical tools we have discussed over the term. Seminar papers should not greatly exceed this page limit. The seminar paper will be due on **Thursday December 13, 2012** in hard copy. I will provide type written comments on your essay that can be picked up in your departmental mailbox if you are a student in Art History and Communication Studies– at a date by which I will notify you they are available. If you are a student from another department or another university in Montreal, I will mail my comments to you by post (please provide me with your mailing address at the time of paper submission).

There are three options for the seminar paper.

Option #1: Theory/commentary paper on a conceptual area of media and affect studies. In this option, your task is to develop a line of critique and/or commentary on an area of affect studies we have discussed.

Option #2: Application paper. In this option, your task is to choose an object of study (perhaps a set of media representations, media practices, or other set of objects) and “apply” a set of concepts we have addressed over the seminar. In this option, you will be expected to: 1) do some relevant additional outside reading, 2) analyze your chosen object of study, and 3) reflect and comment upon the course readings you use as a result of your application and analysis of their concepts. Papers must draw substantially from the course readings.

Option #3: Propose an alternative that engages substantially with course material.

Expectations

There are several expectations that I have of you as participants in a graduate seminar. I expect that you will: attend every seminar meeting and come prepared to discuss each of our readings, do all of the readings and have something to say about them, bring your readings with you to every seminar, turn in your seminar work on time and in completed fashion, and openly communicate with me about anything of concern to you in the course (e.g. if you know you will have trouble meeting a deadline or if there is anything that will prevent you from fully participating in the seminar).

Grading

Your final grade for the semester will be based on the quality and clarity of your performance in presentations and your written work. While not graded, your participation in seminar discussion is a crucial aspect of your work over the semester, and you will be expected to share your thoughts and participate in conversation. If you turn in work late, you may not receive written comments from me and your grade could be reduced. If I deem your work unsatisfactory, I may ask you to do it again. Taking an incomplete or “K” grade for this course is greatly discouraged, unless you have a truly exceptional reason that can be supported by documentation.

How to Interpret Graduate-Level Grades:

A:	Good work
A-:	Satisfactory
B+:	There is a problem with what you submitted
B:	There is a substantial problem with what you submitted
B-:	Lowest possible passing grade in a graduate course; indicates a major problem but not a failure
C+ or lower:	Officially considered a “fail” by the Graduate Studies Office.

Discussion Etiquette: Our seminar time is dedicated to in-depth discussion. Following a few basic discussion guidelines will help insure that this time is productive, enlightening and fun for all of us.

1. Experience and anecdote do not constitute evidence in a scholarly argument. While you each bring interesting experiences to the classroom, **ONLY** bring up your personal experience when it is relevant to class discussion; think carefully about this before you speak about your experience. If you bring up your own experience in class, recognize that it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation. Furthermore, ask yourself what point you seek to make by talking about yourself. Is it really relevant? Do you want others to know this about you?
2. Work to create a shared climate of friendly and lively discussion. Avoid personal attacks, jabs, and grandstanding behaviors. Also avoid overly personalizing the topic under discussion. The point is to build knowledge together, not to look good or act smarter than everyone else or endlessly talk about yourself.
3. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. Grant your fellow course participants courtesy and respect, whether you agree with what they say or not.
4. As much as possible, avoid purely negative critique in your comments. Our goal in discussion is to understand the texts we read and how they might be useful to us -- in addition to cultivating our skills in critique. Understand first; criticize second.
5. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others.
6. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.

Auditors: If you would like to audit this class, I will hold you to the following conditions: that you will follow all the policies and etiquette explained here, that you actively participate in class discussion and attend as many class sessions as you can.

Statement on Academic Integrity: McGill University and I take academic integrity very seriously. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Nondiscrimination Statement: As a professor at McGill University, I value equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial, ethnic, sexual, physical and cultural diversity. Be assured that I will work to promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with University policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, civil status, familial status, sexual orientation, or disability. In addition to the University's policy, and within the bounds of the course, we do not discriminate on the basis of political creed. This means that you do not have to agree with your classmates or me in order to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material, you are under no obligation to agree with it. I will also make every effort to avoid discrimination on the basis of class or income. If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know.

Schedule of Readings and Due Dates

I: Conceptualizing Affect, Feeling, and Emotion

Friday September 7: Affect Theory meets Cultural Studies—welcome to the conversation

- Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010). "An Inventory of Shimmers" *The Affect Theory Reader* (1-25). Duke University Press.
- Larry Grossberg (1992) "Mapping Popular Culture" in *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (69-87). New York: Routledge.
- Larry Grossberg (2010). "Affect's Future: Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual: An Interview with Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg." *The Affect Theory Reader*, Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (309-338) Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- Fredric Jameson (1984). "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" *New Left Review* 146(July-August): 53-92.
- Larry Grossberg (1988/2010). "Postmodernity and Affect: All Dressed up but with No Place to Go" in *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Jennifer Harding and E. Deirdre Pribram (69-83). London: Routledge.

For Further Reading:

Melissa Gregg (2006). *Cultural Studies' Affective Voices*. Palgrave Press.

Wednesday September 12: launch for my book *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.*, 7-9pm, Drawn & Quarterly bookstore, 211 Bernard Street East, Mile End (co-launch with Prof. Jonathan Sterne, author of *MP3: Meaning of a Format* and *The Sound Studies Reader*. Please join us!

Thursday September 13: Alison Winter lecture, 6pm at Concordia University

"Bridey Murphy and the New Age Sciences," based on work from her recently published book, *Memory: Fragments of a Modern History* (Chicago UP, 2012). Room H-763 Hall Bldg, Concordia

Friday September 14: Emotion and Public Cultures of Feeling

- Rei Terada (2001). "Introduction: Emotion after the 'Death of the Subject'" *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (1-15) Harvard University Press.
- Alison Jaggar (1989). "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology" *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 32(2): 151-176.
- Ann Cvetkovich (2003). "Introduction," "The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma," "In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings" and "Epilogue" in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (1-48, 239-288). Duke UP.

For Further Reading:

Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, Ann Reynolds, ed. (2012). *Political Emotions*. New York: Routledge.

Friday September 21: What is Affect?

- Ann Pellegrini and Jasbir Puar (2009). "Affect" *Social Text* 27(3): 35-38.
- Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995). "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins" *Critical Inquiry* 21, 496-522.

Brian Massumi (1995). "The Autonomy of Affect" *Cultural Critique* 31, 83-109.
 Teresa Brennan (2004). "Introduction" *Transmission of Affect* (1-23). Cornell UP.
 Julian Henriques (2010). "The Vibrations of Affect and their Propagation on a Night Out on Kingston's Dancehall Scene." *Body & Society* 16(1): 57-89.

For Reviews of recent key texts, see:

Adam Frank (2004) "Some Avenues for Feeling" *Criticism* 46(3): 511-524.
 Kristyn Gorton (2007). "Theorizing Emotion and Affect" *Feminist Theory* 8(3): 333-348.

Friday September 28: The Cultural Politics of Emotion

Sara Ahmed (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.

Tuesday October 2: Sarah Banet-Weiser public lecture ---'I'm Like Totally Saved': Branding Religion and the Moral Limits of the Market," Leacock 26.

II: Experience and the Everyday---Some Methods of Analysis

Friday October 5: Examining the Everyday

Kathleen Stewart (2007). *Ordinary Affects*. Duke UP.
 Michel de Certeau (1988). "Making Do: Uses and Tactics" and "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (29-42; 91-110). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wednesday October 10: Catherine Driscoll public lecture, title TBA

Thursday October 10-11: Girlhood Studies and the Politics of Place: New Paradigms of Research (an IGSF symposium, Thomson House ballroom)

NO CLASS OCTOBER 12

Wednesday October 17 (2:30-5:30, IGSF Seminar room): Experience: Surface vs. Depth Reading

Raymond Williams (1961). "The Analysis of Culture" *The Long Revolution* (57-88). New York: Penguin.
 Raymond Williams (1977). "Structures of Feeling" in *Marxism and Literature* (128-135). Oxford University Press.
 Raymond Williams (1979). Excerpts from "The Long Revolution" in *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (154-174). London: Verso.
 Joan W. Scott (1991). "The Evidence of Experience" *Critical Inquiry* 17(4): 773-797.
 Norman Denzin (1985) "Emotion as Lived Experience" *Symbolic Interactionism* 8(2): 223-240.

Friday October 19: Analyzing Texts Affectively and Reparatively

Heather Love (2009). "Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn" *New Literary History* 41: 371-391.

Eve K. Sedgwick (2003) "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think this Essay is About You" in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. (123-152). Duke UP.

Brian Massumi (2002). "Introduction: Concrete is as Concrete Doesn't" *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

III: The Cultural Politics of Emotion—Pain, Injury, and Justice

Friday October 26: Adrienne Hurley (Guest Lecture)

Adrienne Hurley (2011). *Revolutionary Suicide and Other Desperate Measures: Narratives of Youth and Violence from Japan and the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Friday November 2: Pain and Necropolitics

Achille Mbembe (2003). "Necropolitics" *Public Culture* 15(1): 11-40.

Sharon Sliwinski (2011). "The Spectator of Human Rights" and "The Kodak on the Congo" in *Human Rights in Camera*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lauren Berlant (2000) "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy and Politics" In Sara Ahmed et al (eds). *Transformations: Thinking through Feminism* (33-47). London: Routledge.

Wendy Brown (1995) "Wounded Attachments" in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (52-76). Princeton UP.

For Further Reading:

Vikki Bell (1999). "On Speech, Race and Melancholia: An Interview with Judith Butler" *Theory, Culture & Society* 16(2): 163-174.

Judith Butler. (2009). *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

Wednesday November 7 (2:30-5:30, IGSF Seminar room): Shame, Unhappiness and Cruel Optimism

Elsbeth Probyn (2010). "Writing Shame" in Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader* (71-92). Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Sara Ahmed (2010). "Unhappy Queers" and "Conclusion: Happiness, Ethics and Possibility" in *The Promise of Happiness* (88-120; 199-223). Duke UP.

Lauren Berlant (2010). "Introduction: Affect in the Present" and "Cruel Optimism" in *Cruel Optimism* (1-50). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

NO CLASS FRIDAY NOVEMBER 9 or 16

Wednesday November 21 (2:30-5:30, IGSF Seminar room): Grief, Precarity and the Politics of Possibility

Judith Butler (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

Lauren Berlant (2011). "After the Good Life, An Impasse: *Time Out*, *Human Resources*, and the Precarious Present" in *Cruel Optimism* (191-222). Duke UP.

For Further Reading:

Carrie Rentschler (2011). *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.* Durham, NC: Duke UP.

IV: New Body Politics

Friday November 23: Affect's Ontology?

- Clare Hemmings (2005). "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn" *Cultural Studies* 19(5): 548-567.
- Lisa Blackman and Couze Venn (2010). "Affect" *Body & Society* 16(1): 7-28.
- Bruno Latour (2004). 'How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimensions of Science Studies', *Body & Society* 10(2-3): 205-30.
- Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard (2010) "Biology's Gift: Interrogating the Turn to Affect" *Body & Society* 16(1): 29-56.
- Sara Ahmed (2008). "Open Forum---Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism'" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 15(1): 23-39.
- Brian Massumi. (2003). Navigating movements: An interview with Brian Massumi. Interview by Mary Zournazi. 21 C Magazine. <http://www.21cmagazine.com/issue2/massumi.html>

Wednesday, November 28: "The Future of Feminist Theory" event at IGSF

Featuring a panel discussion on getting work published in feminist theory with Prof. Stacy Gillis of Newcastle University (U.K.) and the managing editor of the journal *Feminist Theory*, Prof. Anna Feigenbaum from Bournemouth University in U.K. and other participants. Prof. Myra Hird from Queens University will also be delivering a talk on currents in feminist theory based on her own work in feminist science and technology studies and the "new materialism." Stay tuned for more details.

Wednesday, December 5 (2:30-5:30 IGSF seminar room): Bodily Sovereignty

- Ben Highmore (2010). "Bitter after Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics" in Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader* (118-137). Duke University Press.
- Lauren Berlant (2007). "Slow Death: Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency" *Cruel Optimism* (95-120). Duke UP.
- Jasbir Puar (2009). "Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility and Capacity" *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19(2): 161-172.
- bell hooks (2006/1992). "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" In Gigi Durham Meenakshi and Douglas Kellner, eds. *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 366-380.

Thursday, December 13 by 4pm: Seminar Papers Due