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Office Hours (Simpson Center for the Humanities, Communications 206): By Appointment

Spring 2014: ENGL 598A / C LIT 599D
(1 credit: C / NC)

Simpson Center for the Humanities:
All sessions will be held in Communications 202.

Tuesdays 10:30 – 12:20 (April 8, 15, 22, 29, and May 6)



Reading Affect in Literary Studies

The novel was invented to access interiority. Now most people communicate through social media, and everyone I know under thirty has remarkably little notion of privacy. The novel is an artifact, which is why antiquarians cling to it so fervently.

—David Shields, *How Literature Saved My Life* (2013)

This one-credit course is designed as a short introduction to academic literary studies of affect. It is framed by the question of how we might rethink our practice as scholars of literature to take our scholarship to publics beyond the academy as well as to our students and professional circles.

Several recently published books by non-academics—Wendy Lesser’s *Why I Read: The Serious Pleasures of Books* (2014) and Rebecca Mead’s *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014)—express the many meanings their authors find in and through reading of literature. As scholars of literature *we* should be contributing to the articulation of the value of what we study. We will meet on five Tuesdays during the Spring Quarter 2014. Reading and ardent discussion is required, as is a one-two page paper imagining a project of public literary scholarship.

Over the past twenty-five years research on the emotions has exploded across virtually every discipline—history, anthropology, neurology, philosophy, art history, and literary and cultural studies. Recently several strains of this research have been labeled the “affective turn.” The focus of **Reading Affect** will be work on affect and the emotions by scholars of literary studies. It is a vibrant area: at the January 2014 convention of the Modern Language Association, held in Chicago, there were over sixty papers devoted to aspects of affect and the emotions—among them, violent sympathies, terror, nostalgia, narrative empathy, and the feeling of blackness.

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Schedule

- April 8

Affective Registers of Reading

What does the reader want? What kind of reader? The general reader and the professional reader; contemporary styles of academic literary criticism, including reparative reading and paranoid reading (Sedgwick).

Rita Felski, "Introduction," *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) 1-22, 136-38 (notes) and "Suspicious Minds," *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011): 215-34.

Michael Millner, *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere* (Durham, NH: U of New Hampshire P, 2012) xiii-xxii.

Janice A. Radway, "Introduction," *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997) 1-17, 361 (notes).

- April 15

Literature as a Source of Knowledge about and Via the Emotions: Criticism and Theory

Can the reading of narrative literature serve as a source of knowledge about the emotions, or in Daniel Goleman's term, "emotional intelligence"? If so, how?

Kathleen Woodward, "Thinking Feeling, Feeling Thinking," *Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009) 1-27, 235-44 (notes).


Ann Cvetkovich, "From Dispossession to Radical Self-Possession: Racism and Depression," *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012) 115-53, 230-36 (notes).

Lauren Berlant, "Introduction: Affect in the Present," *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011) 1-16, 20-21, 51-59 269-71, 274 (notes).


- April 22

Distinctions

How might we make distinctions between affect, the emotions, feelings, moods, intensities, and structures of feeling in terms of the body, the individual, and society, in terms of temporality (the traumatic, the chronic), and in terms of neuroscience?



Jonathan Flatley, “Glossary: Affect, Emotion, Mood (*Stimmung*), Structure of Feeling,” *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008) 11-27, 198-205 (notes).



Brian Massumi, “Introduction: Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn’t” and an excerpt from “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 1-28, 257-60 (notes).

Paul B. Armstrong, “Preface,” “The Social Brain and the Paradox of the Alter Ego,” *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013) ix-xiv, 131-74, 203-11 (notes).

- April 29

A Case Study: The Affective Dimension of Risk

A mega-keyword in contemporary culture, risk calls up fear of the future. How might we study the affective dimensions of risk? What forms does it take?

Paul Virilio’s *The Administration of Fear* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

Joan Didion, *Blue Nights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

- May 6

Affect, Public Scholarship, and Literary Studies: Models and Resources

How can we take literary criticism public? Models include websites for book reviews, community activism projects, and writing for our professional-plus circles.

Albert Wu and Michelle Kuo’s essay-review of Barbara King’s *How Animals Grieve* (2013), published September 9, 2013, in the online journal *Public Book*
<http://www.publicbooks.org/nonfiction/animal-feelings>

The Drinking Gourd Project, dedicated to increasing awareness of Concord’s African and abolitionist history, emerged from research undertaken by Elise Lemire for *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts* (2009). Read “The Memory of These Human Inhabitants,” 1-14, 183-86 (notes).

See <http://drinkinggourdproject.org/> and

<http://www.neh.gov/humanities/2010/septemberoctober/feature/black-walden>

Project: Seattle as a UNESCO City of Literature.

<http://blogs.seattletimes.com/artspage/2014/01/27/seattle-city-council-endorses-bid-for-seattle-as-a-city-of-literature/>

Continued





Doran Larson, ed., "Introduction: The American Prison Writer as Witness," *Fourth City: Essays from the Prison in America* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 2014) 1-15.
Larson, dir., *The American Prison Writing Archive* (2015)
<http://www.dhinitiative.org/projects/apwa>



Julie Ellison, "Literary Knowledge and Cultural Activism in the Harriet Wilson Project" (ms, not to be quoted).

