

## **"The Affective Turn"**

**Gustavus Stadler (English)**

In 1990, Fredric Jameson pronounced the "waning of affect" a central symptom of postmodernity, with its supposed celebration of surfaces and pastiche. By the end of the decade, however, affect had emerged as a serious preoccupation in the humanities and social sciences. Although psychology is the original "home turf" for theories of affect, work focusing on this concern has surfaced in such fields as literary studies, religious studies, history, performance studies, sociology, and economics, to name a few. This seminar will be a survey of such work, with some attention to its genealogy, and with some attempt made to develop an overview of affect's position(s) in modern psychology—psychoanalysis and "object relations" approaches in particular.

Some important questions we may pursue: What is the history of affect theory? What various definitions of affect exist—how has it been differentiated from emotion, feeling, and sensation, and what are the stakes of (not) demarcating such differences? Should we think of affects as "pre" cognitive and/or "pre" linguistic? Then how do we think and/or write about them? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a general theory of "affect," when there are potentially illimitable number of affects? What is the relationship between affect and theories of the subject; to what extent is it a response to Eduardo Cadava's question, "What comes after the subject?" How does the study and theorization of affect extend and modify theories of embodiment? What is the relationship between affect and trauma theory? Why has queer studies provided a conceptual platform for so much recent work on affect? A key heuristic orienting the seminar will be provided by the relationship between affect and politics. We will look at some recent attempts to revise notions of political agency, and of the location of political struggle, through theories of affect. Time and energy permitting, we will also discuss the notions of "affective labor" and the "affective economy" in this regard.