



STREAM

S23. Taxonomy, Psychology, and Beyond: Affect in the History of the Sciences

STREAM ORGANIZER(S)

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DESCRIPTION

How, and when, did affect come to be understood as antithetical to the kind of cognitive discipline that defines scientific inquiry? As the “Knowledges” theme for this MAKE conference points out, capital-K Knowledge is associated with a cluster of concepts that are “[s]ubtractive of feeling” and “[e]liminative of affect”—a state of affairs in which the understanding of science as the ultimate bearer of instrumental rationality has played an important role. And yet, as scholars from Lorraine Daston (1995) to Donovan Schaefer (2022) have pointed out, affects are and always have been inextricably entangled with the theory and practice of scientific investigation. The posture of aloofness with which affects are taxonomized, as these scholars have revealed, is itself also affectively determined.

This stream asks: what is the history of affect’s entanglement with knowledge practices and its subsequent disavowal? How does this historical narrative map onto contemporary politics—where it is possible for Ben Shapiro to argue that “facts don’t care about your feelings” in defense of religious fundamentalism, while professional scientific associations like the American Psychological Association come under fire for their empirically-derived support for gender-affirming care of minors?

We invite submissions from a broad range of disciplinary, geographic, and historically-framed points of focus that explore and complicate this long-held problematic. From late scholastic “sciences of the soul,” to the emergence of early modern psychology and taxonomies of affect in the 17th century, to the 18th- and 19th-century development of political and population sciences of the mob, to the 20th-century advent of psychoanalysis and its theory of drives, intellectual history is rich with examples of the imbrication of science and affect (even if often holding them as mutually exclusive of each other).

We welcome papers on how affect has been marginalized, discounted, or disavowed in the sciences, but also how it has been incorporated, mobilized to advance Knowledge (singular) or knowledges

(plural), and turned into an object of science in its own right. What is gained or lost by the objectification of affect, and what epistemological premises allow affect to become an object of science specifically as opposed to, or alongside, other fields, such as poetics, visual art, ethics, or religion, to name a few?

Possible topics for this stream include but are not limited to:

- How do modern notions of science and its epistemologies produce or determine our ideas of what “affect” is (if at all)?
- How does the inclusion or exclusion of affect in the history of the sciences affect the orders and hierarchies that science generates?
- How do gendered perceptions of science and affect respectively inflect their mutual imbrication in our understanding?
- What affects are implicated in the scientific or biopolitical discourses and practices of colonial or neo-colonial management?
- How do artistic or literary ways of knowing, themselves “arts” rather than “sciences,” generate or critique affect in manners not possible within the bounds of science, however defined? How do they mediate our knowledge of science and themselves in relation to science?
- Religion, like affect, has a complicated history as one of the “others” of modern science. How have religious and/or Christian concepts, both metaphysical and social-political, determined the structures of science (e.g., reason as “transcendent and all-seeing”) or provided alternatives?