

# S15

## THE PROMISES AND IMPASSES OF AFFECT AS METHOD

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This stream will consider the promises and impasses of affect as method. Everything has an affect. As the atmospheric, porous, embodied, and alive ‘this-ness,’ or haecceity of moments, places, and people, affect is by definition unable to be captured. But what if we look at what affect does? At the changes it creates? The margins of performance that are adjusted? This line of inquiry holds great methodological promise for site specific work and research that is attune to atmospheres and orientations. However, there are also impasses presented by specific readings of affect as a concept and orthodox approaches to empirical qualitative research methods. Paper submitters are invited to consider the role that affect plays in making research, and, in this capacity, consider affect as part of their methods.

Affect theory, which delves into the pre-/non-conscious experiences shaped by bodily responses, is increasingly seen as a significant methodological approach in humanities and social sciences research. Deleuze’s separation of affect from emotion has been taken up widely—while emotion is a subjective content, affect is an intensity, a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. This perspective challenges the traditional dominance of representational thinking and textual analysis in cultural studies and invites researchers to consider the vibrations and resonances that precede and exceed cognitive capture.

In exploring affect as a research method, this seminar series will investigate how affective intensities navigate the space between the body and its environment, between the individual and the collective. The methodological implications here are vast. Engaging with affect prompts a rethinking of how data is collected, analyzed, and presented. It calls for methodologies that are not only reactive but also proactive in tracing and responding to the transient, ephemeral, and often elusive atmospheres and energies of social environments.

Presentations might explore, for example, how urban spaces generate specific affective responses that could inform urban planning and public policy. Research might be drawn

from theories of the lived/built worlds, where authors like Jane Bennett and Nigel Thrift discuss the vibrancy of matter and non-human agencies in shaping human affective states. This could extend to environmental psychology and how physical settings contribute to emotional well-being.

Another suggested area for exploration is the affective impact of digital media. With the rise of virtual reality and interactive media, researchers could examine how these technologies engineer affective experiences and shape user engagement, drawing on work from media studies and communication theory. The educational field is yet another area where affect as a method can yield significant insights. The emotional geographies of classroom settings, the affective dimensions of pedagogy, and the non-cognitive aspects of learning could all be examined. This approach aligns with the work of educational theorists like Megan Boler, who advocates for an "affective pedagogy" that recognizes the role of emotions in learning processes.

In calling for presentations, I encourage potential contributors to consider how methodologies rooted in affect can disrupt traditional research paradigms. Proposals might address questions such as:

- How can affective methodologies help us understand societal shifts and cultural movements?
- What tools or techniques are best suited to capture and interpret affective data?
- How can researchers remain attuned to their own affective responses without overshadowing the phenomena under study?

Potential topics and questions for presentations might include:

- The role of affect in social or religious movements and how it influences collective behavior
- Affective economies in consumer culture, examining how desires and anxieties drive market trends
- The impact of architectural and urban design on the emotional and affective experiences of space users
- Methodological challenges in studying non-verbal and pre-conscious affective interactions
- The interplay between affect, technology, and user experience in the design of digital interfaces
- The work of feeling in global political landscapes

The seminars aim to be interdisciplinary and inclusive. I invite contributions from sociology, anthropology, religious studies, literature, cultural studies, media studies, and other related fields. Each presentation should ideally combine theoretical explorations with practical examples or case studies, illustrating the application of affect theory in

concrete research settings. This call for presentations is an invitation to rethink traditional research approaches and explore the dynamic, if intangible, terrain of affect. It is an opportunity for scholars, practitioners, and researchers to engage with a vibrant field of study that bridges the gap between empirical analysis and the nuanced, often unpredictable realm of human feeling and response.