

# S16

## WORKING WITH AFFECT

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Against the backdrop of a relentless assault on the humanities, a consensus has emerged that the humanities should not be assessed based on utility. Usefulness alone misses too much of what makes humanistic study valuable. The same is said of affect theory. At the same time, as intertwined environmental, economic, and political crises unfold, we have to ask: is affect theory useful? Should it be? Put another way: does affect theory work?

Does affect theory give us insight into the workings of power? Does it shed light on how certain political factions, leaders, ideologies, and systems gain and hold power? What does it tell us about the nature of both bottom-up and top-down political processes? Can it help us explain contemporary dynamics around misinformation and disinformation? What does affect theory contribute to the making and unmaking of activists, critics, citizens, and educators?

In *Poor Queer Studies*, Matt Brim writes that “mainstream Queer Studies likes to pretend that its job is not to prepare students to be workers or part of the working class.” Can affect theory make workers? What does affect theory imagine (or pretend) is its job? Since affect theory is multiple, do different affect theories correspond to different domains of utility? Or are these the wrong questions to be asking? Is affect theory fundamentally inutile? And is its uselessness necessary?

Finally, affect theory’s reception in different academic disciplines—humanistic, social scientific, and scientific—has been uneven. What should we understand about affect theory’s varying levels of success and failure across different academic contexts? Is there an affective approach to archives, to fieldsites, to laboratories, to classrooms, to libraries, to administration, to mentoring? Is there something in the orientation of affect study that determines its degree of play within different ensembles of intellectual concerns?

The papers and panels in this stream will stage this conversation. All participants (speakers and audience members) will bring their own ideas, perspectives, and questions on the relationship between affect and its laborings (its utility?) into dialogue to work toward an increased self-reflexivity in affect theory spaces.

Proposals are invited for short papers that directly respond to the questions of how we can work with affect. Unlike the standard panel session, these short papers will be presented roundtable-style at the beginning of the session in order to set the stage for a full-participation conversation among presenters and the audience to follow. Final papers should be 5-7 minutes long and consider specific thinkers, situations, and/or case studies illustrating affect at work. Proposals should reflect the limited duration that will be made available to speakers along these lines.