Exemplary Affect: Rethinking the Roots of Modern Sensibility
April 6-7, 2018
Indiana University, Bloomington

Please join us for a workshop which brings together an international group of scholars from diverse fields to investigate the collective dimension of affect and its genealogy in a new light.

Program:

Friday April 6, University Club, Indiana Memorial Union

3:45-5:00  Katherine Ibbett (Oxford University), “"The unsettling affect of settler colonialism: Nouvelle France, 1700"

What does it mean to speak of affect and community in a place where the question of community is under violent pressure? For which communities do we speak when we speak of exemplary emotion? In this talk, I will sift through the emotions explored in writing from late seventeenth-century New France: how did French settler society imagine the emotions of the indigenous peoples they displaced and described, and how did that imagination shape their own deeply affective language of community? How might the case study of this frontier situation help us trace the fractures of our own "emotional ecology." to use the terms of this workshop?

5:15-6:30  Rüdiger Campe (Yale University), “Passion and Intercession. Caravaggio's 'Madonna of the Rosaries.'”

Saturday April 7, Distinguished Alumni Room, Indiana Memorial Union

9:30-10:45 Merlin-Kajman (Sorbonne nouvelle Paris-3), “Is Trauma an Exemplary Affect?”

What happens if trauma, in complete contradiction with its socio-symbolic destructivity, becomes exemplary, when it becomes an example? Is this a matter of the public recognition of an affect, which until now has been condemned to a spectral wandering – in other words of a positive enlargement of the domain of the exemplary through the extension of compassion? Or is it the opposite – the accepted installation of a sociability based on the traumatic unbinding? In order to ask these disquieting questions, I will go from past examples where the traumatic affect has set an example (the Passion of Christ, torture [les supplices] …) to the present case of “trigger-warning.”

11:00-12:15 Marjolein Oele (University of San Francisco), “E-Co-Affectivity in the Anthropocene: From Aristotelian Co-Suffering to Rethinking Affectivity Through the Interface of the Soil”

Following Isabelle Stengers’ call that the anthropocene should make us feel and think differently, this presentation focuses on the human task to shift its affective response. I outline some of the principles of Aristotle’s ideas on co-suffering, and show its benefits and shortcomings for proposing a more profound and comprehensive affective shift. Since Stengers calls for a new “us” that seeks to participate in an entanglement, I propose to explore the material and ontogenetic functions of soil, and specifically soil pores, in reimagining such entanglement, allowing for ways to suspend the limited and finite horizon of human phenomenology. A new affective response would emphasize the usually hidden fluidity and diachronic time of pores, and, in doing so, cultivate an epistemic and aesthetic sensitivity, deceleration, and percolation.

Lunch
Jeffrey Peters (University of Kentucky), “The Atmospherics of Devotion, the Incorporeal, and Early Modern Affect”

In contemporary theoretical accounts, affect is often understood to be pure, unbounded potential, a positionless intensity characterized by the becomings it animates. In this sense, it is unlike the variously humoral, or, more recently, chemical, materialities of what were once called the passions and what we today call emotion. In this paper, I return to a moment in the history of affective life prior to, or contemporaneous with, the philosophical establishment of now-calcified antinomies – e.g., human/nonhuman, body/world, private/public. I explore how we might think the free-floating propensities of affect together with early modern reflections on climate, weather, and atmosphere that set those antimonies in motion. Early moderns understood wind, for example, in affective terms, as an indication of humoral storms or disturbances. In a reading of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French devotional literature, I ask how we might discover in the early modern impulse to repurpose the destructive “nothingness” of air and wind as a positive force of connection and community a model for reimagining our own, vexed social and political attachments.

David Bates (UC Berkley), “Thinking Machines: Exosomaticization and the Embodied Mind”

Early Artificial Intelligence research was dominated by the attempt to model and simulate in computers the rational and mostly abstract capacities of the human mind. However, in response to both the critique and failure of these projects in symbolic processing and the emergence of interest in the “embodied mind” in cognitive science, philosophy, and other fields, new approaches to AI stressed how important learning from experience was central to the development of intelligent behavior. Recently, the new and eclectic discipline of “affective computing” has focused attention on the role of emotion in areas as diverse as robotics, Human-Computer Interaction, and AI. However, both traditional efforts to understand human reasoning as the manipulation of abstract concepts and symbols, and the attempt to integrate affective response and intelligence cognition are founded on the core assumption of modern cognitive theory in the computer age – namely, that thinking is the product of the individual mind-brain that interacts with an external environment. Here, I will show how the theory of “exosomatic” evolution of intelligence, which begins with the claim that human thinking is in essence a deployment of prosthetic technologies, fundamentally alters the question of embodiment and affect in AI and computer design. What is the nature of human thought when it is understood as the re-embodiment of a shared system of intelligent artifacts? What happens when machines take on new cognitive functions in these networks?

Final roundtable featuring Constance Furey (Religious Studies), Patricia Ingham (English) and Paul Losensky (Comparative Literature and Central Eurasian Studies).

Questions? Please contact Hall Bjørnstad, Department of French and Italian (hallbjor@indiana.edu) or Johannes Türk, Department of Germanic Studies (joturk@indiana.edu).

Sponsors:

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