

Highmore, Ben, University of Sussex, United Kingdom

Passion Play: Affect, Aesthetics and Cultural Studies

In a less disciplinary age (in eighteenth century Britain to be precise) the term the 'passions' referred to an assortment of phenomena that included pride, fear, jealousy, imitation and sympathy (and a lot more besides). By simultaneously attending to both states and processes, theories of the passions could describe the distinctive qualities of specific feelings; the way that feeling and mood circulated; and the mechanisms by which they produced affect. 'The passions' gave way to a whole host of seemingly more scientific descriptions of the experiential world (psychology and aesthetics through to communication theory). To return to the passions is not anachronistic rather it recognises the promise of cultural studies to refute the boundaries of segregated knowledge. But more than this it promises a philosophy of practice that, potentially, could be dedicated to less self-interested and more world-expanding forms of attention.