



STREAM

S13. Finding Form/Less/Ness

STREAM ORGANIZER(S)

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DESCRIPTION

In the foreword to his essay collection *Every Force Evolves a Form*, Guy Davenport attributes its titular axiom to Shakers founder Mother Ann Lee's belief that *every force finds a form*. He illustrates it with a modest Shaker innovation, the broom. Earlier brooms were little more than bundles of twigs that forced the body to stoop, but Shaker designers flattened and angled the brush and lengthened the handle so that sweeping could be done upright. The change was small and also decisive. The broom's form answered the forces at work in sweeping, that is, the motion of the arm, the resistance of the floor, swatch of surface area, and the posture of the body. Form did not decorate the task; it found a configuration adequate to its motion.

This stream might begin with a broom, but it hopes to engage a much broader sweep of forms and forces. If forces find forms, then forms are not simply given. They emerge through pressure, constraint, and experiment. They also falter and fail. Long before contemporary debates about aesthetics or politics, biologist D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson proposed that form could be understood as the visible trace of forces acting upon living matter. More recently, form offers studies of the infrastructure of collectivity we find in a city or a state (Kornbluh), and arrangements like networks or hierarchies are understood as forms organizing patterns that structure both aesthetic works and social life (Levine). Yet affective experience often becomes most visible precisely where such patterns falter, such as "genre flailing" (Berlant). In each of these examples, it is not the form that is of interest but instead how force finds a shape that holds or fails to.

This stream invites work that attends to how affect moves through these conditions. How does form emerge from under pressure? What happens when it cannot? How do we sense, describe, or compose experiences that meet or exceed the forms available to them? What kinds of forms emerge when inherited genres thin or fray? What happens when affect encounters only insufficient forms? How are new forms constituted?

This stream welcomes proposals for finding form/less/ness through which affect becomes perceptible. We are especially interested in work that attends (implicitly or explicitly) to the relation between force and form in the presentation itself.

Possible directions include (but are not limited to):

- Processes of form-finding: emergence, adjustment, iteration, recomposition
- Situations where affect settles into or reshapes existing forms
- Moments when forms become strained without collapsing
- Histories/theories that trace form finding or losing
- Occasions when affect finds only insufficient forms such as breakdown, exhaustion, impasse, attenuation, or failure
- Constraint, compression, subtraction, and sparseness as aesthetic or rhetorical strategies
- Diagrams of force as/in bodies, environments, materials, or infrastructures