



STREAM

## S25. Theory (for Now)

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#### DESCRIPTION

Treasured intellectual and cultural resources prove themselves increasingly toothless in the face of state terror, ecological collapse, genocide, labor abuse, and a hard reactionary lurch in political landscapes. The atmospheres of social and political life are thick, foreboding, full of dread and anguish, posing hard questions to theorizing, teaching, and study itself. Are these practices still possible? If so, how? Might contemporary atmospheres shift what theory entails? This stream asks participants to consider how atmospheres shape intellectual work and how rapidly shifting, increasingly complex, and often terrifying affective terrains—scholarly, political, social, economic, and ecological—threaten theory, demand theory, and rewrite assumptions about what theory is/can be. In short, this stream flows through the mucky, fraught, and potentially promising connections of atmosphere and theory.

At the same time, atmospheres can easily be registered unevenly when dominant sense regimes, which govern the blurs of corporeal and intellectual labor, filter out a range of affects to consolidate a dominant mood. And a range of conflictual and messy affective states can be the byproduct of clashing movements and forces, or the predictable if not intended result of algorithmic design. A steady stream of terror and violence in ordinary life, the news, and social media feeds is interspersed with other events and aesthetics that generate other feelings, provide escape, and/or amplify the horrors of the now. In the face of systemic violence and immiseration, people have always fashioned joy, beauty, love, and other so called “positive” affects that are never replacements for, lose sight of, and are always intimate with grief, terror, and loss. Atmospheres can make fugitive potentialities sensible. What new possibilities emerge, are created, and are experimented with alongside terrors and threats that are new and unprecedented or extensions and evolutions of longstanding systems of power? How might the minor affects shaping dominant atmospheres be sensed, registered, inflect theorizing? What can silenced, co-opted, and incarcerated knowledges teach us about how we theorize the effects and affects of atmospheres?

What can theory do in a scenario where a mass audience doesn't need convincing that things are very, very, dire? For decades, tools like (to name just a few) cruel optimism, queer negativity, Afropessimism, crip theory, and Indigenous thought have brought to light the systemic violences underpinning the world. As it becomes increasingly hard to deny that the world is being consumed by violence—just as it is increasingly hard to deny that bodies of all sorts resist violence, act creatively, push for other worlds—what can theory do? In this stream we invite you to report back from your atmospheric location—which may be narrow, broad, or dispersed—and let us know how the weather is. What's theory for now?