

S4 Affective Witnessing

STREAM ORGANIZERS

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This stream responds to the vitality and inescapable affectivity of witnessing today. We live in “an era of becoming a witness” (Givoni 2011), one in which the modes, forms, capacities and potentials of bearing witness are rapidly changing. New devices, cameras and sensors make possible the transmission and circulation of testimony, setting veracities of experience on a collision course with post-truth culture. Police body cameras, smartphones, live streaming platforms, social media’s democratisation of voices and lethal drone strike footage uploaded to YouTube: these and countless other new sites and techniques of witnessing feed into the resurgent activism of Black Lives Matter, the street protests of Morocco and the #MeToo movement. Yet older forms of witnessing also remain vibrant and find new avenues for expression and circulation. Now more than ever, corporeal and technological practices, tools and techniques of witnessing are increasingly co-composed: entangling, converging and diverging in unexpected ways to make space – potentially – for change.

Witnessing is always affective: it insists on the intensive relationality of the witness and the witnessed. To bear witness means not only giving an account of experience, event or happening, but making it accessible to others: of affecting and being affected. Witnessing is always on the brink of becoming political, of shifting from the moment of the event to its proliferation through the body politic (Massumi 2015). To bear witness is to be brought within the intersection of the political and the ethical, yet it is also to be affectively entangled in webs of relations, materialities and matterings (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). The capacity of media to generate, circulate and modulate affect (Gibbs 2001, Dean 2010, Papacharissi 2014) means that the economies of meaning within which witnessing takes place are also increasingly affective, transitory and contested. All this has consequences for what witnessing does, for the production of veracity and the formation of witnessing communities.

Affective witnessing makes space for change, for bodies and politics and possibilities that are otherwise obscured, for voices and stories and cultures that might be silenced or oppressed or simply unheard. Bearing witness means becoming responsible to an event (Peters 2001). Witnessing can be mediated and immediate, intimate and distant, commonplace and extraordinary, but it also entails an intensity that can be contagious, or change in time, or take on a life of its own. Unfolding on social media, witnessing is an escapably collective and relational practice of space-making: forming communities, provoking further testimonies, producing co-witnesses.

This stream seeks proposals that address the intersection of affect and witnessing. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

Politics, Activism, Change

- Race and witnessing
- Affect, witnessing and the making of spaces for activism
- Affect, testimony and political conflict
- Affective witnessing as a response to post-truth politics

Communities, Transmissions, Mediations

- Viral testimonies and affective contagion
- Image testimonies
- Making spaces for affective communities of witnessing
- Non- and posthuman witnessing

Temporality, Milieu, Everyday

- Affective textures of everyday witnessing
- Witnessing affective atmospheres and ephemeral events
- Temporalities of affective witnessing
- Witnessing's intensive milieus

S16 For Other Better Worldings: Affecting Ecology, Ecologizing Affect

STREAM ORGANIZER

Chad Shomura

It is increasingly difficult to be insensate to ecological instabilities, degradations, and crises. Intense storms, massive wildfires, long droughts, rising seas, and mass species extinctions are hints of possible futures. Meanwhile, racialized and indigenous peoples have long endured assaults on their immediate environments, as seen at Standing Rock, Flint, Michigan, and the Marshall Islands. Anxiety, helplessness, fear, outrage, indifference, and even hope are in the air of ongoing and impending ruination. So too are novel interminglings of all sorts of beings.

This stream aims to grow better other worlds for humans and nonhumans alike by cross-pollinating affect and ecology. Affect theory is replete with resources for the study of ecology. Cruel optimism (Berlant 2011), political depression (Cvetkovich 2012), queer utopia (Muñoz 2009), and no future (Edelman 2004) may describe life under ecological distress. How do these and other affect concepts, with due reconsideration, implicate both nonhumans and humans? Sensibilities such as hyperempathy (Leong 2016) and intuition (Massumi 2015) could become increasingly widespread as ecological catastrophe looms over more horizons. How might humans and nonhumans become attuned to impending crises, subtle attritions, and the afterlives of environmental upheaval? What about more-than-human worlds could be evoked through affect-centered methods such as paranoid and reparative reading (Sedgwick 2002) and compositional theory (Stewart 2014)?

Ecology likewise can enrich affect, as it already has. Indigenous studies (Belcourt 2016, Goldberg-Hiller and Silva 2011) have called for the resurgence of human-nonhuman relations to develop an affective component to decolonization. How does a focus on ecology open greater space for affect in politics, ethics, and aesthetics? How might affect be reconceptualized through nonhuman animals, plants, minerals, water, bacteria, and plastics? Efforts to develop the generativity of affect tend to be haunted by racialized, gendered, sexualized, ableist, and colonial framings of ecology, materiality, animality, and humanity (Huang 2017; Jackson 2016; Lee 2014; Nyong'o 2015; Chen 2012). How do those frames situate and inflect the potential of affect to reassemble the human and the nonhuman through each other—if they were ever separate? Appreciation and concern for more-than-human worlds have led scholars to craft appropriate methods such as multispecies ethnography (Tsing, 2015; Van Dooren and Bird Rose 2016). How might ecology unsettle forms of affect inquiry while furnishing new ones?

This stream makes space for affect as it flows through fields such as African American studies, anthropology, Asian American studies, critical animal and plant studies, disability studies, eco-feminism, indigenous studies, philosophy, political theory, and queer theory. It invites work that composes new senses of and approaches to affect and ecology through the above issues, the following possibilities, and others yet:

- Feelings of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene (Moore 2015), Eurocene (Grove 2016), Chthulucene (Haraway 2016),...
- Nonhuman and multispecies emotionality
- Retheorizing the commons, assemblage, intersectionality,...
- New materialisms, vitalisms, and animisms
- Sensing slow violence (Nixon 2011), fragility (Connolly 2013), collapse,...
- Ecology and the entanglement of strands of affect (psychoanalysis, philosophies indebted to Spinoza, Whitehead, and Deleuze, cultural materialisms,...)
- The more-than-human good life

- Biopower, ontopower (Massumi 2015), and geontopower (Povinelli 2016)
- Ordinary life under longstanding or imminent ruination
- Oceanic and climatological entryways into feeling
- Affect and large scales of time (geological, cosmic,...)
- Humanisms: New, non-western, post-, in-, para- (Allewaert 2013),...
- Becoming and endurance
- Wild feelings, feeling the Wild (Halberstam 2014)
- Futurity: posthuman, queer, decolonial,...