

# S4

## AFFECTIVE SPACES OF OPACITY

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Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* (2012) disrupted the space of the Moscow Cathedral and caused a national sensation in a matter of minutes. It proved enigmatic and permeated the public imagination. Why couldn't the state and church displace four young women in ski-masks from the center of national discourse? "Mad", "hysterical", "sensationalist", and many other labels were deployed, but none of them managed to grasp the affective charge of the event. Within an otherwise sacred site, *Punk Prayer* introduced a space of opacity, bringing into question the unshaken pillars of society—patriarchy, religion, and the state apparatus.

This stream calls attention to such spaces of opacity across theoretical, historical, activist, and political discourses. We see spaces of opacity as inherently unstable; they remain in permanent tension, refusing interpretations. Opacity reveals and conceals, allowing us to experience, beyond sight, what was previously hidden and obscuring what appeared obvious or straightforward. While this instability delimits a space of possibility, promising some potential liberation from set forms and ways of seeing, it also threatens to create further modes of exclusion and oppression. Instances of opacity proliferate all around us and throughout history; they include revolutions and periods of socioeconomic transition, social and protest movements, discourses that destabilize the legibility of sexual and racial identities, and an aesthetic that plays on sensation rather than cognition. Resonating with Eve Sedgwick's "sites of productive opacity", Martine Beugnet's "aesthetics of blur", and Édouard Glissant's "the right to opacity for everyone", spaces of opacity are necessarily affective (Sedgwick 2003, Beugnet 2017, Glissant 1997). They invite multiplicity and error, and resist reason and rationality. They are vague and therefore constitute impasses, in which "strong" theoretical models are pushed to their limit (those of affect studies included) and the need for new or reworked ones becomes especially acute (Ashtor 2021).

Opacity is historical and political, but disturbs historical linearity, codified structures, or mimetic representations of reality. In instances of opacity, affects come to the forefront; they are intensified and their interplay is surfaced. It is here that it becomes increasingly clear that emotions, as Sara Ahmed puts it, “do” things and determine the future because reason ceases to reason (2004). The vision of the future proves inherently partial and identities incomplete, necessitating change and adjustment but providing no clues for how to move forward. It is thus not only a theoretical impasse, but also a literal, embodied one. Opacity simultaneously promises and threatens. Life modalities are altered and “cruel optimisms” amplified, mobilizing not only hope for change, but also pain of detachment and anxiety before the future (Berlant 2011).

Spaces of opacity encompass feelings that are “emergent” (Deleuze 1986) and are always “embryonic” (Williams 1977). The present thus serves as opaque, it functions as a “pastness opening directly into the future”; it is incipient, a realm of potential that is not yet rationalized (Massumi 2002). Within an instance of opacity the center necessarily pivots, giving way to feminist and alternative black epistemologies, radical manifestations of queerness and sexuality, and new uses of the erotic and poetic (Jaggar 1989, Hill Collins 1990, Muñoz 2009, Lorde 1978 & 1979). The changes are rapid and settling is incipient, but its shape is not yet clear. Sites of opacity thus demand urgent and expansive analyses, given that they form the futures we will all live in. Learning from the opacity of the past can help us traverse the future, and identifying its present manifestations is crucial to envisioning and most importantly enacting liberatory futures.

We seek proposals that locate, problematize, theorize, and propose new ways of navigating spaces of opacity. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

Politics, Revolution, Transition, Activism, Protest

- Opacity of historical transitions and its impasses
- Modalities of physical or digital protest that resist legible practices and strategies
- History as multiplicity and/or polyvocality that elude linear accounts
- Rhizomatic intersections of art and activism that challenge institutional formations and codified expressions
- Spaces of opacity that emerge amidst circulation and distribution of information or as an effect of the disruption of the continuous flow

## Race, Sexuality, Desire

- Ambiguity, invisibility, and opacity against a reduction to identitarian taxonomies
- Rethinking otherness (race, queerness or any other abject identities) as a resistance to language, meaning, and interpretation
- Extreme, unprecedented, or other-than-human configurations of desire and intimacy beyond conventional categories
- Showing and/or concealing identity in cinema and screen media
- Invisibility/hypervisibility in digital media, networks, or environments

## The Decolonial, the Anticolonial

- The opacity introduced by oppositional geographies and alternative cartographies
- The poetics of landscape and the poetics of questioning (Glissant 1997), the disruption of authority and reason underpinning charts, figures, maps, and/or official records
- Diasporas and nomadic patterns, rethinking space as opaque and unfinished
- The “demonic”, the uncertain, the non-linear, the un-predictable as a departure from determinism and positivism (McKittrick 2006)