

transmediale
31 Jan – 03 Feb
2019
HKW, Berlin

Study Circles

transmediale 2019 focuses on the role of emotions, empathy, and cultural emergence in digital culture. Responding to this thematic focus, it aims to create an environment for the emergence of experiences and knowledge that goes beyond the limited time frame of the public festival days. The newly introduced transmediale Study Circles have already started in October 2018 and not only offer a space for reflection and in-depth exploration of some of the festival's key questions, they generate various outputs which frame and form a part of transmediale 2019's core program. This approach is also reflected in an accompanying documentation through the transmediale/journal, which will feature two new online issues taking up central topics of the two Study Circles' thematic strands *Affective Infrastructures* and *Uneasy Alliances*.

Study Circle: Affective Infrastructures

*What remains for our pedagogy of unlearning is to build affective infrastructures that admit the work of desire as the work of an aspirational ambivalence. What remains is the potential we have to common infrastructures that absorb the blows of our aggressive need for the world to accommodate us [...]. — Lauren Berlant, *The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times**

Affective Infrastructures revisits the understanding of the notion of infrastructures and its relation to affect. It is one of two newly introduced Study Circles that frame the 2019 edition of transmediale and are part of the core program of the festival days. In response to the festival theme, the Study Circles bring together artists, researchers, and activists in working groups taking place before, during, and after transmediale 2019 in order to strengthen the festival as a site of knowledge exchange by involving participants at an early stage. The Study Circles take place in association with TIER.space, Spektrum, and Import Projects. Before transmediale 2019, the Berlin-based project spaces host a series of working meetings and, parallel to the festival, present their own program on the themes of the Study Circles.

Looking into the ways that contemporary technologies capture emotions and control bodies, *Affective Infrastructures* examines how they mediate and regulate life. It emphasizes how systems based on machine reading or face and voice recognition can police behaviors, classify habits, and influence collective feeling. Acknowledging affect itself as a powerful infrastructure, the members of the Study Circle ask: *How can we move towards technologies that would accommodate multiplicity and difference? In which ways can categories that predefine experiences and lives be complexified? How can the lived experiences of material and affective infrastructures be used to mobilize bodies, energize politics, and bring about change? Which modes of learning and doing can empower new forms of worldbuilding?*

Following Lauren Berlant's approach that habits, norms, patterns, and affective assemblages are what bind us to each other and to the world itself, the Study Circle (re)turns to these elements as part of its exploration. By sharing knowledge, reflections, and practices, the participants discuss infrastructures with regard to lived experience: these include examples such as feminist servers, online #MeToo lists, the commons, cruising for sex and foraging for

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mushrooms as manifestations of binding moments and points of contact.

As a response to the problematics of care and empathy—and the forms of power and privilege that they involve—the potential of spaces that lie between autonomy and interdependency, non-sovereignty and agency, taxonomy and messiness are in the foreground of this discussion. Aiming to think and move beyond hegemonic systems, this Study Circle instead attends to hesitant, delirious, and imaginative living infrastructures (and technologies) that can embrace affective differences, multiple temporalities, and meaningful complexities.

Study Circle: Uneasy Alliances

The social and political transformation starts with the small step, the daily call, the weekly demonstration, moving outside our zone of comfort where we all identify with one another toward the uneasy alliance that stands against injustice. — Judith Butler, “This Is What Resistance Looks Like” Lecture, 2017

The Study Circle *Uneasy Alliances* takes the question of how affect relates to social change as its starting point. It aims to investigate how new forms of acting in solidarity can be built by connecting artistic, tech, and activist approaches. *Uneasy Alliances* is one of two newly introduced Study Circles that frame the 2019 edition of transmediale and are part of the core program of the festival days. In response to the festival theme, the Study Circles bring together artists, researchers, and activists in working groups taking place before, during, and after transmediale 2019 to strengthen the festival as a site of knowledge exchange by involving participants at an early stage. The Study Circles take place in association with TIER.space, Spektrum, and Import Projects. Before transmediale 2019, the Berlin-based project spaces host a series of working meetings and, parallel to the festival, present their own program on the themes of the Study Circles.

The corrosion of social relations is intensifying within both civil society and the digital public sphere. Against this background, the participants of *Uneasy Alliances* will reflect on the invention of new political languages through socially engaged art, collective organization, counterpublics, and experimental technological frameworks. The goal of the Study Circle is to think through the affective conditions of solidarity—including the possible uneasiness caused by bringing together heterogeneous actors—and how this could productively inform new actions.

The wider context to *Uneasy Alliances* and its concerns are the problematic conditions produced by contemporary political and media landscapes. Within these, sudden emotional outbursts contrast with a generally disaffected civil society, making sustained cooperation across different social classes more and more difficult. This process of atomization, co-shaped by the dissolution effects of digital platform capitalism, impairs social cohesion and complicates attempts at collective organization. As an alternative to ever-increasing compartmentalization and hyper-individualist optimization and self-management, as well as impending tech gentrification of the urban environment, this Study Circle turns to the possibilities of building new affective bonds for solidarity, action, and care. These alliances may include—but not be limited to—intersectional

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activism across class, gender, and race in today's hybrid urban and technological spaces as well as artistic re-imaginings of places, institutions, and forms of organization. Common to all of these approaches should be a demand for the immediate unlearning of privilege and oppression.