

transmediale
31 Jan – 03 Feb
2019
HKW, Berlin

Theme Text

transmediale 2019 focuses on how feelings are made into objects of technological design and asks what role emotions and empathy play within digital culture. One of the key questions of the upcoming festival is “What moves you?”, referring not only to an emotional response but also to the infrastructures and aesthetics that govern how affect becomes mobilized as a political force today.

With digital technologies being integrated into the liveness of experience, a new situation for social change and cultural practice has arisen, which currently seems to lead to either political extremes or extreme complacency. How to resist the manipulative and polarizing aspects of affect in the digital public sphere as it is expressed through a deadlock of the politics of feeling on the one side and disengagement on the other? What motivates social engagement and how can new forms of care and solidarity be developed and embodied?

For the first time in many years, the festival does not have a title in order to emphasize the possibility of emergence: In response to a critical time, transmediale wants to focus on live practices and the creation of learning environments rather than close down meaning.

Taking up the challenge of how to understand and work with new technologies of feeling, transmediale recognizes that digital culture has become instrumental for capturing and managing what Raymond Williams once called “structures of feeling”—lived experiences and cultural expressions, distinct from supposedly fixed social products and institutions. Such experiences and expressions now create the affective spaces of social media, form the design imperatives of artificial intelligence applications, and seem to be capable of evoking empathy through virtual reality. In these contexts, social and political issues tend to become emotionalized and get turned into binary choices of for and against. One of the contemporary challenges is how to be critical and affirmative at the same time while avoiding such oversimplifications. For this purpose, transmediale 2019 strives to feature living, and not yet fully formed digital cultures of artistic vision, speculative thinking, activist intervention, and counter-cultural dreaming.

Following its focus on cultural emergence, the 2019 festival aims for a high level of participant and audience engagement through discussion-based and educational formats: Preceding the public festival days transmediale offers a workshop program as well as a new student platform to create an environment for concentrated, in-depth work and studying. Furthermore, a new format called “Study Circles” is integrated across the program, zooming in on specific aspects of the festival theme. The “Study Circles” consist of working groups in which participants come together before, during, and after the festival and generate various outputs such as workshops, events, and publications.