

WORLDS SET ADRIFT: WATER, AIR AND THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN

Hayden Lorimer, University of Glasgow

In this talk I will consider two milieus that matter to the formulation of a more-than-human geography: the hydrological and the atmospheric. Both water and air have been subject to recent re-theorization and cultural commentary, expanding the volume of the world as a site of contemporary disciplinary inquiry. Voicing their concern at deepening environmental crisis and seeking to chart kinder, more progressive futures, human geographers have conjured with new materialism; a theoretical orientation inviting a collapse of scales between the planetary and the personal, and the dissolution of embodied thresholds between external and internal worlds. Unorthodox exposures, intimacies and assemblages are the outcome of this magical thinking. Having reviewed how the purposeful unsettling of social-biological-ecological dynamics is constitutive of more-than-human ontologies, I will turn my attention to quieter, less hymned quarters where cultural imaginaries of water and air take on different but arresting expression. I want to consider the kinds of agency afforded by familiar hydrological and atmospheric motifs (i.e. 'wash', 'drift', 'flow', 'aura', 'bliss' 'essence') and the sorts of watery or aromatic language they deploy. To achieve this I will scrutinize two texts, each representative of a specific literary genre (the storybook; the reference book), each pertaining to a particular print-world, and each showing how the wording and -scaping of water and air in relation to land causes unexpected and confounding qualities to surface. Theorizing the more-than-human, I will conclude, is a challenge that must be addressed stylistically in a renewed approach to geographical writing.