



Center for Global Culture
and Communication

*An Interdisciplinary Initiative of Northwestern University
School of Communication*

VOLATILITY: SCALE AND AFFECT

OCTOBER 25-26, 2018
KRESGE HALL, 2-350
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Where does our current "politics of volatility" come from? The immediate backdrop is the black-swan events of 9/11 and the Great Recession of 2008, which continue to infuse contemporary politics with overtones of risk, uncertainty, and volatility culminating in last election's contrasting images of Trump as the volatile but charismatic deal-maker and Clinton as the prudent risk-manager. These images draw upon a complicated history that goes back to at least the early seventies when changes in the global economy provided the backdrop for the coeval development of derivative finance and postmodernism, and the onset of neo-liberalism. 1989's one-dimensional optimism about "alternative modernities" and the possibility of a global civil society has been replaced by the anxiety about the volatility of competing capitalisms that are rapidly undoing the neoliberal consensus on globalization. But what is volatility and how is it different from our earlier concerns about risk and uncertainty? Is there any relationship between the volatility that derivative finance seeks to access and price and the volatility of feelings and emotions whose investigation lies at the heart of contemporary affect theory? Bergson and Deleuze's work on intensity seem to prefigure some of the contemporary discussion of volatility; the mathematics of finance has captured its quantitative dimension in notions such as standard deviation and spread, while affect theory has emphasized the qualitative modulation of intensity. In Bergson, the quantitative and qualitative dimensions are opposed, which Deleuze tried to overcome in his cinema books by adding Peirce's semiotics to the mix. *Who are the theorists who provide us with an understanding of where affect, finance, and volatility meet? Spinoza's theory of affect? Bergson's duration? Deleuze's crystal image? Peirce's abduction? Whitehead's process philosophy? Or current thinkers such as Lauren Berlant, Benjamin Lee, Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Robert Meister, and Sianne Ngai?*

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PARTICIPANTS

LAUREN BERLANT ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Lauren Berlant is the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor of English at the University of Chicago. Her work focuses on the affective components of belonging in the U.S. nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries: in particular, in relation to juridical citizenship, to informal and normative modes of social belonging, and to practices of intimacy as they absorb legal, normative, and fantasmatic forces.

ERIN MANNING FINE ARTS, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Erin Manning holds a University Research Chair in Relational Art and Philosophy in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University. She is the director of the SenseLab, a laboratory that explores the intersections between art practice and philosophy through the matrix of the sensing body in movement. Her own art practice is centered on large-scale participatory installations that facilitate emergent collectivities.

BENJAMIN LEE ANTHROPOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY, NEW SCHOOL

Benjamin Lee is Professor of Anthropology and Philosophy at the New School, where he has served as Dean of The New School for Social Research and as Provost. Lee's primary academic interests include contemporary China; the cultural dimensions of globalization, particularly the effects of global financial flows; and modern theories of language.

ROBERT MEISTER HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ

Robert Meister is Professor of Social and Political Thought in the Department of the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His most recent book is *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (2011). Meister's research interests include political and moral philosophy, law and social theory, Marxian theory, institutional analysis, and financialization.

BRIAN MASSUMI COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

Brian Massumi is a Professor in the Communication Department of the Université de Montréal. His research follows two principal directions of inquiry. The first bears on the aesthetic dimensions of contemporary issues in communications and focuses on emergent modes of expression and modalities of experience. The second is concerned with contemporary theories of power in the context of globalized capitalism.

SIANNE NGAI ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Sianne Ngai is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Chicago. Her second book, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012), was the winner of the MLA James Russell Lowell Prize and the PCA/ACA Ray and Pat Browne award. Ngai's scholarship is broadly concerned with the analysis of aesthetic forms and judgments specific to capitalism.

SCHEDULE

THURSDAY,
OCTOBER 25

3.30-6PM

SESSION 1:

ERIN MANNING
AND
BRIAN MASSUMI

FRIDAY,
OCTOBER 26

9.30AM-12PM

SESSION 2:

LAUREN BERLANT
AND
SIANNE NGAI

12-1PM
LUNCH

1-3PM

SESSION 3:

BENJAMIN LEE
AND
ROBERT MEISTER