

From love of nature to fear of Climate Change: Emotional Species and Posthuman Bodies

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This lecture considers how contemporary performance and art might reach beyond the twentieth-century shift from love of nature to fear of climate change. If theatre confirms that this shift in attitudes happens bodily and emotionally, some recent performance displaces the fearfulness, which has the potential to override the hopeful aspects of posthuman dynamism.

Performance reflects how human relations with the environment are embodied and some works point to what Stacy Alaimo (2010) identifies as a harmful, toxic cellular legacy. I would add that the materiality of artistic representation also reveals that humans perceive their surroundings through the less tangible prism of embodied emotion – social emotions, sensory mood, personal emotional feeling and impersonal affect. Even though Brian Massumi (2002) argues that intensity and affect flows can be formless, and Jane Bennett's (2010) 'vital materialism' contends that impersonal affect spans objects and particles, nonetheless art invariably presents aesthetic, embodied and environmental forms. It induces responses through form and implicates personally felt experience.

How might artistic form illuminate posthuman approaches in the framing of emotional species bodies? Posthuman ideas suggest ways of approaching the world that defuse the separation between human and nonhuman. The common practice across the arts is to position diverse species bodies in a natural landscape or framed as nature and in most instances without unquestioning that these are emotionally meaningful for humans. It is this emotive positioning that demands attention and since the viewing continues to be embodied even where visible bodies are absent from the framing. I am concerned about the inability of humans to remove the veil of humanness unless there is greater awareness of the all-pervasive power of human emotion and personal feelings.

I argue that artistic engagement can actually support the effort to decentre the human when it draws attention to the processes of engagement with the surroundings and by creating perceptual spaces of hesitation and uncertainty. This happens with performance

or art that interrupts the phenomenological seamlessness of lived bodies in the world explored by Merleau-Ponty (1995), and the ways in which phenomenological perception becomes imbued with gender, racial and species experience. Art in all its strangeness has the potential to counteract obliviousness to the pervasive manipulative power of human emotions which underlie bodily blindness towards other species, the environment and climate change.