

## Sub(e)merging: Poetics, Temporalities, Epistemologies

25 - 27 May, 2023 at Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg  
Organized by the research department Theory and History of Contemporary Media,  
Institute for Art and Visual Culture, Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg



Jennifer Mehigan and Bassam Al-Sabah's animated film *A Paradise Out of a Common Field* (2020) follows a zombie as she emerges from the soil of a lush garden and submerges into the glittering depths of the ocean. A voice can be heard from off-screen, pondering Irish graveyards as sites of class and gender trauma, and forgotten or rather subdued history, but also as "pleasure grounds" of metamorphosis and transition, of kinship, allies, and, indeed, life: "the gossip in the mass famine grave was probably more exciting than the bullshit of the middle-class cemetery."

Tapping into the defiant yet activating quality of the underground and its porous line of demarcation, *A Paradise Out of a Common Field* engages with what we might call "submerged modes." Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017) introduced the term to describe complex and, above all, resistant forms of life and knowledge. These social ecologies exist in specific material and media environments; sites of industrial as well as digital-capitalist, neocolonialist exploitation, takeover, oppression, and surveillance, while also resisting these powers. Through their intangible density as well as their illegible heterogeneity, these perspectives elude an "extractive view" from above, that is, approaches that aim at totalizing representation, (scientific) disciplining, and capitalist valorization. Instead, they invite engagement with methods and perspectives that are equally submerged: a perception *from below*. These perspectives may be messy or unstable, but by enabling (or rather requiring) a mode of "perceiving life differently," (Gómez-Barris), a "seeing with one another without claiming to be another," (Haraway 1988) much can be learned from them.

Seeking to open and expand the rich repertoire of meanings of Gómez-Barris's concept—and focusing on its generative potential by slightly altering its terminology—the international transdisciplinary workshop *Sub(e)merging* invites artistic and scholarly contributions from various fields to probe the transformative potentials of operating and perceiving from below, especially in times of political and ecological crisis. How can we take seriously the processes of gathering and evolving inherent in the term submerging? In other words: What emerges in submersion?

We are particularly (but not only) interested in the following aspects and questions:

#### Aesthetic, material and visual aspects of submerging

- What does an aesthetic of submerging look like? What is its affective dimension?
- What challenge does submerging pose to modes of representation?
- How can submerging be discussed in relation to the role that imaging media and technologies play in making "submerged modes" visible?
- What are potential contexts and material environments of submerging; the "damaged landscape, beyond the call of industrial promise and ruin" (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015)? The swamp, the soil, the deep sea? The archive, the cemetery, the tunnel, the landfill?

#### Epistemological and methodological dimensions of submerging

- How can going beneath the surface become a position from which to perceive, speak, act, and operate (differently) – a site of learning with/from buried or disqualified, that is, "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault 2003); a way of "recuperating the lost bodies of history" (DeLoughrey and Flores 2020)?
- How does submergence destabilize the ground as a site of stability or evidence to become a conceptual tool for "milieu-specific analysis" (Jue 2020) or the study of "liquid ecologies" (Blackmore and Gómez 2020)?

#### Spatial and temporal layers of submerging

- How do the spatial and temporal specificities of submerging matter?
- To which degree can submerging upset normative chronologies and spatial hierarchies?

#### (Eco-)politics of sub(e)merging

- How can we make productive the tension (and interrelation) between the different forms of going below; between chosen/strategic submerging, violence or suppression, and submersion as the result of anthropogenic climate change that has led to a shift in environmental boundaries (as in sea level rise, a flood, or landslide)?
- How does submersion relate to the underground in its many material and metaphorical meanings—as porous and paradoxical contact zone of longing and mysticism, of rich ecosystems, complex infrastructures (of care), of colonization, exploitation and exclusion, of imagination and otherness?
- In what ways can submerging become an act of resistance, imagination, protest, refusal, or revenge, an "emergent strategy from the deep" (brown 2017, Gumbs 2020)?

Formally, the workshop is open, meaning that contributions can choose the usual presentation form (individual papers of 20-30 min.), but other formats like conversations or material discussions are equally welcome. Presentations should preferably be held in English, but German is possible as well. Please send an abstract (max. 300 words), along with a brief biographical note (max. 150 words) and/or queries, by email to the following address **by February 10, 2023**: [medienwissenschaft@uol.de](mailto:medienwissenschaft@uol.de). Applicants will be notified of acceptance by the end of February, 2023. Funding is being applied to run the workshop.

#### References:

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  - Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, 575-99.
  - Jue, Melody. 2020. *Wild Blue Media: Thinking through Seawater*. Durham: Duke University Press.
  - Lowenhaupt-Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibilities of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.