

Panel CfP:

## Potency and Prowess: Entangling the Earth in Landscapes of Radical Change

How do we live with, speak to, and activate the landscape? What is the relationship between people and potency in place?

Recent work across philosophy, anthropology, and critical theory, has focused on the productive entanglements that humans have with other, animated, non-human agents, from material (Bennett 2009), to animals (Haraway 2018), and beyond (Kohn 2013). Taking a slightly different tack, Elizabeth Povinelli looks at the ways that different ways of seeing the world enable animacies (of capital, of geology) and foreclose others. Anthropology, engaging as it does with a diversity of human experience, has a unique contribution to such discussions. Marisol de la Cadena proposes an “uncommons:” a recognition of assemblages of people and other animate actors that share a common good, but not a mutually shared ontological world – earth beings, possessing spirits, ancestors, all potentially share our world – or do not. Here, we seek to explore this idea of potential within landscape.

We take up calls to “slow down,” as Isabelle Stengers puts it, and understand these entanglements from a de-exoticised and de-magicalized perspective. How does communication with animated, non-human agents – what might in some places be glossed as spirits, gods, ghosts, and other such figures, or what might be commodities or other features of capitalism – happen? What kinds of entities are animated within altered landscapes? And, what can this communicative persistence say to classic and new anthropological theory?

Our premise begins with Paul Mus’ observations from Asia, which implicates the “fecund energies of the soil” in the establishment of both cosmological pantheons and human systems of governance – what Marshal Sahlins has called “earth energy.” This is potency: the fecund energy that is present in mountains, rivers, certain objects, stones, caves, and other such places. It is open to encounter and gets deployed toward multiple projects, both human and non.

Here, we seek to focus on this potential and the claims to and ability to access it – harness it toward particular agendas. This, following the classic Southeast Asian literature, is prowess. Tracing, as Povinelli does, the links between various kinds of animacy, we see entrepreneurs and colonialists as well as kings and mediums; thieves, investors, and charismatic prophets as those individuals who attempt and cultivate this prowess. To what extent are communicative gestures toward entanglement gathering up newly animated entities in pursuit of various forms of capital?

While we are based in Southeast Asia, we welcome papers from any geographical focus. We seek papers that address this notion of land and potential, and wo/men of prowess in search of that potential. We pay special attention to work that engages with forms (and failures) of communication, new and transformed landscapes, and the imaginaries and ontological worlds that go along with them.