

## Whole Worlds Panel II Abstracts

### Chris Westcott, *Drilling the Dialectic, or How Capital Makes Itself Felt*

My paper asks how Marx's sense of feeling in his later work might be of use for understanding aesthetic responses to capital and for rethinking the place of feeling in anti-capitalist politics. I begin with a critical overview of some recent attempts to understand the relation of feeling (or affect) to capital, paying special attention to the role of class-identity narratives and subsumption narratives (the latter of which often see subjectivity, desire, and emotion as activity shaped by or incorporated into the logic of late capital) in these efforts. One of the hazards of such narratives, I argue, is that they tend to obscure the character of impersonal domination that Marx identified as capital's historically unique feature. Throughout *Capital*, Marx suggests that impersonal domination is something primarily encountered as "felt"—in compulsions, constraints, and law-like social necessities that variously condition our participation in capital, a process at once premised upon our having discrete desires and attachments and yet fundamentally *indifferent* to them. At the same time, Marx shows, capital tends intermittently to afford feelings of unconstraint, fulfillment, and self-standingness, which in turn dynamize subsequent feelings of compulsion and constraint. To explore just a couple of the aesthetic dimensions of this outline of conflicted feeling, I briefly look to the work of the poet George Stanley. Stanley's poetry addresses the difficulty of articulating individual experiences of the whole, particularly of the whole that presents itself as an impersonal and irrational force. For Stanley, poetry figures as a venue for tracing out the social dimensions of feelings and for reconstructing attitudes towards what is felt—so that what might but felt as humiliation, for example, may be more oppositionally conceived of as damage.

### Orlando Reade, *Shakespeare's wide and/or vile world*

Three times in Shakespeare's sonnets (c. 1599-1609), the poet-speaker invokes the 'wide world'. In this position, the world is dilated, appearing available - perhaps even *destined* - for capture. This paper attends closely to the 'wide world', a famous and peculiar phrase which has critical significance in for an understanding of Shakespeare's universalism. Radical criticisms of Shakespeare's writing, at least since Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969), encourage us to see this universalism as a specious category involved in historical systems of violence.

The 'Golden Age' of English literature coincides with an intensification of activity in science, mathematics and geography, whose efforts were increasingly devoted to the foundation of an Elizabethan Empire. From Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589) to Raleigh's failed attempt to colonise Guiana in 1616, this period was marked by the amplification of imperial ambitions. The practical manifestations of these ambitions, the early voyages to the Americas, are reflected in and provoked by proto-colonial fantasies about possession of the world whose most precise subjective document is literature.

This paper considers how Shakespeare's sonnets document shifts in subjective and social relations, inscribed with the geographies and temporalities of desire (queer and heteronormative) in Elizabethan England, how they participate in early modern capitalist relations and colonial dreams. It describes how these dreams arise from shifts in the *longue durée* of global economics, surfacing within the expanded consciousness of an intellectual elite working through the implications of the Copernican revolution.

The 'wide world' is conceivable, in this historical and conceptual analysis of poetry, as a totality *to be possessed*. Those moments in the sequence where the world contracts into a shadow, becoming 'vile' or 'forlorn', discloses a negative image of the world, underwritten by a radical uncertainty about the possession

of the world.

### **Matthew Hubbell, Smiley Faces and Frownlands: Cinematic Performance, Affective Mapping, and the Feeling of Ordinary Worlds**

Given the manifest unrepresentability of a world system dominated by abstract flows of capital and information, Steven Shaviro has advocated the idea of “affective mapping,” which understands films and new media works as objects “which do not just passively trace or represent, but actively construct and perform, the social relations, flows, and feelings” that make up the world we live in. In generating an account of “*what it feels like* to live in the early twenty-first century,” affective mapping offers one way of moving between differing scales or worlds, connecting the ordinary worlds that impinge on individual bodies and subjects to global systems of power and finance. However persuasive this idea, Shaviro’s project is hindered by a conceptual deficiency in film studies, which generally understands cinematic performance either in terms of an expression of interior emotion or a signifying practice based on a set of culturally shared codes. Yet if we take seriously the idea that the movements and gestures of our bodies are modulated by and show the traces of the forces of the neoliberal ordinary, then performance and acting style can be rethought as an articulation of those transpersonal forces, becoming a site where we can witness how emergent economic and political realities are felt and aesthetically mediated. To this end, I will be looking at Gregg Araki’s stoner-comedy *Smiley Face* and Ronald Bronstein’s aggressively confrontational, ultra-low budget character study *Frownland* – two relatively recent films that map the contours of particular affective landscapes, largely through the distinctive performances of their leads, both of whom employ non-naturalistic acting styles to portray characters in states of disintegration and disattachment, unable to control or coherently position themselves in relation to the demands and forces (of labor, sociality, and intimacy) that shape and deform them while simultaneously constituting their worlds