

Alex Lockwood, WALK research

My research interests are formed around the experiences of affect in the making of public and private worlds. I work from the position of separating out affect, emotion and feeling into the categories of: “feelings are *personal* and *biographical*, emotions are *social*, and affects are *prepersonal*” (Shouse, 2005: 1). However, I am particularly interested in affect as theorized by scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich, Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant, who have put into circulation the concept of public feelings to “challenge the idea that feelings, emotions, or affects properly and only belong to the domain of private life and to the intimacies of family, love, and friendship” (Cvetkovich & Pellegrini 1). For public feelings scholars, a critical programme is one that destabilizes a worldview of politics as the only/proper mechanism for managing and privatising public feelings.

The mediation of public feelings when concerned with environmental politics is a vital component of my research, accumulated into an ‘archive of green feeling’. Most recently, my work has focused on the emotional textures of the Save Our Forests campaign enacted through Twitter and other digital and traditional media, a campaign important for the way it mediates a public feelings culture impacting on British political and ecological life. An understanding of the affects in circulation around the protests offers an insight into how affect, emotions and feelings are pivotal to the possibilities of forging environmentally-responsible public cultures: how a love of walking in the woods can be connected through informed spaces to mobilise as political force: in the 12 months to February 2010, the English adult population made 2.86 billion visits to the natural environment, nearly half of which (48 percent) involved walking (mainly accompanied by a dog). This phenomenal accumulation of affective experiences infolds into a politics and economy of walking.¹

What I’m trying to get at is an understanding of the role played by different affective environments, including forests and online spaces, which in turn provide an effectivity for environmental stewardship, including channelling public feelings into a mobilized political force to halt harmful legislation. Walking in the woods then becomes an act of everyday citizenship that can be mobilized into an agency of public feeling. Walkers move into the sylvan landscape, generally accompanied by non-humans, if at all. And this question of everyday citizenship, for Lauren Berlant, “is a status whose definitions are always in process. It is continually being produced out of a political, rhetorical, and economic struggle over who will count as ‘the people’ and how social membership will be measured and valued”

¹ *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment*, p.6

(Berlant 1997: 20). This question of citizenship remains central to the next stage of my research.

References

- Berlant, Lauren. 1997. *The Queen of America goes to Washington City*. Durham and London: Duke U.P.
- Cvetkovich, Ann & Ann Pellegrini. 2003. 'Public Sentiments' in *The Feminist Scholar Online*, 2:1.
- Shouse, Eric. 2005. Feeling, Emotion, Affect. *Media/Culture Journal*, 8(6). Accessed 12th March 2011, <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>