

Spellbound: Mass Hysteria, Collective Symptoms, Contagious States

Spellbound is an event series co-organised by NADINE HARTMANN, CLIO NICASTRO, and HANNAH PROCTOR. The series, hosted at *diffrakt | centre for theoretical periphery* since autumn 2018, explores experiences of collective mental contagion. Probing the boundaries between the psychic and the physiological, the natural and the supernatural, the social and the spiritual, the events have focused on often mysterious mass psychic phenomena such as hypnosis, fainting fits, possession, the 'mimetic' dimension of hysteria and eating disorders, the regimentation of gesture and trances. How do certain kinds of collective behaviours or experiences take hold and spread among groups? Do conditions with no clear biological origin have their roots in society? What do mass symptoms express?

For our contribution to the conference *Death / Text / Resonance: Simone Weil and Writing To(wards) Death*, we decided to produce three independently written but thematically linked pieces that explore shared interests developed through our collaboration on *Spellbound*. We each took a cue from Chris Kraus's book titled *Aliens and Anorexia* (2000). Kraus's text deals with the making of her film, *Gravity and Grace*, and the inspiration she found in Simone Weil's life and writings.

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HANNAH's piece contrasts Kraus's and Weil's accounts of their attempts to empathise with others, exploring distinctions between their approaches and their relations to the 'I'. Drawing on Anne Carson's and Elizabeth Hardwick's reflections on Weil, specifically in relation to the concept of 'decreation', the essay claims that Weil's religious beliefs and political commitments distinguish her work from Kraus's. It also talks about staring at a Burger King in Kent on Google Street View.

NADINE is looking at Kraus's comments on anorexia and her attempt to reframe the narrative of the 'anorexic girl'. By following Kraus's allusions to Gilles Deleuze's writings on the subject, Nadine seeks to propose a way to think anorectic practices and their meaning for questions of sexual difference that challenge the notion of 'becoming-nothing' that Kraus, as well as Deleuze, seems to affirm.

CLIO's part proposes some reflections on 'self-sabotage' as a method in thinking, writing, and filming that helps to replace the idea of an unbridgeable void – as it is for instance often conceived in eating disorders – with that of interruptions. The latter being (temporary ongoing) strategies to build an intersubjective space where subjects need to learn how to stay 'on the edge' (*in bilico*) as Italian feminist thinker and writer Carla Lonzi suggests. The second part of the piece focuses on Chris Kraus's film *Gravity and Grace* as a peculiar kind of self-sabotage through which she tests the ambivalence of her main methodological convictions as writer, as artist, as woman.

