

Marta Figlerowicz

A Short History of Virality

ABSTRACT

Marta Figlerowicz is an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, English, and Film and Media at Yale University. A comparative scholar of philosophies and representations of intersubjectivity, she is the author of two books, *Flat Protagonists* (2016) and *Spaces of Feeling* (2017). Her writing has also appeared in academic and non-academic publications ranging from *Foreign Affairs* to *New Literary History*. This talk derives from her new book project in progress, *Mythical Thinking: The Self in the Age of New Media*.

What is virality, and how does one represent it? "A Short History of Virality" draws on research in the history of science, network theory, and media theory, to outline how the phenomenon of virality was gradually "discovered" and theorized. It then discusses recent representations of viral network events in American cinema, which illustrate various aspects of virality's political, phenomenological, and scalar contradictions.

BIO

My research articulates a counter-tradition to aesthetic individualism that has been present in Western art and literature at least since the seventeenth century, and which takes on particularly striking resonances in our contemporary digitally-mediated environments. My first book, *Flat Protagonists: A Theory of Novel Character* (Oxford UP, 2016), discusses an odd group of characters found across the long history of the French and British novel whose construction simplifies in the course of a narrative, instead of deepening or expanding. My second book, entitled *Spaces of Feeling: Affect and Awareness in Modernist Literature* (Cornell UP, 2017) studies representations of intersubjective affective awareness in American, British, and French fiction and poetry. I am currently developing a new academic project on the non-individualist phenomenology of contemporary digital media, called *Myths of Obscurity: The Self in the Age of Integrated Media*, and a popular audience book on global histories of selfhood. I also write literary and cultural criticism for publications such as *The Washington Post*, *n+1*, *Cabinet*, *Jacobin*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Yale Review*, *Logic*, and *Boston Review*.



At Yale, I have taught courses on philosophies of the self, modernism, literary and critical theory, and world cinema. I am a co-organizer of *Utopia after Utopia*, a research initiative on contemporary post-socialist critical theory and art practice, and co-PI for an upcoming Sawyer Seminar called "Ordering the Multitude: Encyclopedia, Atlas, Museum." In the academic year

2018-2019, I will be a member of the Women Faculty Forum Council and a Fellow at the Whitney Humanities Center. I am also an affiliate of the Yale Film and Media Program and a member of the Harvard Society of Fellows, which I joined as a Junior Fellow in 2013.