

The concept of ‘intersectionality’ has completely transformed a wide range of disciplines over the last few decades. From literary study to sociology, intersectional approaches—approaches that demand that scholars and activists look at the interplay of multiple social identities and locations in order to understand social life—have importantly become routine. But much less attention has been given to what intersectionality was introduced to help correct: the idea of a ‘single-axis analysis’, or an approach that putatively focuses on a single dimension of social life. Instead scholars have tended to take it for granted that they know what this means: that is, a ruinous distortion of the complexity of the social world and something that should be avoided. At the same time, and in some instances departing from intersectionality, influential scholars in recent years have again deployed ideas about the singularity of foundational social formations, particularly in order to understand Blackness and Indigeneity. Focusing on Euro-American scholarly frameworks for studying gender and sexuality, this talk will turn attention to the many functions and purposes of single axis analyses in order to complicate understanding of such frameworks and to develop literacies around their various meanings.

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Ben Nichols What Is a ‘Single-axis Analysis’?

Lecture Series Scale Scales are used to quantify properties such as length and temperature, or also to measure popularity and affect. But as Alice discovers in Wonderland, a change of scale can also have dramatic qualitative consequences. It disrupts customary ways of perceiving, acting, and being — to the point of feeling as ‘queer’ to her as a caterpillar’s metamorphoses. Helped by the arguably inextricable intertwinement of different meanings and aspects of scale, Alice’s experiences continue to provide apt metaphors for the disorienting importance and effects of scale and scaling at a time of hyperglobalization and the so-called anthropocene.

Scale is indeed a highly ambiguous notion, even when one only considers the meanings deriving from the Latin or Italian *scala*, ladder. It simultaneously denotes the whole ladder, one of its steps, and the relation between two steps: The scale of a cartographic map is the ratio between a distance on the map and a distance on the ground, but any particular length also defines a scale, and the range of scales from the subatomic to the planetary scale is part of the spatial scale. Paradoxically recursive, scale combines and helps mediate quantity and quality, as well as subjective perception, objective material properties, and contingent construction.

If different disciplines, discourses, and dispositives each have their privileged scales to which they tend to reduce others, what may be gained by thinking them together, acknowledging both the relative autonomy of particular scales — each with their own affordances, limitations, rules, even laws and ontologies — and their interdependence — each affecting and being affected by other scales? What is the critical purchase of developing multiscale architectures or patchworks of scale-specific, mutually inconsistent and irreducible descriptions, theories, and models? How might the tensions be made productive where they overlap or come into contact? The ICI’s Lecture Series ‘Scale’ will address such questions by reflecting upon the critical role of scale within and across a wide range of different fields.