



Colloquium: Witness: Humans, Animals, and the Politics of Becoming

Speaker:

Naisargi Dave, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

Date / Time:

May 2, 2013 - 3:45pm - 5:15pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Pixel A, APU

Abstract:

A prominent animal rights activist in New Delhi, explaining her relentlessness on behalf of animals, said to me the following: “I only wish there were a slaughterhouse next door. To witness that violence, to hear those screams . . . I would never be able to rest.” She was not alone among animal welfare activists in India in linking the witnessing of violence against an animal to the creation of a profound bond that demanded from them a life of responsibility. I argue in this talk that this moment of witnessing constitutes an “intimate event” in tethering human to non-human, expanding ordinary understandings of the self and its possible social relations, potentially blowing the conceit of humanity apart. But I also consider another reading, which is how this act of intimacy exacerbates the species divide as the witness hyperembodies herself as human, “giving voice” for the animal other which cannot speak. Throughout the talk, I consider how posthumanist perspectives might trouble both these interpretations, and ask what it would mean to take seriously the animal activist’s “becoming animal.”

A Note on the Speaker:

Naisargi Dave is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto. Her work concerns emergent forms of politics and relationality in India, specifically queer and posthuman. Dave’s articles have appeared in journals such as *American Ethnologist*, *Signs*, and *Feminist Studies* and in several edited volumes including the *Sarai Reader*, *Ordinary Ethics*, *Law Like Love*, and the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Gender in South Asia*. Her book, *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics*, is published by Duke University Press. She is currently working on her second book, *The Social Skin: Humans and Animals in India*.