

Flow and Friction (Santa Cruz, 15 May 26)

University of California, Santa Cruz

Deadline: Mar 27, 2026

Sarah Hwang

Symposium: Flow and Friction: Media Practices Across Global Asias.

Migration is always a choice to live. The opposite of migration is not citizenship. It is containment, the condition of being unfree shared with all who are considered less than citizens. -Jeff Chang

Any kind of belonging has a risk of being cast out.

-Chloé Zhao

Flow—the exchange of information, bodies and cultures—is a crucial element of media, its movements and transformations. It offers both emancipatory and coercive opportunities of instrumentalization, both distributive and accumulative. It represents the network in which media ebbs and flows in and out of relevance and it represents the relations created within the system and externally with other systems. Flow is both representation and performance, content and circulation, migration and containment. We can also think of flow as “exchange rates” of mobility and value that shape what (and who) can circulate, as well as the platforms, routes, and collective labor that sustain this circulation. Time and space collapse together in media’s flow to be spliced into digestible shards that can traverse endless planes so that we may participate in its velocity as concomitant viewers and practitioners.

Friction, then, is flow’s mirror image, its reflection reproduced and inverted all at once. Where flow conjures pictures of movement and travel in our minds, friction indulges our desire to remain still. It blocks, agitates and alters the pathways of media’s endless flow, creating tension and tolerance. Its sheer existence can generate heat and constraint that can disrupt laws of thermodynamics and nations. In Global Asias, these frictions often surface in struggles shaped by borders, land, militarization, and unequal access to infrastructure of transit and communication, which in turn shapes what gets to be mobile, visible, and legible. From films to Reels, theories and practices of media become sites of friction, offering a chance for the dispossessed to collectivize—or endure together—around the lamentations and celebrations of the environments generated by media’s capaciousness. They invite us to consider friction as strategy - how movement is slowed, rerouted, or reimagined collective practice.

Though flow and friction have their enmeshed problematic of combined colonial and imperial mechanisms, we also believe that they can be useful concepts to think through the transnational and deimperial techniques that Global Asias can offer. Global Asias offer an expansive model to consider the imaginary or symbolic Asia as a series of diasporic interpolations constituted by Asian, non-Asian, and indigenous peoples and cultures. It demonstrates that worlds are not singu-

lar, much like media and its practices, and are contingent upon the labor and bodies that engage and disengage with them. It is also the subject of concern for our research cluster and symposium, and we welcome papers from researchers, cultural practitioners, scholars and critics that intersect with flow and friction in the study of Global Asias.

We are thrilled to have Professor Lisa Nakamura join our symposium as the keynote speaker. She is the Gwendolyn Calvert Baker Collegiate Professor in the Department of American Cultures at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and her seminal work *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* received the Asian American Studies Association award in Cultural Studies in 2010. Her extensive research and publications on the intersections of digital media theory, Asian American studies, and race and gender demonstrates that media is both racial(ized) and racist.

Some possible topics include but are not limited to the following:

- Mobility, diaspora, borders and crossings
- Empire, coloniality, governance, and political economy
- Archives, institutions, and exhibitionary power
- Platforms, visibility, and access
- Visual, sound and material culture in circulation
- Imaginaries of Asia(s) in visual/audio media
- Media histories of Asia and its diasporas
- Material and ecological media environment
- Collective practice, counterpublics
- Indigenous media practices and ancestral technologies

*We welcome practice-based submissions, including screenings, artworks, lecture-performances, field reports, and collective projects.

Submission Guidelines

Abstract length: 250–300 words

Format: Please submit abstracts as a PDF file

Additional information: Please include a short bio (100 words). We have a small number of modest travel subsidies available for presenters. Since funds are limited, priority will be given based on financial needs. Please indicate in your submission if you would like to be considered.

Submission method: Please submit your abstract via email to flowandfrictionucsc@gmail.com

Submission deadline: March 27, 2026, 23:59 PST

Contact: For submissions and inquiries, please contact flowandfrictionucsc@gmail.com

Reference:

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