

<http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>

## Top of the heap: Angela Woods

2013-10-18 09:22:19

By Ekaterina Anderson and Maria Cecilia Dedios



*This week we feature two clusters of books, one on depression, the other on voice-hearing, which are at the top of the reading list for Angela Woods, [Lecturer in Medical Humanities at Durham University](#) and Co-Director of the [Hearing the Voice](#) project. Woods has also reviewed Anne Cvetkovich's [Depression: A Public Feeling](#) for this site.*

### Angela Woods

**Ann Cvetkovich**, [Depression: A Public Feeling](#) (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012)

**Alain Ehrenberg**, [The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age](#) (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2010)

**Junko Kitanaka**, [Depression in Japan: Psychiatric Cures for a Society in](#)

[Distress](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)

Depression three ways – or, rather, three absolutely fascinating explorations of this most mercurial of diagnostic and cultural categories. Cvetkovich, Ehrenberg and Kitanaka go beyond critiques of mainstream biomedical models of depression, and the global pharmaceutical industry which supports and is supported by them, to focus on its cultural logics. Whether as a resource for political activism in the ‘queer and arty’ worlds of contemporary US academia, an affliction of the autonomous and endlessly self-fashioning individual much valorised in late twentieth-century liberal democracies, or as the vector through which psychiatry has reshaped the meaning of certain forms of work-related suffering in Japan, depression in these books cannot be reduced to a simple inventory of symptoms because it emerges from places and sources as diverse as memoirs and first-person accounts, newspaper articles, data from ethnographic studies, fourth-century theological texts, hospital records, performance art, pharmaceutical promotional literature, and radical crafting practices. I am particularly interested in what these books have to say about the relationship between depression, labour and exhaustion, and will be presenting some preliminary thoughts on this at a [symposium on exhaustion](#) organised by Anna Katharina Schaffner at the University of Kent later this month.

**Lisa Blackman**, [\*Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation\*](#)  
(London: Sage, 2012)

**Tanya Luhrmann**, [\*When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God\*](#) (New York: Knopf, 2012)

**Ian Hacking**, [\*Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory\*](#) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Voice-hearing, or auditory verbal hallucinations, is another key area of interest for me through my work in the [Hearing the Voice](#) project, and these books both open up perspectives on the experience of hearing voices that are otherwise missing from mainstream hallucinations research. *Immaterial Bodies* makes a persuasive case for revisiting late nineteenth-century debates about perception, selfhood and embodiment in order both to interrogate and to further the interdisciplinary ‘turn to affect’ across the humanities and social sciences. In chapter six, “The Problem of Automatism: Divided Attention, Voice Hearing and Machinic Vision,” Blackman extends her work on [voice-hearing and embodiment](#) by reflecting on her own experience of relating to her mother’s voices. Engaging with Grace Cho’s 2008 book [Haunting the Korean Diaspora](#), she

considers the possibility that voices “might be thought of less as irrational perceptions and more as forms of embodied memory or modalities of communication that challenge both our understandings of madness and how we might approach memory and perception” (126). *When God Talks Back* also shines new light on what might otherwise be dismissed as “irrational perceptions,” this time in the context of a nuanced ethnography of American evangelical Christianity. Lurhmann’s penetrating discussion of the way in which hearing the voice of God is experienced, valued, sought after, and differentiated from other out-of-the-ordinary phenomena in this particular faith community similarly shows that hearing voices cannot be construed simply as a psychiatric or neurophysiological problem. Finally, I’ve relished returning to Ian Hacking’s masterpiece *Rewriting the Soul*, especially after meeting him briefly at a talk he gave on [Making up Autism](#). While Hacking’s account of the ‘looping effects of human kinds’ is indispensable for understanding how the contemporary figure of ‘[the voice-hearer](#)’ has come into being, I think the implications of his analysis of the multidimensional phenomenon of multiple personality disorder in America in the 1980s and 1990s have yet to be fully explored by researchers working on voice-hearing.

*Angela Woods is a [Lecturer in Medical Humanities at Durham University](#) and Co-Director of the [Hearing the Voice](#) project. Her first book, [The Sublime Object of Psychiatry: Schizophrenia in Clinical and Cultural Theory](#), was published in 2011, and her current research interests include the interplay between theoretical and subjective accounts of psychotic experience and new modes of ‘doing interdisciplinarity’ in the critical medical humanities. She is founding editor of the [Centre for Medical Humanities](#) blog.*

Image: Anselm Kiefer, [The High Priestess/Zweistromland](#) (1985-1989)

#### **AMA citation**

Anderson E, Dedios M. Top of the heap: Angela Woods. *Somatosphere*. 2013. Available at:  
<http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>.  
Accessed October 30, 2013.

#### **APA citation**

Anderson, Ekaterina & Dedios, Maria Cecilia. (2013). *Top of the heap: Angela Woods*. Retrieved October 30, 2013, from Somatosphere Web site: <http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>

**Chicago citation**

Anderson, Ekaterina and Maria Cecilia Dedios. 2013. Top of the heap: Angela Woods. Somatosphere.

<http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>  
(accessed October 30, 2013).

**Harvard citation**

Anderson, E & Dedios, M 2013, *Top of the heap: Angela Woods*, Somatosphere. Retrieved October 30, 2013, from

<<http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>>

**MLA citation**

Anderson, Ekaterina and Maria Cecilia Dedios. "Top of the heap: Angela Woods." 18 Oct. 2013. Somatosphere. Accessed 30 Oct. 2013.<<http://somatosphere.net/2013/10/top-of-the-heap-angela-woods.html>>