



## Meghanne Barker

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# Materializing Care

## Animating Objects of Intimacy in Kazakhstani Childhoods

This talk examines intimacy as a material and sensory process. It examines relations between humans and objects at two state-run institutions devoted to children in Almaty, Kazakhstan: a puppet theater and a temporary group home for children under six years of age, known as Hope House. Both the puppet theater and Hope House take advantage of ambiguities and murky boundaries between human and nonhuman objects. Puppeteers treat objects as social others. At the same time, the production of *Kashtanka*, examined in this project, rendered puppet artists' bodies instruments of performance, much like puppets. At Hope House, gifts and the material environs of children indexed care from adults, present and absent, while imaginative play rendered objects social actors. When one teacher draws parallels between the vulnerability of the toys and that of the children themselves, caring for toys becomes an ethical act that mirrors the work of caregivers. This presentation argues for looking at situated claims surrounding the material and immaterial, and at human-object interactions, in order to trace when such distinctions become salient and when they break down.

Friday, April 12, 3pm  
Woodburn Hall, Room 003

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