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“Theories of the Event in Climate Law and Policy”

The former head of the United Nations sees a “global suicide pact” in the insufficient legal and policy response to climate change. One explanation for inaction is that climate change is an intrinsically slow atmospheric process; it is not enough of an “event” to compete with other, more immediately pressing, happenings—a war, a car crash, a scandal, an election. In this essay, we delve into the “theory of the event” developed by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in order to explore the eventfulness of climate change, and to document efforts at event-making and event-suppression that leverage the temporality and categorical cohesiveness surrounding climate change. Our interest in examining climate change in light of this tradition of event theory is motivated by what we think of as event-frustration or event-longing: the sense that climate change is a rapid transformation, and yet is not apprehended as an event nor transforming our social structure in the ways necessary to mitigate its impacts. In Sahlins’ understanding, events are made as much as they happen; eventfulness is not defined by the intrinsic or scientific properties of happenings. Rather, happenings are given shape, tempo, and meaning through their intersection with pre-existing social structures, through what he calls a “structure of the conjuncture.” The Sahlinsian framework helps situate event-longing which emerges in the gap between claims about phenomena and social meaning, and provides a framework to trace the dialectical relationship between structure, happening, and event.

PLACE Zoom and In-Person. Zoom [registration link](#) on our website.
In-Person: Room 244, Berkeley Law | [Masking requirements](#).

TIME 12:45 – 2:00pm.

INFO <https://www.csls.berkeley.edu>

If you require an accommodation for effective communication (ASL interpreting/CART captioning, alternative media formats, etc.) to fully participate in this event, please contact csls@law.berkeley.edu with as much advance notice as possible and at least 7-10 days in advance of the event.

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