

Call for Papers

International Conference
Université de Montréal/ CELCP
April 21-23, 2022

Topic:

Planetary Drifts—Methodology, Technology, and the Creative Imagination in the Age of Planetary Transformation

The various connotations of the phrase “planetary drifts” evoke material and symbolic movements across different disciplines, geographies, and discourses. A geological, nautical, and idiomatic term that operates as noun and verb, “drift” refers to the slow but continuous accumulation and transfer of grounds and currents, to symbolic and material displacements, including the formation of new landscapes or “driftscapes” (e.g., snowbanks), the displacement and sedimentation of glacial and terra-structures, particular passages in mining operations, the manipulation of language, and the roaming of arguments and thoughts. Its metaphorical openness and its trans- and para-disciplinary usages reflect both the search for a new language and the need for methodological and creative innovation when encountering, representing, and theorizing a “world” that is, as indigenous scholar Margaret Kovach observes, “on the cusp of shape-shifting, metamorphosing, becoming” (7). This conference seeks to explore received, emerging, nascent, and speculative modes, technologies, and methods of knowledge production, research, and creation in response to known and unknown effects of current planetary transformations and their representation.

In the context of this conference, the notion of “becoming” entails the physical transformation of our “volatile planet” (Nigel Clarke, 55) and the ways in which planetary metamorphoses affect human agency, redefine vulnerability and loss brought on through planetary events, and create new human and non-human/human relations. These changes are also reflected in newly emerging disciplinary constellations, intersections, and collaborations, all indicative of the ways in which the natural sciences, earth sciences and the humanities are now forced to reevaluate and rearticulate their historically strained relationship. If the planet is a “hyperobject” (Tim Morton) that defies objectification and ought to be understood, as William Connolly argues, as unpredictable, self-organizing “temporal force fields” through which the effects of the global become visible (Dipesh Chakrabarty), the various current and projected intrinsic and anthropogenic alterations of the planet will both reconfigure possible ways in which the Earth becomes inhabitable and require “planet-centered thinking” (Dipesh Chakrabarty) to conceive new shared social, cultural and political imaginaries.

Rather than looking at these transformations in terms of the Anthropocene, impending apocalypse, and tech-fundamentalism, this conference seeks to explore “planetary entanglements” (Achille Mbembe) and asks what it means to contemplate and live with the incalculable and the unpredictable. While the latter two terms frequently refer to the occurrence of extreme weather events and the effects of climate change, they also oppose an algorithmic desire and impulse to create calculable risk scenarios, prediction fetishes, and the digitalization of the social, affective and public sphere as ways in which to maintain a prosthetic illusion of anthropocentric control

over planetary events. In fact, the incalculable, the incomprehensible, the “messy” (Katrin Pahl), the unpredictable, the volatile, and the creative and speculative imagination are of interest and intersect in the natural and social sciences, and the various humanities. Planetary transformations, then, are a philosophical, cultural and literary matter as much as they are a physical, geological, and bio-chemical matter. The former, however, as Tom Conley, notes, has remained woefully “under-examined.” This conference seeks to examine what Conley and others call “telemorphosis” and its impact on articulating and imagining planetary transformations otherwise. Telemorphosis designates the ways in which “mnemotechics, conceptual regimes, and reading . . . participate in or accelerate the mutations that extend, today, from financial systems to the biosphere” (20). Thus, in what ways does telemorphosis—theory, methodology, digital and analogue forms of narrative—further, manifest, and shift different understandings and perceptions of the planetary and planetary change?

Planetary transformations create new physical, digital, and cultural commons. The magnitude and shattering effects of planetary upheavals and drifts have the potential to generate both decolonial and communal practices of solidarity and a dramatically bifurcated and increasingly violent society based on entrenched exclusions and incarcerations of those who live in spaces most affected by planetary transformations. Finding new methodologies through which to address planetary transformations requires a profoundly decolonial and inclusive practice which, however, must remain alert to the particular and intersecting cultural and political geographies of race, settler violence and indigenous resurgence, time/temporality, gender/sex, and marked and unmarked bodies.

Conference papers may address the following questions:

- How do current planetary transformations and their representation force us to rethink the relationship between human and natural history?
- How do we rethink materialist accounts of history and human agency through deep, geological time or what Ian Baucom calls “history 4 degrees Celsius”?
- How might we differentiate climate change theories from planetary thinking? If nature and technology have been inextricably linked over the last two centuries (Raymond Williams), then how might the planetary function as a “messy” concept that reshuffles presumed and, at times, categorical relationships between nature, technology, and art?
- How might we shift, inflect, re-purpose research practices and methodologies anchored in the environmental, energy, and digital humanities to address planetary drifts and volatility?
- How do the creative imagination, the arts, and literature help generate new forms and methods of critique that respond to planetary changes?
- If the “planetary discloses the global” (Chakrabarty), how exactly does this process work in new and received regimes of representation?
- How do indigenous methodologies and forms of storytelling think and conceptualize planetary transformations?
- How might critical race theory, postcolonial, indigenous, feminist and queer, intersectional, and posthuman studies limit, challenge, and/or help conceptualize the planet’s shared “habitability” (Chakrabarty)?
- How do speculative, symbolic, and creative narratives of the planet generate new multi- and para-disciplinary terminologies and methodologies?

- In what ways do hyper- and digital capitalism drive and limit planetary transformations? How do configurations of loss, the incalculable, enchantment, and rupture provide new methodological trajectories of planetary thinking?
- What are “messy” methodologies and how can they be produced?

Titles and abstracts of conference contributions (200 words), along with a short bio (up to 150 words), must be sent to Heike Härting (heike.harting@umontreal.ca) and Imen Boughattas (imen.boughattas@umontreal.ca) by October 15, 2021. Abstract and papers may respectively be written and given in English or French.