

Queer Ethics and the Planetary

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In this call for papers for a one-day colloquium, we invite academic researchers to reflect on the different ways in which we might approach questions related to ethical issues from queer perspectives in a planetary context. If we return to the third volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Care of the Self* (1984), we have some ideas that could help us think about queer ethics today. In this fundamental text, Foucault analyses, from the point of view of a philosophy of ethics, the problems of pleasures, of the culture of the self, of the relationship between the self and others, of the body and of the soul. Furthermore, Foucault highlights that while the codes that “concern the economy of pleasures, conjugal fidelity, and relations between men may well remain analogous,” they will “derive from a profoundly altered ethics and from a different way of constituting oneself as the ethical subject of one’s sexual behavior” (239-240). We can consider that Foucault's critical reflection on the relationship between sexuality and ethics in his theories on sexuality has influenced the work of many queer theorists, including Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Bultler, Michael Warner, José Estaban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, and Sarah Ahmed, among others.

Queer constitutions of the self are variously and discursively situating, moving, unsettling and recomposing received subjectivities and boundaries of normativity, sex, gender, class and race. In this context, the planetary might simply suggest another way in which to think about the relationship between, for example, anthropogenic transformations of the planet and their uneven and often amorphous effects on the “psychosocial” and “psycho-terrestrial” formation of subjects (see Aidan Seale-Feldman 2019; Glen Albrecht 2019). Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Judith Butler’s recently published work *What World Is This? A Pandemic Phenomenology* (2022) raises a number of questions about what it means to orient the self—queer and otherwise—within a planetary context, that is, within a world in which, as the pandemic demonstrated, the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman are increasingly blurred and in which precarity, poverty, racism, transphobia, and sexism, in their multiple forms, are rampant. Under such conditions, Butler asks—as she has done throughout her work—, “*what makes a life livable?... how long can I live like this?*” (29) Her questions invoke central tenets of planetary thinking, noting that what makes “life livable” in the first place is the “habitability” (Chakrabarty)

of the planet itself, the existence of all life on the planet. She subsequently asks, “*what makes for an inhabitable world?*” (30) Some of her proposed answers bear directly on the topic of this colloquium. For, according to her, “the answer lies less in individual conduct or practice than in the forms of solidarity that emerge, across whatever distance, to produce the conditions for inhabiting the world.” (30)

The move towards making an “inhabitable world” in common understands both the self and the planetary in fundamentally ethical terms. For, on the one hand, as Butler argues, “To be a body at all is to be bound up with others” (37) and “to regard this “being bound up with one another” as a fundamental feature of who I am” (39). On the other hand, as Spivak suggests, the planetary constitutes a fundamentally ethical project, in which “to be human is to be intended to the other.” Another name for the planetary is “alterity,” a Spivakean caveat that guards against the environmentalist and globalist cooptation of the planetary as a concept. Instead, “alterity” resists definition and representation; it requires us “to imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities”, so that it “remains underived from us” (*Death of a Discipline* 73).

In this critical and theoretical context, we propose to return to issues that derive from what Foucault highlights as “a profoundly altered ethics and...a different way of constituting oneself as the ethical subject of one's sexual behavior” (240). However, we would like to explore the plurality of ethical possibilities that reflections and analyses from queer and planetary points of view open to us. In this colloquium, we propose to return to the question of the constitution of the self as an ethical subject in relation to the discipline of the individual, the regulation of the population, and societies of social control.

This one-day colloquium explores the plurality of ethical possibilities enabled by reflections and analyses from multiple queer and planetary points of view. We propose to address questions of the constitution of the self as an ethical and planetary subject, including biopolitical, geontopolitical and necropolitical discourses of the individual or of communities within social, social media, political, and cultural constraints. We would therefore like to think about subjectivity, subjugation, intersubjectivity, power, domination, submission and resistance as they impact the formation of queer planetary ethics. The colloquium seeks to generate a dynamic exchange about the various conjunctures of queer ethics, care and the planetary, for all three terms tend to question norms, normativity and normalization, as well as the limits of representation.

Reading the planetary through queer theory and ethics, and vice versa allows us to investigate the ways in which individual and social constructions of gender identity, gender expression and performance – in intimate, public and global spheres — and sexual experiences and practices in different cultural contexts, unsettle and shape emerging “inhabitations” (Butler) of planetary spaces. Some of the central questions raised include:

How might we queer the planetary imagination without reintroducing identitarian politics?

How might planetary epistemologies be shaped or shifted by queer epistemologies, and vice versa?

How might we discuss and articulate queer, gender and sexual orientations within disorienting and constantly shifting planetary spaces of power and resistance?

Please send 250-word proposals, including title and short biographical note to heike.harting@umontreal.ca, bend2502@usherbrooke.ca, and jorge_calderon@sfu.ca by March 17, 2023.

Works cited

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Butler, Judith. *What World Is This? A Pandemic Phenomenology*. Columbia University Press, 2022.

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