

The Scales of Queer Kinship: Contestations over (Anti-)Normativity

Panel Organizers:

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Confirmed Speakers:

Gero Bauer (Universität Tübingen): “From Chosen Families to Microbial Cohabitation: The Conceptual Range and Potential Limits of Queer Kinship”

Anne Potjans (HU Berlin): “Black/Female/Queer/Kin: (Im)Possible Junctions”

Over the last two decades, the relation between queerness and kinship has undergone dramatic transformations. While queerness as a long-presumed antithesis to familial life was influentially reinterpreted as a generative negativity that liberates from oppressive constraints of heteronormativity (Caserio et al. 2006; Halberstam 2008), this so-called ‘anti-social turn’ has more recently been joined by affirmative and reparative approaches in US-American queer theory. Much intellectual energy has been invested in addressing the different scales of queer kinship, reaching from horizontal arrangements among adults to vertical child-centered LGBTQIA+ constellations (Murray 2010; Goodfellow 2015). At the same time, this boom of queer kinship has been accompanied by critiques that view the very language of kinship in queer epistemologies with skepticism and see discourses and practices of queer kinship as always entangled in sprawling homonormativity (Duggan 2002).

This workshop aims to take stock of the scales of queer kinship in North America. We welcome contributions that theorize the usefulness and ambiguities of kinship as an analytical concept, and we solicit case studies that examine queer kinship across past and present manifestations. While scholarship has more broadly taken into account how the institution of the family is informed by histories of enslavement, settler colonialism, and their ongoing aftermath (Spillers 1987; Butler 2002; Rifkin 2024), we are interested in conversations about how, specifically, queer kinship is shaped by race (Somerville 2005; Eng 2010; Rodríguez 2013), trans genealogies (Lundy-Harris), class as well as religion (Plaster 2023), immigration status (Ritzholtz/Buxton 2021), disability (Kafai 2021), legal discourses (Leckey 2015), and questions of Native sovereignty (Tatonetti 2020).

We invite contributions on individual texts and contexts as well as specific concepts that (re-)position notions of queer kinship. To this end, we take our cue from Bradway and Freeman’s (2022) notion of “kincoherence” as the ambiguous flow of “forces, desires, practices, relations, institutions, and forms that render kinship a horizon of violence and possibility” (3).

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