

Queer Generosity - Approaching Something Like Queer Love in Always Precarious Times

This is an open call to academics and non-academics.

In any act of worldmaking, tensions between what is best for a community and best for individuals within that community form axes around which debate, contention, struggle, compromise are all but inevitable. Particularly in queer worldbuilding, with our commitment to radical self-determination, we worry over what is good for the individual queer while also keeping an eye on what is good for the larger queer community and its cultural and political projects.

Too often, such tensions have degraded into skirmishes over strategy that cast complex issues as oversimplified binaries (e.g., assimilate or opt out) and that do not generatively forward creative possibilities for queer worldmaking. Instead, we see such tensions not just as opportunities for misunderstandings and conflict, but also as the possibility to offer and receive gifts -- gifts of experience, insight, embodied struggle, and queer wisdom -- that collectively constitute queer worldbuilding. Such possibilities often arise out of robust conversation amongst queers working, thinking, and feeling their way across multiple and intersecting lines of not just sexuality and gender but also race, ethnicity, class, and ability. As such, we advocate for *queer generosity*, a conceptual, theoretical, and strategic approach that we hope this special issue will help develop.

Generosity is historically embedded within economies of exchange and gift giving. In the ancient Greek tradition, Aristotle (*NE*) insists that for gifts to be virtuous, they must be given freely and with the right intentions. However, sometimes rhetors (un)intentionally offer terrible gifts, those that Jennifer Clary-Lemon describes as “gifts we do not want to receive” (n.p.). As with all gifts articulated within economies of exchange, there rests a presumption of reception, response, and an acknowledgment of the relationships that emerge. These presumptions, further, are shaped by race, class, gender, age, ability, geography, and sexuality.

However, while always influenced by the uneven power dynamics of the categories above, generosity need not be imagined within economies of exchange. While contributions may certainly go beyond the boundaries of this call, we highlight three areas where queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, and thinkers engaged in class critique might be able to extend generosity beyond the logics of exchange: embodiment, affect, and epistemology.

Embodiment: As feminist philosopher Rosalyn Diprose suggests, generosity “is an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to others” (p. 4). Diprose’s notion of corporeal generosity is not caught up in the logics of exchange but in the construction of the self that is necessary to move us toward social justice. Nelson Rodriguez suggests that trans generosity “opens up the possibility of framing queer embodiments more generally as forms of ‘bodily generosity’ that can potentially become a resource for students in terms of imagining their own bodies and identities as sites of ‘endless becoming’” (p. 270). The bodily generosity envisioned by Rodriguez opens questions of bodies moving through time and space. Bodies move and act through spacetime which suggests ways of movement and

being together in ecologies of human and non-human agents. We note Rodriguez's connection between the ontology of bodily generosity and the open space for considering generosity as a transformative experiences, experiences that are fraught with asymmetrical power dynamics.

Affect: Similarly, performance studies scholar Jill Dolan's notion of queer critical generosity encourages ways of giving back to artists in ways that "draw out [a piece of art's] borders, boundaries, and beauty as evocatively" as possible (Dolan, n.p.). Dolan links the powerful experiences we have in the theater with the drive to use that affective response beyond the fleeting moments during a show. The generous critic is one who both describes those feelings and offers ways to carry them forward beyond the moments of our viewing. Dolan states that "critical generosity is a necessary gesture in how we see the relationship of performance (and the arts in general) to the project of world building, as it allows us to think specifically beyond the present of reception into the near future of potential activism and engagement" (n.p.). What is important to recognize here in Dolan's notion of critical generosity is that the transformative effects of experience lead to material action beyond the present.

Epistemology: Generosity may also be understood as an epistemology, a way of knowing and responding to others. For example, though not framed as such, Eve Sedgwick's "reparative reading" can be understood as a gesture of generosity free from the logics of exchange. Such a reading imagines space and places for queer survival where none may exist. In the reparative reading, the critic approaches another not to offer her a gift but to treat what the other offers *us* with a kindness of spirit that resists doing harm.

Finally, in times of crisis, critical orientations toward violence make generosity seem like a weak political stance. However, as Isaac West notes, "[m]ore generous modes of queer critique are not naïve nor do they excuse those moments where norms and normativities are reinforced more than they are challenged" (p. 541) Rather, generous critiques can create new forms of life that help us imagine creative reasons to go on living.

Whether structured within the logics of exchange, embodiment, affect, or epistemology, the indeterminacy of reception, response, and acknowledgment demanded by generosity reveals tensions between the radical right for self-determination and communities of practice that this special issue seeks to engage. These tensions leave us with several questions that we hope this special issue will address:

- What queer tensions exist between communities of practice and the right to self-determination? And how might such tensions be approached generously?
- What technologies for the transmission of generosity are available for rhetors and how might our audiences respond to those technologies?
- What criteria are necessary for determining who should receive generosity, and how?
- How might queer generosity shape our conceptions of politics and the political?

The contributions in this special issue may come at these questions obliquely. We are specifically seeking contributions from scholars, teachers, and activists from historically oppressed groups and/or contributions that attend to the intellectual contributions from these groups.

Contributors may submit original academic research or relevant non-academic research (7,000-9,000 words). We welcome traditional, queered, and queering forms for this special issue. We also seek shorter pieces for a forum discussion (4,000-5,000 words) that responds to the following question:

What are queer and trans politicians, scholars, and artists doing to advance queer generosity?

Think, for example, of the Silence = Death campaign as a collective struggle rhetorically linking speech with life and working against the cruel negligence of the Reagan administration. This is a politics of visibility built on the increasing call to "come out" (cf. Harvey Milk, Jean O'Leary's Day of Visibility). Contrarily, Sylvia Rivera's "Y'all Better Quiet Down" was an individual critique against the liberal gaystream political activism of the time. "YBQD" disrupted the collective's forward movement toward an exclusionary gay rights agenda. Forum contributors will articulate a living individual or collective that illustrates what queer or trans* people are doing currently to help us think more fully about queer generosity.

In your proposal, please indicate the contribution type: academic research, non-academic research, or forum contribution.

Timeline:

250-500 word proposals due:	December 1, 2020
Requests for full manuscripts:	December 18, 2021
Full manuscripts due:	June 1, 2021
Publication:	Winter/Spring 2022 vol. 9, no. 1

Please submit proposals to Timothy Oleksiak (Timothy.Oleksiak@umb.edu) and Jonathan Alexander (jfalexan@uci.edu). Please feel safe and free to inquire with questions or concerns before deadlines.