

5th Graduate Conference in Political Theory, Sciences Po Paris

Keynote Speaker: Judith Butler

Theme: Politics of the Sensate Subject

The 5th Graduate Conference in Political Theory of Sciences Po Paris will be held on **June 28-29, 2017**. Each year, the conference brings together young political theorists representing a variety of traditions and methods to discuss the work of one prominent author. This edition will focus on the work of **Judith Butler (Maxine Elliott Professor, UC Berkeley)**, who will be out keynote speaker.

A well-known public intellectual, Judith Butler has explored the disquieting relationship between subjects and norms through acclaimed books on gender identity and vulnerability. Her more recent works, from *Senses of the Subject* to *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, invite us to reconsider in the light of a critique of the subject the ethical and political issues at stake in social relations. By redefining the subject in terms of interdependence, Judith Butler argues for a “social ontology” which grants a central place to the **concept of sensitivity**.

Sensitivity, understood as the responsiveness characteristic of living beings, refers to both the possibility of being affected by one’s environment (by others, their discourses and their norms), and the ability to react to it. This notion allows Butler to tie together the concepts of normativity, performativity, vulnerability and viability in an original way. Sensitivity allows us to make sense of how the life of individuals, and their potential precariousness, depends to large extent upon the patterns of conduct that are valued in a given society. This approach gives rise to a number of questions that this conference aims to explore. Our guiding question will be the following:

Against or beyond liberalism’s classical view, what politics does this alternative conception of the subject yield?

The objective of this conference is thus twofold. First, it aims to reflect upon the principles and modalities of Judith Butler’s arguments about sensitivity. Second, the conference aims to discern the potential consequences and applications of this notion of the subject’s sensitivity to a range of political questions such as:

- **Political representation and collective action:** in particular the performative dimensions of representation connected to the constitution of the “people” and its sovereignty, which don’t only rely on speech acts and other links between the representatives and the represented, but also include other forms of appearance within the public sphere such as the plural and self-made assembly of bodies.
- **Resistance, pacifism and critiques of power:** the critique of power in Judith Butler’s work is twofold. On one hand, she analyzes the mechanics of power by identifying their norms, violence, and extra-judicial measures; on the other hand, she focuses on emerging forms of resistance, such as occupation, that challenge the traditional differentiation between the private and the political roles of the body.
- **Technique, transhumanism and anthropocentrism:** her desire to not surrender the theme of “life” to anti-abortion movements leads Judith Butler to wonder what a

viable life can be. This question lies within a more global critique of humanism, which encourages us to question humanity's dependence on technique, and to think about non-human forms of life.

- **War, violence and precarization of life:** how the traditional approaches of violence, war and terrorism are redefined in light of the plurality of the conceptions of life, and more specifically, the distinction between grievable and non-grievable lives.
- **Gender and vulnerability:** gender is the paradigmatic object of Judith Butler's philosophy of vulnerability because it is constructed, as well as undone, assigned, as well as subverted, within discourses and speech acts whose character is normative and/or performative.

All contributions that are related to one of these topics are encouraged, but we also welcome propositions connected to other fields of interest.

Only graduate students who have not defended their PhD are eligible. Each two-hours-long session of the conference will concentrate on two to three papers and will be chaired by a Sciences Po graduate student. Presentations will be followed by a Q&A session open to the public.

Breakfast, lunch and refreshments will also be provided for the duration of the conference. Unfortunately, Sciences Po is not able to provide funds for housing and transportation.

Submission Information

- The **submission deadline** for proposals is **March 3rd, 2017**. All proposals should be sent to
sciencespotheorygrad@gmail.com
- Proposals and final papers should be written in English or French, which are the two working languages of the graduate conference.

Please send us:

- A detailed abstract (between 500-750 words) of your proposal in PDF format, prepared for blind review.
- A separate document, mentioning your name, the title of your proposal, and your institutional affiliation.

Selection procedure

- Political theory students from Sciences Po doctoral school will select approximately 13 proposals on a blind basis.
- The selected participants will be notified of their acceptance by April 15, 2016. All the other proposals will be acknowledged.

Selection committee: Bescont Amélie, De Barros Thomas, Estève Adrien, Millou Vincent, Richard Lucile, Xhardez Catherine

For any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at:
sciencespotheorygrad@gmail.com

For further information on other activities and events organized by the Political Theory Program at Sciences Po, please visit (and like) our **Facebook page:** Sciences Po, Paris - Théorie Politique.