

Amy Marvin

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2025 Thinking Trans / Trans Thinking Conference

Skillman Library 206 / Gendebien Room (and virtual)

Welcoming Remarks: Or, A Conference at the End of the World

Lately a lot of your trans friends have been trying to figure out ways to cope with stress and uncertainty, a practice Florence Ashley refers to as palliative trans care. I've been turning back to my own status as a failed musician, listening to countless hours of jazz. In a science fiction film I watched over the summer, the interstellar sound artist Sun Ra and his outer space Arkestra offer the repeated refrain: "It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?"

It's with this collision of endings and beginnings that I welcome and deeply thank you for joining me at this 2025 Thinking Trans Conference. To introduce myself, I am your host, Amy Marvin. I am Louise M. Olmsted Fellow in Ethics here at Lafayette College, and I have some of my own remarks as a vessel of right and wrong. It is scary to say some things right now and that is why I think I should say them. We're also meeting today in a situation of loss in our Lafayette College community, missing a friend, classmate, and student who should still be with us. I'd like to observe a brief moment of silence for those who we have lost on the way here.

Originally when I proposed this conference I planned for what I call a 'hang out' style, inviting an interesting group of scholars to our campus with the central goal of conversation and collaboration from around the world. Even with federal government threats against funding and the attempt to wither away trans rights in public life, the conference could still provide a space for thinking trans, and trans thinking, to flourish.

And what a year it has been for trans thinking! I had to turn away over 100 excellent proposals for this conference alone and I still feel bad about it. The past year has seen the publication of the *Trans Philosophy* anthology, big conferences on trans theory and trans studies across the world, and a bloom in grants for trans studies workshops and archival research. It is more than I could have imagined just about ten years ago when I was first involved in this conference series as a grad student who was very afraid to talk about my trans history out loud. And, though I am about to wander into a more somber set of tones, we will still be a space for the ongoing work of thinking trans during these two days.

And yet Gaza is burning under bombs paid for by a US administration that explicitly desires more beach real estate. And here we are atop Lafayette Mountain, with Sullivan Road winding up and down towards the town of the Treaty of Easton, which marked the expulsion of indigenous people from Lenapehoking. Rumeysa Ozturk was taken away the other day for legal participation in journalism.

“It’s after the end of the world. Don’t you know that yet?”

The work of organizing the conference during these past few months has revealed the ways that the current US administration is actively attempting to block trans studies, trans theory, and free inquiry more broadly. It began during February, when I first fielded emails concerned about the climate in the US given the crackdowns on trans people through Executive Orders. It then ramped up this month due to reckless actions against immigrants, visitors, and other nations, as if repeating the word ‘security’ means anything during an assault on habeus corpus, due process, and the first amendment. Visitors to our international conference suddenly had to worry about the legal speech contained on their phones, Kafkaesque Visa laws confounding trans travel, and news

about increased investigations and indefinite detentions. This week, on Monday, I found out that universities in other parts of the world have upgraded academic travel to the U.S. to the status of a “serious risk,” especially for a conference on trans studies.

Our ability to truly stand for the kinds of academic freedom that have, with some complexity, enabled trans studies to flourish is tenuous. Our political opposition party, in the face of waning approval and pleas to do anything at all, has decided to rot in middle-ground mediocrity, courting anti-immigrant and anti-trans sentiment alike as if democracy will be restored once we have hoisted our spines far enough outside our bodies. I speak to you today from an institution that has been directly put on a list. I have watched how Columbia University has responded. How will we all respond?

Trans people are increasingly worried about the US from outside and from within. In a callback to unpopular W. Bush-era paranoia, Canadians are erroneously accused of passing “weapons of mass destruction” (i.e. fentanyl) across borders and immigrants are flown without charges or sentence limits to work camps that delight in torture and dehumanization. In such a political environment, what is to stop a slip in language from a despised “gender ideology” to a designation of “gender terrorism?” This is an affective atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and defensiveness within and across borders - a direct block to the work we have been doing of connection and care.

And yet, there is something to the hyperbolic response that I find strangely empowering. I remember watching the passing of Executive Orders in January alongside celebrations, including by professional academic philosophers, that the trans menace had finally been defeated and society would soon come to its senses. But where once there was a common sense of morphology and chromosomes, there is now an

anxious retreat to possible gametes. And here we stand, not an abstract idea of identity or a metaphysical intended pathway gone awry, but a world-historically compelling way of living. People want to be around us and sometimes even be us because we remain virtuous and powerful and creative. We push forward thought, critique, and art, share literature and films, and create spaces that trans people and non-trans people alike want to share in. My memories of the 90s and 2000s were of transness as a source of laughter, a pretend, make-believe, and terrifying way of living that could be ignored and disposed of. As trans people in the US, and internationally, our haters have grown obsessed and contorted not because we are trivial but instead because we are in possession of such undeniable persistence and fortitude. Again, Athens has been slightly woken from its slumber, and it seems rather hangry. I say, let it seethe as we continue to make our lives and the lives of others more livable, more beautiful, and more interesting.

“It’s after the end of the world, don’t you know that yet?”

For now, we have our own academic conference during these next two days, and many presentations from a variety of perspectives to learn from and dialogue with. This space is real and I hope we can enjoy what we have while it is still here.

At the conclusion of polemics, there are practicalities. Having affirmed my interest in trans creativity and thinking, I want to introduce a special issue I’ll be co-editing of *Puncta: A Journal of Critical Phenomenology* with Chris Jingchao Ma. It will be published open access, with submissions due on July 15th. We will circulate the call over the course of our conference and I hope you will consider submitting if it seems like a good home for your work.

During this conference I ask that you try to make as many friends and hold as many conversations as you can, including with those joining us on Zoom. We will stick strictly to the time limits, so please be available on time even as you enjoy the break periods. With the exception of the book panel and keynotes, you will each have 15 minutes to present, so please stick to your time. I will tell you when 5 minutes are left, then 1 minute as is the tradition among stand-up comedians, and finally you will know you are out of time because I will politely ask you to stop. I also ask, since this is a social event, that you be respectful of others - invite them into conversation when they'd like to be invited, but also give them space when they want space.

As always, though I consider the words I just gave my own responsibility, such events are never possible without the support and work of many. I wanted to thank, first of all, the Lafayette College Philosophy Department, and the related support for this conference by the Louise M. Olmsted Fund for Ethics. I wanted to thank Meghan Masto specifically, who has been supportive of the conference and did crucial work with making sure that we provide a safe and supportive environment for attendees. I also wanted to thank Laura McKee, our office administrator, whose assistance is always crucial when planning events for our department at Lafayette. The LGBTQ Studies Program at Syracuse University, just up the road from us, gave us funds to allow for a complete set of meals, which is crucial for accessibility as we make sure everyone doesn't have to move too much up and down Lafayette Mountain. Assisting with technology today will be Isobel Bess, who has volunteered her many sound and video talents to help our conference run as smoothly as possible. And finally, I wanted to thank you, dear attendee, for joining us for a thinking trans conference at the end of the world.

For now, we will have time for a break until we reconvene a little bit before 10am for a panel on Trans Resistance.