

PLANETARY SOCIAL THOUGHT

**Bronislaw Szerszynski
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Seminar room 3 (History),
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University of Vienna**

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In contrast to the 'global turn' in the social sciences in the 1990s, there has recently been signs of a 'planetary turn' that is more sensitive to the dynamism of the Earth system, not least in response to the growing awareness of anthropogenic climate change and the idea of the Anthropocene. But what would it mean to take the planet seriously in social thought – not just as a stable backdrop for social life, or even just as imposing practical limits on what it is possible for social life to do, but as providing, in its capacity for self-differentiation, the enabling and shaping conditions for social life itself? In this talk I will set out the idea of 'planetary social thought' that Nigel Clark and I have been developing over the past few years. I will explain our approach to analysing social life as just one phenomenon produced by a self-organising planet over deep time; discuss the way that this approach involves negotiating between different ways of knowing developed by the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities - and in non-western cultures; outline our two key concepts of 'planetary multiplicity' and 'earthly multitudes'; and use a few examples to illustrate how this way of thinking can provide new diagnoses of the present and suggest a wider range of possible social futures.

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