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Queer critical intersections with ecology and religion. Review of Bauman, W. A. (Ed.) (2018). *Meaningful Flesh: Reflections on Religion and Nature for a Queer Planet*. Goleta, California: Punctum Books.

Intersecciones críticas de lo queer con la ecología y la religión. Lectura crítica de Bauman, W. A. (Ed.) (2018). *Meaningful Flesh: Reflections on Religion and Nature for a Queer Planet*. Goleta, California: Punctum Books

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Religion and Nature are queer phenomena; that is the premise of *Meaningful Flesh*, a transdisciplinary collection of critical essays that examine the academic intersections of queer theory, religious studies, and ecocriticism. It has been a long time since pioneer scholars, such as John Boswell (1981) and Marcella Althaus-Reid (2002), explored the history of religious traditions from a gay and lesbian studies perspective.



Nevertheless, very few scholars have ventured into the fields of religion and ecology from a queer critical view. Except maybe for Daniel T. Spencer's groundbreaking book *Gay and Gaia* (1996), a pioneer scholarly endeavor to incorporate insights of ecology, environmental ethics and liberation theologies, queer scholars have rarely examined the intersection of religion and ecology. Indeed, these disciplines rarely come across with each other. Therefore, cultivating the skill of transdisciplinary thinking, the chapters of this volume generate an intellectual ecosystem in which scholars can strengthen the background and general knowledge of the interrelationships among religion, nature, and understandings of queer phenomena. As such, *Meaningful Flesh* becomes distinctive in its academic scope and novel critical insights. While each essay creates a unique contribution, the notion of "performativity" links them in fascinating queer ways.

In the book introduction, Daniel T. Spencer describes his transition from being "a deeply closeted gay man" (p.15), during his student's years, to the pioneer scholar who later came to explore the interconnections between ecology, theology and same-sex desire. While supporting a provocative and seductive "sense of the sacred found in the interconnectedness of all", Spencer proposes an ethical shift, from "an anthropocentric, human-centered worldview" to an "ecocentric, all-of-life centered worldview" (p.16). The scholar maintains that various notions from post-structuralist gender theories, ecofeminism and liberation theologies hold the potential for articulating an ethic of environmental sustainability that could incorporate all levels of our existence. He goes on to argue that same-sex desire, and queer theory from an academic field, reclaim "eros" as a life-force that informs and shapes our orientation and directionality towards the world. Drawing on critical thinking, Spencer encourages deconstructing hegemonic dualism and binary notions that have shaped cultural understandings of nature, divinity and humanity, and the respective relationship among them. Offering the reader with a genealogy of the places and times that shaped his prominent study *Gay and Gaia*, we are intellectually prepared for the transdisciplinary thinking that lies in the essays ahead.

Carol Wayne White's chapter, "Polyamorous Bastards: James Baldwin's Opening to a Queer African-American Religious Naturalism", explores how questions of race, religion, and queer theory help to detect the existence of an African American "religious naturalism" in James Baldwin's writing. White is a preeminent feminist scholar-critic well-renowned for her award-winning study *Black Lives and Sacred Humanity* (2016). In this chapter, she examines five of Baldwin's major works and in so doing she identifies a queer ecosystem of affection. Following White, Baldwin draws on the metaphors of "bastard" and "freak" to portray the intricate crossroad of queerness, blackness, and religious rhetoric (p.24). Baldwin's literary use of the "bastard" term epitomized the moral paralysis he found rooted in an American psyche suffering from the excesses perpetrated by white supremacy's hegemonic discourses. In her sharp analysis, White points out how Baldwin challenged America's white supremacy, the nation's hegemonic framework for evaluating and controlling other peripheral manifestations of desire. Contrary to the fixed binaries employed by both, white Anglo-Saxon supremacy and Black church religious tradition, Baldwin created a queer and liminal religious topography in which "polyamorous bastards" wander in constant nomadic longings.

Baldwin introduced his concept of love to address various forms of alienation experienced by Americans who desired a meaningful connection with otherness. Nevertheless, far from being a lofty abstraction, Baldwin's view of love involved a radical re-consideration of human relations, inviting individuals and communities to welcome and embrace the otherness they habitually feared or dismissed. Baldwin's concept of love demanded exceptional acts of courage and sometimes risky alternatives on the part of blacks and whites. Therefore, this queer view of love became a creative counter-hegemonic means of synthesizing the affective and ethical with socio-political radicalisms. White reads Baldwin's use of "bastard" as a textual trope which celebrates the emergence of an African American religious naturalism that defies normative views of humanity (p.25). White's analysis of Baldwin's self-understanding as an outsider celebrates nomadic, polyamorous relations as a form of religiosity. With its naturalistic foundation, this view of religiosity refuses the conventional "isms" based on normalized binary structures that sustain asymmetrical relationships and divide our desire for connection with others. Therefore, Baldwin's religious naturalism embraces a queer

positionality — or what Michael Warner has termed as resistance “to regimes of the normal” (1993, p.xxvii). As a ratification of queerness, such African American religiosity demands a radical relationality in which human experiences of love may conquer arbitrary boundaries orchestrated by hegemonic cultural discourses. White’s chapter is a reminder of how identities are affirmed through a continuous process which always incorporates historical specificity, diversity, and a dynamic processing of becoming.

White’s critical proposal of an African American religious naturalism delivers the motivation and vision for sustained social justice activism in the twenty-first century. Along with its stress on profound connectivity —local and global ecosystems, and the universe— this religious experience pursues a transformed existence. Thus, African American religious naturalism underlines constant, expansive perceptions from the wisdom beliefs that obstinately encourage kindness, empathy, and compassion for various kinds of natural processes, including human ones. As such, Baldwin’s writing celebrates a radical relationality, exposing humanity as an open-ended project, rather than a map of fixed identities.

Jacob J. Erickson’s chapter, “Irreverent Theology: On the Queer Ecology of Creation”, introduces the reader to Karen Barad’s feminist philosophy of science, from examples of Isabella Rossellini’s queerness of nature, to Martin Luther’s incarnational theology. In so doing, Erickson produces an encounter between Barad’s concept of “post-humanist performativity” and Luther’s unique understanding of the incarnation of Spirit in Creation. The author considers the possibility of climate change crisis as an important occasion to be in love with and entangled with a divine performance. Erickson’s eco-theology adopts “a constructive posture of irreverence” which intends to destabilize Christian’s theological views on “God” and “Nature” (p.59). The author criticizes hegemonic theological discourses that frequently read biblical texts in a blatantly literalistic way. Such theological perspectives often contribute to cultural rhetoric which celebrates and endorses heterosexual life and relationships as the normative framework. Consequently, those theological viewpoints often blame queer lives by calling them deviants or anti-natural. In this line, Rossellini’s queries subtly confront the notions of heterosexist theologies and hermeneutics. Using queering Martin’s Luther’s theology of incarnation, Erickson proposes “the potential for a queer incarnation of divinity in which that divinity is caught up —and even plays several roles— in the performative indeterminacy of the earth and of the cosmos” (p.60). In the audacious slippage of God and Earth, “creation” indicates a divinely queer ecology. Accordingly, theology turns irreverent and, hence, queer. As Erickson goes on to maintain: “Our language, speaking of God and creation, is carnivalesque, topsy-turvy, performative, animated, vibrant, constantly changing shape and drag” (p.74). Under this viewpoint, theology produces queer ecologies, specifically in attempts of utterances, both known and unknown. Indeed, even the most stable or fixed theological structures comprise multiple instabilities. Henceforth, Erickson argues that we can never fully speak of this divinity related to us, and we can never fully make use of all the possibilities when speaking of the Divine.

Jay Emerson Johnson’s chapter, “Liberating Compassion: A Queerly Theological Anthropology of Enchanting Animals” opens a reflection that deconstructs the rigid anthropocentric doctrine of the *imago Dei* (the image of God) to discuss, and reconsider, the theological status of animals. The concept of *imago Dei* has allowed Christians to disregard several issues of “evolutionary theodicy” and the prevalence of suffering throughout the animal world (p.84). Johnson’s amusing reflection emerges from the grief generated by the death of his dog. Triggered by those personal reflections, he discusses the complexities of the “master/pup” relationship, one that is physically affectionate. Johnson’s multi-year relationship with his dog helps him to move beyond the dominant queer criticism, on gender and sexuality, and lay focus on human deeply contested relationship with animals; something “that is usually not sexual in the more common genital connotations of that word, though the relationship is certainly physically affectionate” (p.85). Distorting hierarchical boundaries between “master” and “pup” relationship, Johnson examines the performativity of queer affection and particularly the human/pet phenomenon in some areas of metropolitan gay life. In so doing, this chapter explores meaningful questions regarding our non-human-self and its relation to living, dying, and thinking.

Whitney A. Bauman's chapter, "Queer Values for a Queer Climate: Developing a Versatile Planetary Ethic", discusses climate change, globalization, and queer theory as the intellectual intersection for new alternatives of being. This essay is a manifesto that considers the material elements of what Bauman calls "a versatile planetary ethic". (p.103). Discussing the ever present current issues of globalization and climate change, Bauman cleverly "queers the planet", allowing the reader to "break out of the thought habits of modern scientific reduction" which, according to the author, correspond to "the habits of becoming according to the laws of capitalist reproduction" (p.109). In Bauman's view, proving versatile in planetary ethics requires being able to discern "the contexts and contours of our planetary becoming" (p.110). The author carries the reader into a queer time and space of "non-locality in quantum physics" in which humans can introduce a new planetary ethics to "think ourselves back into our animality and embeddedness" (p.113).

Finally, Timothy Morton's chapter, "Queer Green Sex Toys", is an eco-critical essay that builds an intersection between queer criticism and several current issues of postmodern thinking. Morton begins by queering the "law of noncontradiction" that dominates western thought through the notion of performativity, in which phenomena paradoxically are and are not what they seem to be (p.126). The chapter takes the reader from Aristotle to Hume, Kant, Heidegger, and Derrida to then reflect on the complex metaphysics of presence that natural sciences and queer theories sometimes perform and sometimes strip off. Morton challenges the strict "agrilogistics" and the constant acts of social violence which emerged during the Neolithic and continue to shape contemporary society (p.131). On the other hand, he considers that queer ecology undermines agrilogistics, as also does queer sex and the playfulness of toys, offering non-hegemonic possibilities for our time. According to Morton, queer eco-criticism allows us to overcome the violent binaries constantly endorsed and policed to preserve the hegemonic foundations of agrilogistics.

The intersection of queer theory and ecocriticism suggests a fundamental issue within postmodern thought in general: namely, if we live in a society which offers no transcendental foundations, how do we come to articulate an environmental ethic to protect? After all, we could probably ask ourselves: do we have time to expand on these theoretical dilemmas now that we face an urgent global crisis? In this vein, the authors in this academic volume seem to agree that these ecological and global environmental problems urgently demand new transdisciplinary responses from scholars working in the field of the humanities. *Meaningful Flesh* presents an intersectional, thought-provoking, and fascinating collection of critical essays. Each chapter offers an extensive bibliography on various issues on religion, sexuality, race, ecocriticism, and ethics which substantiates the queer potential of going beyond. We should not forget that queer theoretical analysis is itself an evolving and versatile academic discourse that persistently shifts and adopts diverse new cultural and disciplinary configurations. Additionally, within the hybrid context of religious scholarship, queer criticism continues to develop its conjectural pertinence and suitability. Accordingly, queering religion has something to do with enlarging the scope and traditional object of study in religion. The virtuosity of these essays is that after reading them, we will not think about those subjects in the same way. Consequently, queering issues of religion and nature triggers new and transformative possibilities, so crucial during the current times of the Anthropocene. Although these essays differ in their themes and scope, the authors seem to agree that queer theory can offer relevant insights on how to achieve a better planetary future.

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