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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines arguments within religion and ecology, particularly within the ecospiritual movement and methodology called the new cosmology, that humans should cultivate and sustain emotional relationships with nature by caring for nonhuman others as our evolutionary kin. Focusing on the U.S. Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita, and the British Petroleum oil spill, I argue that new cosmology affords few opportunities to think about intimacies with severely damaged and toxic environments. I consider how to rethink common themes in religion and ecology, like sacrality, kinship, and hope, within the context of encounters with toxic creatures and damaged ecosystems. I argue that cultivating affinity and attachment with/in ecological destruction requires thinking through how so-called “negative” affects like fear, disgust, revulsion, melancholy, shame, and despair can be an important part of ecological theory and activism. Furthermore, I contend there are other avenues for theorizing desire and kinship at the theoretical intersections of social marginalization and environmental decline that are more helpful for speaking to intimacies with and in damaged environments.

Desiring Devastated Landscapes: Love After Ecological Collapse

by

Courtney O'Dell-Chaib

B.A. Baylor University, 2004
M.A. Texas Woman's University, 2007
M.T.S. Brite Divinity School, 2009
M.Phil. Syracuse University, 2015

DISSERTATION

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To the Gulf and her communities whose voices and challenges I am sure I did not do justice, but they remain the reason to keep trying.

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Introduction

Late April 2010, another “storm” is brewing in the Gulf of Mexico. Still in recovery from the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Gulf residents painfully returned to the national spotlight as reports slowly revealed that a British Petroleum (BP) drilling rig, *Deepwater Horizon*, exploded killing eleven workers and leaving a sea-floor oil gusher. BP’s public relations quickly jumped on the offensive claiming they had the plans and resources to stop the spill. But, as days passed, it became frustratingly evident that no such plans and protections were in place. Live feed cameras placed near the destroyed wellhead depicted in real time what looked like a volcanic eruption spewing clouds of ash. This eruption was an estimated 53,000 barrels of crude oil per day gushing from the well. Despite numerous attempts to cap the wellhead, and mounting anger and frustration at the seeming inability of anyone to stop the spill, it was not until July 15th, 2010 that the wellhead was capped. Media reports depicted tar ball littered beaches, rainbow-slick seas, gasping wildlife, struggling residents, and transnational corporations juggling the blame in an endless loop. The nearly five million barrels of crude oil spilling into the waters, plus the approximately 1.07 million gallons of toxic Corexit dispersants used to sink the oil, continues to result in extensive damage to marine habitats, marine industries, and the health of Gulf-residents, human and non-human.

At the time of the spill my days were spent in a neonatal intensive care unit in southeast Texas. I'd given birth to a "micro preemie," a child so small and underdeveloped he looked more like a piece of overripe fruit than a human. He could not breathe or eat on his own. Some surgeries removed pieces of his anatomy and others added synthetic solutions. He was sustained by machines and donated breast milk from a facility. The crisis in the Gulf formed a strange

backdrop for the crisis unfolding in our NICU room with its incessant alarms, dry air, and pressing panic. While the unstoppable gush of oil garnered palpable local anxiety, it remained as background to the hourly pressures of the NICU. The spill seemed too close and too far— an overwhelming disaster that fashioned a certain lingering sourness. My partner and I were just beginning to learn all that could harm our son in that hospital and glimpses into the risks outside its protective walls seemed cruel. Two years later, feeling more confident in mothering my remarkable son and starting my graduate research, I came across the Aljazeera anniversary special report on sea life impacted by the BP disaster. In these interviews marine scientists Darryl Felder, Jim Cowan, and Andrew Whitehead detailed a list of disturbing after-effects including: crabs lacking claws and dying from within, fish with oozing sores and without eye sockets, and shrimp without eyes, with large tumors, and with their dead young still attached to their bodies.¹ Even now, seeing the accompanying images of these mutations I feel an unsettling mix of what I can best describe as horror, revulsion, dread, and grief. I feel empathy for these tiny creatures that is difficult to articulate. They haunt me.

It is risky to begin a project with personal experience. As a feminist, I recognize that while the personal may be political it is also easily dismissed as irrational, arbitrary, unscholarly, confessional. Nevertheless, this project originated from and is shaped by unexpected personal encounters—namely my evolving relationships with the daily entanglements of living on an environmentally precarious coastline while mothering a disabled child. My response to the images of ill and disabled sea life is, in part, a desire for conversations that do not yet exist on the intersections of social difference, particularly race, sexuality, illness, and disability, within the field of religion and ecology. Religion and ecology affords few resources for thinking about our

¹ Dahr Jamail, “Gulf Seafood Deformities Alarm Scientists,” *Al Jazeera*, April 20th, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/04/201241682318260912.html>.

relationships with and to gravely damaged environments and their inhabitants. Exploring our attraction and attachment to nonhuman others is the core of not only much of religious ecotheory but also other trajectories of environmental theory. But damaged environments and their ill, wounded, deformed, dispossessed, and exiled inhabitants are rarely granted presence except, perhaps, as distant warnings or apocalyptic tropes. What kinds of futures are we hoping for and which creatures, human and nonhuman, have access to these futures? In response to their weighty absence, the labor of this dissertation is cultivating vital intellectual and political resources at the intersections of social marginalization and environmental decline.

The Gulf Coast region, that these creatures and I call home, is a devastated landscape—an area marked by ecological destruction and the anticipation of rapid environmental decline. While “devastated landscape” can arguably be applied to much of the planet, I use it in this project to illuminate places experiencing significant crisis fatigue, with the expectation of persistently perilous futures, and where environmental conditions also wring traumatic emotional and material costs. Following the BP spill and the destruction of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Harvey, for many the Gulf landscape is unclean, disturbingly damaged, a bad investment, beyond repair. This region, particularly the Louisiana coast, is what geographer and urban ecologist Joshua Lewis calls an “ecological chokepoint;” or sites “where human intervention inhibits or eliminates critical forms of ecological connectivity.”² Coastal ecosystems “like those of the Mississippi River Delta,” Lewis writes, “depend on the river’s capacity to transport and circulate fresh water, millions of tons of sediment and sand, seeds, and billions of animal eggs and larvae. A sustainable delta requires multiple pathways to distribute water, nutrients, and sediments into its alluvial plain. When these circulation patterns break down, ecosystems

² Joshua Lewis, “Ecological Chokepoints,” *limn* 10 (2018), <https://limn.it/articles/ecological-chokepoints/>.

undergo dramatic changes and the delta's landmass itself rapidly erodes. This catastrophe is currently unfolding in coastal Louisiana, placing its communities, its infrastructure, and its ecological bounty at risk."³

Louisiana's environmental precarity is not merely geological or topographical, however. This dissertation forwards the conviction that we cannot examine environmental injustice separate from social injustice and argues not only that the Gulf region should be read both as an ecological choke point and a racial one, but also that these concerns are fundamentally intertwined. By weaving environmental decline into the historical and present social exclusions, erosions, deprivations, and abandonments that make the Gulf region particularly precarious for marginalized humans, I will demonstrate how histories of environmental racism and its political and economic implications set the scene for disaster and degradation along the coast by pressing social exclusions into the very landscape of this region. "Devastation" not only describes the environmental destruction itself but also the traumatic emotional and material tolls exacted on the bodies that call this coast home by histories of environmental racism and the uneven impacts of toxicity. The argument that to address environmental problems we have to take-on social injustice is in no way new. It is the long standing and ongoing reminder from powerful environmental justice movements, but this dissertation emphasizes how the field of religion and ecology, which I will define shortly, still sidelines or completely ignores these concerns and, in response, demonstrates what we might accomplish by investing in efforts to resist white supremacy, compulsory heterosexuality, able-bodied, and able-mindedness, and by heeding both the material and affective circuits that complexly prevent and promise environmental and social healing.

³ Lewis, "Ecological Chokepoints."

At its core, this project considers how “best to love” after ecological collapse. In 1989

Donna Haraway asked:

how are love, power, and science intertwined in the constructions of nature in the late twentieth century? What may count as nature for late industrial people? What forms does love of nature take in particular historical contexts? For whom and at what cost? In what specific places, out of which social and intellectual histories, and with what tools is nature constructed as an object of erotic and intellectual desire? How do the terrible marks of gender and race enable and constrain love and knowledge in particular cultural traditions, including the modern natural sciences? Who may contest for what the body of nature will be?⁴

These questions have only grown in power as “how should we love in a time of extinction,”

Matthew Chrulew rightfully contends, is now “one of the central ethical questions of our time.”⁵

Frustratingly, Haraway’s attention to the intersections of nature with social exclusions also remains salient particularly for religion and ecology that still tends to ignore how nature is shaped by conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and ability. This dissertation takes up the problematic absence of social/environmental degradation within religion and ecology by asking: what does it mean to love life in devastated landscapes? When so much has been lost, when critical damage has already been done, is the love gone as well? When places we call(ed) home are no longer places of desire, what kind of love is required for sustaining affinities in precarious environments? First, I look at current trajectories of affinity and attachment charted by religion and ecology and then suggest different avenues, what I will call queer detours, which might better prepare us for the future. Reading devastated landscapes as *affective landscapes*, for example, opens inquiry to the range of emotional bonds with these environments that could be love, but also constellations of shame, fear, melancholy, and apathy. I argue that cultivating

⁴ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1.

⁵ Matthew Chrulew, “Managing Love and Death at the Zoo: The Biopolitics of Endangered Species Preservation” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): 139.

affinity and attachment within ecological destruction will require thinking through the often unsettling, possibly terrifying, quotidian intimacies in areas of ecological collapse. Furthermore, taking on long histories of racial and environmental injustice in America as an occasion to speak to the larger part they must play in religious ecotheory, I contend we must better understand the so-called “negative” affects like disgust, revulsion, melancholy, shame, and despair that stick to communities shouldering the uneven burdens of toxicity by demonstrating that they must become a critical part of how we do ecological theory and activism. Finally, I argue that reevaluating our conceptions of “nature,” “human,” “intimacy,” and “futuraity” from the perspectives and encounters of bodies (human and nonhuman) in degrading environments fundamentally unsettles common themes in religion and ecology, like sacrality, kinship, and hope, that are implicitly drawn upon but in need of further reflection.

Religion and Ecology

The field of religion and ecology includes multi-disciplinary methods from anthropology, theology, philosophy, ethics, and the sciences to consider human interactions with the “natural world” as well as examine how religion and culture shape conceptions of “nature.” I use “religion and ecology” here as a broad umbrella of inquiry that could include work that dwells in the overlap of ecological/environmental and religious studies concerns. Various iterations of this umbrella are “religious environmental ethics,” “religion and nature,” and “religious environmentalism.” These projects could include: spiritual/religious dimensions of environmental thought/practice, environmental practices established by particular religious communities, study of the reemergence of nature religions, and theoretical work on

environmental problems “so complex, terrifying, and significant that they require a religious register for understanding and responding to them.”⁶

In 1989 and 1991 professor of Buddhism and Environmental Studies David Barnhill, theologians Eugene Bianchi and Jay McDaniel, and Buddhist scholar and deep ecologist Stephanie Kaza proposed an initiative at the American Academy of Religion to form a group to “focus scholarly attention on the religion variable in human/ecosystem interactions.”⁷ Religion and Ecology has remained a group at AAR since 1993. While some scholars consider any material working on ecological and religious questions within the big umbrella of religion and ecology, others make distinctions between “Religion and Ecology” (associated with the Yale Forum on Religion and the publications/conferences hosted by the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University) and “Religion and Nature” (associated with the graduate program at the University of Florida and the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture.)⁸ Those who identify with the category “religion and nature” argue “the religion and ecology framework excludes a good deal of nature-related religiosity not associated with established religions,” is “sometimes more sanguine about the environmental potential of the world’s predominate religions than is warranted,” and that religion and ecology too easily assumes without genuine critique that our environmental crisis “is the result of defective religious worldviews.”⁹ While I find these to be reasonable critiques, I intentionally resist

⁶ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 8.

⁷ Bron Taylor, “Religious Studies and Environmental Concern,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature Vol. II*, ed. Bron Taylor (New York: Continuum, 2005), 1373.

⁸ Lisa Sideris, “On Letting a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Religious Scholarship in a Time of Crisis,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2015): 366.

⁹ Sideris, 367.

advocating for one approach as remedy for the sins of another. I see merits as well as limitations within their various approaches. Many of the challenges to common themes in religion and ecology that I believe devastated landscapes stimulate span this literature regardless of internal tensions. This project is primarily concerned with arguments about/for cultivating emotional connections with nonhuman others and scholars in both camps articulate investment in these attachments. I am compelled, however, by arguments from Tim Morton, Whitney Bauman, and others that conceptions of *nature* (particularly those that nostalgically conceptualize “nature” as pristine¹⁰) can actually inhibit generative ecological thought. I also remain sensitive to ecofeminist critiques of anthropocentrism and androcentrism within many western *environmental* activist and philosophical frameworks. Consequently, my terminological preference (however imperfect) is “religion and ecology.”

Keeping in mind these internal tensions, religion and ecology as a broad academic field demonstrates three tendencies that readers should anticipate. One, the element that binds all this diversity together is a commitment to contending that religion, in its many definitions, expressions, and practices, is an important part of ecological theory/activism. Whether taking an apologetic, reparative, or analytic stance, most of this scholarship insists that the “broad intellectual traditions of religions” and the “everyday reality of religion on the ground” are complementary and are relevant to concerns about environmental degradation.¹¹ Thus, methodologies in religion and ecology frustrate attempts to conceptualize intellectual traditions and lived religions as separate enterprises. Two, religion and ecology as a multidisciplinary and

¹⁰ Whitney A. Bauman, Richard R. Bohannon II, and Kevin J. O’Brien, “Introduction” in *Grounding Religion: A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

¹¹ Bauman, et. al., 6.

constantly evolving conversation includes activists and theorists (many of whom consider themselves to be both/and), theologians and laity, so speaking into this conversation requires openness toward challenging differences in training and investment. Scholars who approach religious studies from the argument that “the task of the discipline is properly to analyze religion rather than to defend or engage in it” find much of this work inappropriate at best, leading some to argue that the Religion and Ecology AAR group is “more engaged in green religion and ‘missionary’ work than in scholarly analysis.”¹² Finally, as Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon, and Kevin O’Brien suggest, scholarship in the field of religion and ecology helps “people to think critically about how religion has been shaped by the natural world and can be shaped by environmental degradation, and to imaginatively consider how religion and/or the study of religion might positively impact the future of our species and our planet.”¹³ Consequently, the third tendency to keep in mind is that in most cases work in religion and ecology is ethically prescriptive even if only in the broadest sense of contending that humans ought to change their behaviors/conceptions, whatever the highlighted issues might be, for more sustainable futures.

While not an unimportant conversation, I tend to find definitions *of* the field are not as compelling as the gaps and limitations *within* the field. Religion and ecology’s tendencies, while frustrating at times, resonate in some ways with feminist epistemologies that contend that “objectivity”, or separating oneself from one’s “study,” is impossible. Recognizing the diversity within the field, I intend to make my connections and generalizations as fair as possible accepting that consolidating this diversity inevitably leads to discomfort and acknowledging that tensions remain amongst and within different approaches. I imagine this project less as a critique

¹² Taylor, 1374.

¹³ Bauman, et. al., 8.

of religion and ecology and more a writhing within the field, pushing at its limitations/horizons by considering how roily evolutions in the Gulf challenge our theory. By highlighting aversion to non-ideal lands/creatures and through advocating for a (re)investment in these spaces/relationships, this project is both practical and speculative. On one level, I want to open a practical conversation about developing language that ecological theorists and activists can access to talk about the truly complex material and affective investments necessitated by cultivating relationships with gravely damaged environments. On another level, this project is inescapably speculative as it aims at the definitively unanswerable questions of: what does it mean to be human and how should we humans live, love, and hope in the midst of ecological destruction?

Dark Green Religions

In his helpful framing of the past few decades of work in religion and ecology broadly defined, Bron Taylor organizes the bulk of scholarship into four trajectories. One path is to illuminate various obstacles within the world's religions that prove to be stumbling blocks for ecological projects. The second is the extraction of resources within religious traditions/practices that may prove to be generative for ecological thinking and ecoethical action. The third includes practical projects in which religious, spiritual, and theological work is deployed to hopefully promulgate ecologically ethical behaviors. The fourth, perhaps more experimental course, is the constructive cultivation of "green religions/religion of nature/dark green religions" whether through encouraging mainstream religions to "go green," by rekindling/inventing nature spiritualities, or suggesting contemporary ways of reading the earth itself as "sacred text" that may not easily fall into the borders of normative religions.¹⁴ All of these trajectories,

¹⁴ Bron Taylor, "A Green Future for Religion?" *Futures* 36 (2004): 995.

understandably, bleed into one another but, Taylor suggests, they all seem to work from an agreement that “nature is sacred (in some way); and this conviction appears to be tethered to ethical concern about the environmental decline.”¹⁵ It is this fourth avenue’s emphasis on reading the sacrality of the earth itself and interest in ecoreligiosity on the horizons of normative religious practice that is most relevant to this project’s search for ethical trajectories more conducive to loving devastated landscapes.

The conversations I engage here, including exchanges between well-known religion scholars like Thomas Berry and Mary Evelyn Tucker and scholars in the sciences like E. O. Wilson and Ursula Goodenough, fall under what Taylor has come to term “dark green religion.” While green religions posit that “environmentally friendly behavior is a religious obligation” *dark green religions*, Taylor argues, are “deeply ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric, considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings.”¹⁶ This approach to religion and ecology is based on a “felt kinship with the rest of life, often derived from a Darwinian understanding that all forms of life have evolved from a common ancestor and are therefore related.”¹⁷ As a value system rooted in affective kinship, Taylor contends that dark green religion is “accompanied by feelings of humility and a corresponding critique of human moral superiority, often inspired or reinforced by a science-based cosmology that reveals how tiny human beings are in the universe.”¹⁸ Taylor gestures

¹⁵ Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?” 995.

¹⁶ Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religions: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 10-13.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Dark Green Religions*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

toward sacred natures and kinship ethics as important orientations in paganism and indigenous religions, and the growing academic interest in these orientations, but he also highlights the curious development of a “kind of civic planetary earth religion” evolving without any “concomitant confession of supernatural beliefs” yet nevertheless claims “religious fidelity to the biosphere.”¹⁹ This form of dark green religion, Taylor argues, is surprisingly present in the supposedly secular work of prominent scientists Stephen Jay Gould, Wilson, and Carl Sagan who utilize “metaphors of the sacred to express their awe at the wonders of the universe and reverence for life.”²⁰

Significantly influenced by the work of religion scholars Berry, Tucker, Loyal Rue, and John Grim and in conversation with scientists Goodenough, Wilson, Brian Swimme, and Stephen Kellert, this vein of scholarship understands “scientific worldviews not as a leading *cause* of nature’s disenchantment but as a primary vehicle for *restoring* enchantment, wonder, meaning, and value to the natural world.”²¹ In this dissertation, I track this particular route in religion and ecology whereby “scientific narratives are sacralized and the diversity of life is accorded reverence” to inquire how these theorists approach affinity and attachment with/to nonhuman others.²² In chapter one, I will address this work in detail but it is significant to note here that this vein is read both as a methodology within religion and ecology and a science-based

¹⁹ Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?” 991-1000.

²⁰ Ibid., 998.

²¹ Lisa Sideris, “Science as Sacred Myth? Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 9.2 (2015), 137.

²² Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?” 999.

ecospirituality movement that Lisa Sideris terms “New Genesis” or “new cosmology.”²³ Taylor notes an interesting aspect of new cosmology spirituality is that it stands “alone as something of a new religious movement” as a way of expressing “deep, driving feelings” toward biodiversity and it is also often “grafted onto liberal forms of already-existing religions” interested in exploring ecological questions.²⁴ Nurturing these “feelings” or “emotions,” this scholarship advocates, could prove fertile for ethical investment. As Ursula Goodenough contends, “it seems likely that the emotional circuits invoked when we contemplate our deep evolutionary affinity with other creatures, and when we are infused with compassion, will turn out to map closely onto the circuits that drive our parental instincts, emotions that generate such feelings as tenderness and warmth and protectiveness. These same emotions extend to our understanding that the Earth must be nurtured, an understanding embedded in many religious traditions.”²⁵ With hope that these affective circuits will lead the way, I read new cosmology’s main ethical argument as insisting that *for the future, we must love nonhuman others as our sacred evolutionary kin.*

Taylor argues that this “affectively grounded spirituality of connection” in which “people feel awe and reverence toward the earth’s living systems and even feel themselves as connected and belonging to these systems” might not “retain anything we would recognize in today’s more common supernaturalistic metaphysics, but it might nevertheless require religious terminology to verbally capture the feelings.”²⁶ While I will defer to other scholarship within religion and

²³ Sideris (2013) terms this religiopoiesis project “New Genesis” but it is also recognized in religion and ecology as “The Epic of Evolution,” “Big History,” “The New Story,” or “The Great Story.”

²⁴ Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?” 999.

²⁵ Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 128.

²⁶ Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion,” 1002.

ecology that saliently critiques the uses of “science” and “religion” in sacred nature discourse, my project is concerned with the unexplored affective resonances in this work. What do we mean by “religious emotions”? Why are feelings and emotions important to religion and ecology? Are awe, wonder, and reverence our primary religious emotions? How do these feelings relate to ethical action? Furthermore, what if our encounters and connections with/to nonhuman others stir up other feelings? What happens to our “natural” attraction and attachment to nonhuman others in devastated landscapes? My project contends that this vein of religion and ecology functions as scholarly *and affective process* in which particular experiences of affinity and attachment are normalized, policed, and celebrated. I am primarily interested in tracking what happens to the keywords and normative values of religion and ecology when they are made to address the complicated crisis contexts of devastated landscapes. The persistent focus on awe-struck and benevolent relationships in new cosmology, I argue, encourages us to ignore and/or hide the affective intimacies that shape degrading environments and leads us away from developing the politics and contexts we need for a world in crisis.

Affects

While affect theory may be underutilized in religion and ecology, and celebrations of the “affective turn” tend to speak of affect as novel, the translations of affect that resonate in this project are not new but rather a continuation of a “long tradition of feminist scholarship on emotional life,”²⁷ what Lauren Berlant calls the “unfinished business of sentimentality,”²⁸ that

²⁷ Ben Anderson, *Encountering Affect: Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 6.

²⁸ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

considers “‘the personal is the political’ as it has shaped theoretical and political practice and their relation to everyday life.”²⁹ This work in feminist, queer, critical race, and disability studies fashions affect as the “social energy through which subjects, meanings, and cultures are produced, organized, and undone.”³⁰ To make some sense of the emotional atmospheres of devastated landscapes, I appeal to two entwined modalities of affect. First, affect as economy or collective condition “that mediates how life is lived and thought”³¹ considers capacities to affect and be affected as “always mediated in and through encounters . . . shifting attention from the personal to the transpersonal whilst at the same time attending to the formation of subjectivity.”³² Significantly in the work of Sara Ahmed, Lawrence Grossberg, and Ben Anderson, this translation of affect considers how emotions “align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.”³³ This scholarship, particularly Ahmed’s sobering work on race and nation, pays attention to space, place, and embodiment by asking how the circulation of affects “shapes the materialization of collective bodies” and how individuals might be aligned, or out-of-step, with these collectives.³⁴ Second, the similarly invested Public Feelings project with conversation companions Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and José Muñoz, takes “feelings as both subject and method” to bring

²⁹ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 8.

³⁰ Jenna Supp-Montgomerie, “Affect and the Study of Religion,” *Religion Compass* 9/10 (2015): 336.

³¹ Anderson, 18.

³² *Ibid.*, 105.

³³ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies” *Social Text* 79 (2004): 119.

³⁴ Ahmed, 121.

“emotional sensibilities to bear” on intellectual and political projects continuing to “craft new forms of feminist intellectual politics that are still lacking in the public sphere.”³⁵ Implementing queer theories’ emphasis on “identities and public cultures that cultivate non-normative affects,” like the transformative possibilities of negative affects (failure, grief, rage, melancholy, shame, and depression) and “rethinking categories such as utopia, hope, and happiness,” *Public Feelings* side-steps conceptions of emotion as solely personal/private to “address histories of trauma that have not yet been overcome.”³⁶

The Gulf of Mexico after BP and Katrina joins a “series of spectacular toxic catastrophes with single-name recognition: Bhopal, Minamata, Love Canal, Chernobyl,”³⁷ Flint, where specificities of racial and social inequality, gross injustices, and complex sedimented histories of neglect are often glossed over in an amalgamation of revulsion. In this project I will trace numerous ways that “notions of human and social difference” are “projected onto the nonhuman world”³⁸ and consider how “nonnormative bodies and minds can reframe what it means to be an environmentalist or ‘nature lover,’”³⁹ by advocating for the cultivation of religious environmental theory that can speak to the numerous intersections of species, race, class, gender, and ability within an increasingly toxic world. Keeping in mind these translations of affect and

³⁵ Cvetkovich, 5-9.

³⁶ Cvetkovich, 5-7.

³⁷ Mel Chen, “Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17 (2011): 265.

³⁸ Traci Brynne Voyles, “The Invalid Sea: Disability Studies and Environmental Justice History,” in *Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 453.

³⁹ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, “Precarity and Cross-Species Identification: Autism, the Critique of Normative Cognition, and Nonspeciesism,” *Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 553.

their framing of the human as immersed environmentally, historically, and culturally helps me in this dissertation to work through some troubling questions: why might encounters in devastated landscapes seem out-of-step with the affective modeling in new cosmology? Are the affective-ethical visions of new cosmology tenable or do they necessarily disavow many everyday encounters? What sorts of spaces, places, and encounters does religion and ecology bind itself to through its affective investments? By beginning and remaining with encounters in devastated landscapes, I will shift the conversation to address the deep complexities and frustrations in cultivating and sustaining emotional investments with and in crisis environments and contend that lingering with so-called negative affects illuminates overlooked social and environmental inequalities as well as opens new possibilities for ecological activism.

Negotiating Methodologies

It is no small task to examine post-disaster affinity and attachment while keeping a finger on the pulse of questions relating to sacrality, kinship, futurity, emotion, and ethics. Any number of intellectual trajectories could speak to the questions I am asking in this project about a region comprised of diverse ethnic and religious communities negotiating legacies of slavery, racism, poverty, entrenched yet volatile energy economies, and rapidly depleting coastal habitats. Significantly, work in feminist and critical geography, cultural memory, spatial theory, energy humanities, environmental justice and health equity movements, ecocriticism, and geography of religion all provide rich methodologies that are helpful for sifting through these complexities. To better understand and convey emotional life on the coast, I will draw, in part, from these disciplines (particularly scholarship in environmental justice, critical geographies, feminist/queer/critical race work on affect and cultural memory) but my framing does not allow for the extended meditations that many of these authors unfold. One of the limitations of this

project is that it is not work in sociology of religion or ethnography that could afford richer accounts through collaboration. Compelling narratives of particular religious communities encountering these disasters can be found in Brenda Phillips' (2015) *Mennonite Disaster Service: Building a Therapeutic Community After the Gulf Storms*, Richard Turner's (2016) *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans After Hurricane Katrina*, Katherine Michell Elvey's (2010) "God Talk: Shifting Religious Rhetoric in Post-Katrina New Orleans," and Ellen Blue's (2016) *In Case of Katrina: Reinventing the Church in Post-Katrina New Orleans*.

What I do hope, however, is that this dissertation will serve as a model for deep commitments to interdisciplinary thinking and careful attention to the requirements interdisciplinary conversations can entail. While I will expand much more on this material in forthcoming chapters, one of the shaping elements of new cosmologist thought, particularly in Loyal Rue and others' resonances with E. O. Wilson's ideas, is a commitment to consilience. While consilience can mean a bringing together of diverse ideas to negotiate complex theories, it often reads here as an uncritical privileging of scientific thought, particularly for those scientists new cosmology venerates but does not contextualize or challenge. Consilience for Wilson, "entails that all enterprises of culture—a huge category—will eventually be explained when we attain complete knowledge of the human brain."⁴⁰ In its most troubling forms, "consilience is not simply" an "argument for a more creative or lively exchange between the sciences and humanities. Wilson's more controversial claim is that the sciences will ultimately absorb territory currently occupied, and inadequately explained" (they argue) "by the humanities."⁴¹ Consilience, Lisa Sideris surmises in critique, "assumes that what can be grasped dimly by one

⁴⁰ Lisa Sideris, *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 57.

⁴¹ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 59.

discipline can be better known—known with greater precision and certainty—by science.”⁴²

Surely troubling for many of us in the humanities that already recognize dwindling investments in the humanities within academia and wider culture, consilient commitments also frame a very particular conception of interdisciplinary work—one where new cosmologists pull from other disciplines what is useful to support their arguments while remaining impervious to critiques either within the sciences or without. Furthermore, this agenda does not recognize any of the politics of knowledge production thus it does not question the ethical implications of dwindling material support for the humanities nor does it recognize the work in the humanities taken on by critical race, queer, feminist, decolonial, and disability studies to speak with marginalized epistemologies. Consequently, it frames these conversations as low risk—easily maneuvered by the certainty that commitment to the benefits of teaching and celebrating the new scientific narrative will persuasively outweigh discrepancies, disagreements, and power struggles between religion and science, the sciences and humanities, and all the inequalities that fuel critical inquiry.

One could respond to this certainty in numerous ways including tempering their confidence with more critical perspectives from the sciences. I view this dissertation, in part, as a resistance to consilience projects via my insistence that potent interdisciplinary projects are those that welcome vulnerability by allowing the voices we bring into conversation to shake up our fundamental disciplinary values and practices. To resist consilience agendas, I side with complexity and context by maneuvering the normative universal ethics of new cosmology into conversation with everyday material and emotional challenges. For source material throughout these chapters I weave in diverse narratives, particularly memoir, poetry, and news media, written in response to these disasters and their aftermath—emotional responses to life on the

⁴² Sideris, 60.

Gulf Coast that include, but are not limited to, deep empathy, grief, disgust, anger, frustration, disorientation, confusion, solidarity, and tentative hope. My intention here is drawn from affect studies; it is to convey affective impressions by surrounding my text with voices that are attempting to make sense of disastrous and traumatic events, even while I insist that their affects are neither exhaustive nor final.

To be fair, questions about landscapes and territory, space and place, sacred and profane, lived religion and embodiment, persistently occupy not only religion and ecology but also much of the study of American religion. To render this slice more manageable, I focus on thinking about humans in relationship with nonhuman creatures/environments and why emotional orientations in these relationships are particularly important. Despite working hard to “keep pace with globalization’s growing complexities” and the richness it lends to questions of sacrality, liminality, belonging, ritual, diaspora, displacement, etc., many scholars in American religious studies still, as Kevin Lewis O’Neill argues, “either treat space as a kind of neutral grid upon which religion happens or they remain focused on meaning” operating under an “uncontestable observation that religion makes space meaningful” sustaining lingering divisions between sacred and profane, local and global, North and South.⁴³ My questions for new cosmology and the future of religion and ecology add to the scholarship hoping to unsettle this refrain by insisting that the historical particularity of environments, legacies of environmental and social abuse/abandonment, make all the difference for how we read, recognize, and advocate for emotional attachments to land and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. Neutral grids, ahistorical locales, and apolitical bodies are convenient theoretical fantasies.

⁴³ Kevin Lewis O’Neill, “Beyond Broken: Affective Spaces and the Study of American Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, 4 (2013): 1094.

Chapters

Each approach to studying the confluences of religion and ecology has its own compelling elements and particular shortcomings. Since Lynn White's 1967 essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," religion theorists have worked to uncover and address the various obstacles within religious traditions, practices, and thought that prove to be stumbling blocks for ecological projects and to carve out trajectories that hopefully address/transcend those obstacles. This dissertation responds to a prominent discourse within religion and ecology—new cosmology—that chooses evolutionary kinship and its potential to spark deep affinities with biodiversity as its hopeful course. In order to address shortcomings within this discourse, I will challenge its core ethical argument (*for the future, we must love nonhuman others as our sacred evolutionary kin*) by breaking it into parts. First, I focus on the overlooked affective implications of new cosmology's commitment to the cultivation of a universal orienting narrative via "expert" scientific knowledge. Then I highlight diverse narratives/methodologies that offer better alternatives, perspectives, and opportunities to help us prepare for complicated futures. In chapter one, I outline the development of religion and ecology and then turn toward the work of Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Connie Barlow, Brian Thomas Swimme, Ursula Goodenough, Edward O. Wilson, and Stephen Kellert to frame their approach toward affiliation and attachment with/to nonhuman nature. Concluding the chapter, I lay out the troubling questions that arise from what remains shadowed by this approach that the rest of the dissertation will unpack and address.

In chapter two, I begin to unsettle new cosmology's universal ethical argument by relocating it within a very particular context. Tracing the environmental history leading up to the "unnatural" disasters named Katrina, Rita, and BP, I challenge religion and ecology to better prepare for precarious futures by learning to address the swirling tensions of power, privilege,

and exclusion (long histories of particular investments) that shape everyday encounters along the Gulf. In two, I argue new cosmology's conception of *sacred* works best when it is dis-located from everyday materiality. Working with material in critical geographies and sacred space/place to underline the political implications of how "the sacred" is defined, produced, reproduced, and protected, I draw attention to the places, communities, and creatures occluded, excluded, and abandoned by new cosmology's conceptions of the sacred. Is the collective body of devastated landscapes, implicated together in crisis and attached to one another through toxicity, disgust, and aversion, no longer sacred? Are these creatures, habitats, and communities acceptable losses? Or are they the ethical quandary at the core of the kinship intimacies with nonhumans dark green religions desire to explore? What kind of investments illuminate material "left behind" — those unloved others still living lives?

While new cosmologists hope to inspire affective renewal, in chapters three and four I argue that habitual investments in the awe and wonder of encounters with nonhuman nature have left new cosmology with few resources to speak to affiliation with degraded lands, damaged environments, toxic creatures, and the human communities that intimately encounter these quotidian complexities. Experiences within areas like our opening scene might not solely elicit affects like awe, wonder, or reverence. When we encounter toxic materials and their effects we are affected differently. For some, this precarity galvanizes a response in an attempt to care for these lives. For others, this ecological pain may elicit overwhelming shame or apathy. Some may see these creatures and their habitats as contagions themselves, monsters of our own creation that should be avoided, visibly witnessing to all that we have poured into the waters. Encounters with toxicity in Gulf communities are unfolding but some of these affects might coalesce into what we would call disgust, revulsion, dread, panic, horror. We do not gravitate toward these places. Life in devastated landscapes does not draw us near. How do we address the repulsive pulse of

the Gulf—the queasy unease that sticks to devastated environments? By trading only in awe, wonder, and reverence, I contend that the affective economies of new cosmology bind themselves solely to places and creatures that engender those experiences. Pulling at the frayed edges of this discourse post-destruction, in chapters three and four I argue that new cosmology’s onto-ethical project (*we must love nonhuman others*) refuses to address what it truly champions—namely a very particular conception of what it means to be human *and* to love nonhuman others that does not address race, racialization, and the historical connections between environmentalism and white supremacy in the United States that very much continue to shape which bodies, communities, and habitats are valued/loveable. I question the ahistorical, rational, enclosed, and sovereign subject at the heart of new cosmology’s onto-ethical project by contending its impermeability and affective certainty makes it incredibly difficult to map new cosmology’s onto-ethical commitments onto degraded environments. In conversation with scholarship in feminist materialisms and feminist genealogies of affect theory, in chapter three I argue that human bodies are always already materially and affectively intimate with their environments and since environmental degradation and its unequal impact on the poor is a daily reality for much of the planet, religion and ecology can no longer assume a “healthy” or historically neutral subject. Consequently, we must grapple with our proximity to toxic exposure and its uneven seepage into bodies and communities. In chapter four, by examining how fear shapes devastated landscapes, I draw material feminisms, affect theory, and religion and ecology into conversation by thinking about embodied affects along the Gulf Coast. I argue that the intertwined concerns of environmental degradation and environmental racism impact our affective orientations. In a queer response to E. O. Wilson’s encouragement that we examine the circumstances and occasions on which we love and protect life, I inquire after the affective structure of disposability arguing that ecoterrorists must contend with: race and racialization,

long histories of white supremacy, and troubling toxicity in order to shape affective projects in this devastated landscape.

In chapters five, six, and seven, I examine the kinship of the declaration that *we must love nonhuman others as sacred evolutionary kin*. I find kinship models to continue to be ripe with tremendous possibility but instead of walking the path of sacralized science, I advocate for detouring toward more plastic conceptions of kinship. In chapter five, I highlight the limitations in new cosmology's conceptions of kinship that make it very difficult to map its visions of affinity, attachment, and care onto a racially and environmentally toxic landscape. Many new cosmologists recognize that environmental degradation is an impending threat and prescribe deepening kinship intimacies with nonhuman others as a reciprocal solution for environmental concerns and a correction to unhealthy habits holding us back from our full humanity. But, I contend, these voices have not questioned if environmental degradation fundamentally alters what we mean by affinity, attachment, intimacy, and reciprocity. What does it mean, for example, to care for toxic habitats, ill creatures, and precarious communities as kin? Kinship in new cosmology asserts a biological connection with all life but does not consider any radically altering notions of intimacy. New cosmology kinship, I argue, works best when we pretend that all we inherit is positive evolutionary tendencies, ignoring how social histories, embodied differences, and declining environmental conditions can all shape us materially and affectively. In five, I argue kinship is not just biological but also performative. Drawing from queer and critical race critiques of kinship studies, I contend that new cosmology kinships do not resonate in devastated environments because they do not recognize that normative conceptions of kinship always limit which bodies, communities, histories, and legacies can count as beloved kin.

Insisting that we cannot disconnect complacency with the disposability of the Gulf Coast from other projects of disposability, namely disregard for the bodies, lives, and losses of queer,

disabled, and black communities, in chapters six and seven I argue we need models for kinship in religion and ecology that are more affectively attuned to racial trauma and abject desire. An ethics of love for devastated landscapes, I contend, must desire to dwell with the presence of troubling legacies of environmental racism, toxic impacts, and uncertain futures. Paying attention to other inheritances besides evolutionary affective tendencies, I cultivate resources for expanding the boundaries of kinship within religion and ecology by turning to critical intimacy scholarship that can help us think about the intersections of embodied difference and environmental decline. I construct two visions of what kin-love for devastated landscapes might look like. The first, in what I call a *kinship of remainders*, chapter six thinks with “remaining” in different ways: communities that remain after disaster negotiating environmental decline, bodies considered to be remainders by normative conceptions of kinship (residual, left-over, disposable,) and remaining-with (to endure, prevail, persist) environmental trouble to develop affinities and attachments forged not through awe, wonder, and reverence but perhaps grief and fear. To cultivate a kinship of remainders, I argue, requires religion and ecology to understand that kinship is an ongoing affective process that must address environmental trauma, loss, and mourning in order to speak to our environmental crisis.

The second, in what I call *queer eco-crip affinities*, chapter seven draws from critical disability studies and queer ecologies to argue that one of the reasons new cosmology kinship does not map onto devastated environments is its deep discomfort with the persistence of abject bodies. Unsettling new cosmology’s ethical commitment *for the future*, I ask what kinds of futures are we imagining and which bodies/communities/creatures/habitats are included in these futures? The absence of ill, disabled, and mutating bodies/habitats/creatures within new cosmology ethics holds us back, I argue, from imagining affiliation and attachment with embodied difference and the changes toxicity brings to environments. Concluding this

dissertation, chapter seven cultivates improper affinities by considering the ways devastated landscapes are positioned as undesirable, beyond hope, without future, and insists that we refuse conceptions of desire, hope, and futurity that absent ill/disabled bodies and environments. Drawing from Mel Chen's suggestion that the *queerness* of queer ecologies describes "social and cultural formations of 'improper affiliation,' so that queerness might well describe an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative," I advocate for encouraging impropriety in our kin care.⁴⁴ Recognizing that desire always overflows the contours meant to contain it, queer eco-crip affinities might ask: what does it mean to *desire nature* when this "nature" is devastated? And, what does this "nature" desire? Relying on awe, wonder, and reverence in encounters with nonhuman kin, new cosmology is interested in intimacy-with and futurity-for less unruly cousins, more perfect lovers, than devastated landscapes afford. Here, I end by imagining what future avenues might open for religion and ecology by claiming and sustaining wounded, ill, and mutating bodies, creatures, and communities as our desired beloveds.

⁴⁴ Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 104.

Chapter One Sacred Evolutionary Epics: Awe, Reverence, Kinship

“We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love.”⁴⁵
Stephen Jay Gould, “Enchanted Evening”

Since Lynn White’s (1967) germinal essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” theorists studying the confluence of religion and ecology have considered the implications of religious world-views for environmental health and degradation. White argues that western Christian dogma and thought, particularly its dominant anthropocentrism, “made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”⁴⁶ Perhaps more galvanizing for the legacy of scholarship to follow, White concludes: “since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.”⁴⁷ This essay and its numerous responses (apologetic, reparative, and alternative) advanced interdisciplinary environmental studies and birthed the field of religion and ecology. Itself a multidisciplinary endeavor, religion and ecology utilizes a variety of methodological approaches toward not only discussing the culpability of religious thought/practice but also toward developing new ethical models for human/nonhuman relationships, illuminating the religious roots of environmentalism, and examining the “influence of religion in shaping the environmental imagination.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, “Enchanted Evening,” *Natural History* (September, 1991): 14.

⁴⁶ Lynn White, Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March, 1967), 1205.

⁴⁷ White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” 1207.

⁴⁸ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 16.

Environmental degradation is a staggering problem in its enormity and complexity. Thus, as human understanding of this complexity deepens, so too do approaches within religion and ecology that make sense of and address our environmental decline. This chapter traces a prominent conversation within religion and ecology that chooses evolutionary kinship and its affective possibilities, actualized and deployed through what they identify are religious emotions, as the path forward.

This onto-ethical trajectory within religion and ecology seeks to relocate conceptions of what it means to be human within evolutionary history characterizing humanity as but a small speck of the wonder that is our complex universe. Wary of Jewish and Christian cosmologies they regard as significantly devaluing the material world, these theorists advocate for reorienting these myths through teaching evolutionary sciences as giving rise to sacred cosmologies.⁴⁹ Rethinking the human within this universe story, these scholars contend, would generate an emotional shift in our theory and ethics toward humble respect and caring practices for nonhuman others. From this perspective, investment in the sciences could be the enchantment that leads humans to love nonhuman others as we begin to understand the very matter of the universe, what some might call “nature,” is sacred. Addressing White’s call to “rethink and refeel our nature and destiny,” this discourse sees possibilities for nurturing ecological sentiment by advocating a new sacred mythos of how our universe came to be and how humans should relate to its wonder.

In this chapter, I consider some of the work of cultural historian Thomas Berry; religion scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Loyal Rue; science writer Connie Barlow; cosmologist Brian Thomas Swimme; biologist Ursula Goodenough; and evolutionary biologist

⁴⁹ Sideris, “Science as Sacred Myth?” 147-153.

Edward O. Wilson. This group of scholars has sustained a growing conversation within religious ecotheory that Lisa Sideris calls the “new cosmology movement.” I trace their approaches toward affiliation with nonhuman nature and their particular investment in the ideal of loving nonhuman others as sacred kin. Grouping such diversity together, not without significant controversy,⁵⁰ is precarious but Sideris argues that these voices form a “recognizable constellation, an ideal type”⁵¹ that proffers a “new, common creation story based upon our understanding of cosmogenesis,” and all are “engaged in a process of religiopoiesis, of crafting a new religion, grounded in a myth that explains our origins and destiny.”⁵² Later, I will unfold what is compelling about Sideris’s perspective as well as resistance to her arguments. But what I find unites these writers, why they are relevant for this project, is their appeal to the affective potential of scientific enchantment to engender ethical action. In what follows, I will map out this form of sacred natures discourse to survey their conceptions of evolutionary affinity with nonhuman others, how they believe evolutionary affinity leads to emotional attachment, and finally how this emotional attachment can result in ethical action. Like any methodology, every approach to studying the intersections of religion and ecology has particular political implications. Concluding the chapter, I will gesture toward some of the implications of this approach, explored in more depth in chapter two, by drawing attention to the places and creatures possibly occluded, excluded, and abandoned by these sacred kinships.

⁵⁰ Forum critique of Sideris’ arguments and her response can be found in more detail in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*, Issue 9.2 “Contesting Consecrated Scientific Narratives,” (2015).

⁵¹ Lisa Sideris, “The Confines of Consecration: A Reply to Critics,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture*, 9, no. 2 (2015): 224.

⁵² Sideris, “Science as Sacred Myth?” 148.

Evolutionary Epics

The new mythology constellation that Sideris terms “new cosmology” has two progenitors: E. O. Wilson and Thomas Berry. The “Epic of Evolution” originated in Edward O. Wilson’s writings and is cultivated by Connie Barlow, Loyal Rue, and Ursula Goodenough.⁵³ A Harvard biologist with a particular affinity for ant behavior, E. O. Wilson is largely responsible for popularizing the terms “biodiversity,” “evolutionary biology,” “the evolutionary epic,” and “biophilia,” as well as influential in shaping contemporary conservation ethics and biodiversity studies. Of interest for this project: Wilson’s 1971 text *The Insect Societies* introduced his concept for sociobiology—a new discipline, with some controversy on his analysis on the origins of human behavior,⁵⁴ to study the biological basis of social behavior in all organisms including humans. Responding to criticisms of his perspectives on the evolutionary origins of our social behavior, Wilson’s *On Human Nature* (1978) and *Genes, Mind, and Culture* (1983) further explore the role of biology in human ontology. His perhaps most enduring texts, *Biophilia* (1983), *The Diversity of Life* (1992), and *The Future of Life* (2002) study human attraction to the

⁵³ J. Baird Callicott, “Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism,” *Journal of Religion, Nature, & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2015): 154-55.

⁵⁴ Wilson’s sociobiology was initially met with sharp critique, particularly from Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, calling his attempts to locate the roots of human social behavior in evolutionary origins to be the latest historical manifestation of “social Darwinism, genetic determinism, biological reductionism, and vulgar adaptationism.” (Holcomb, 1988, 315) Harmon Holcomb responds briefly to these critiques recognizing their merit yet argues that they perhaps responded too quickly in outright rejection of sociobiology without allowing it to grow in response. Furthermore, he contends that critiques of sociobiology and its proponents like Wilson and Richard Dawkins often do not recognize that these critiques extend beyond sociobiology as a discipline into the life sciences as a whole, which needs continual reevaluation of the unrecognized sociocultural power dynamics undergirding assumedly unbiased inquiry. For a more detailed discussion of these critiques see Harmon R. Holcomb III, “The Modern Synthesis and Lewontin’s Critique of Sociobiology” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 10.2 (1988), 315-341.

natural environment with the argument that humans have an evolutionarily inherent need, threatened by the impending impoverishment of the environment, to preserve biodiversity in order to flourish as a species. Finally (though not his final text), of interest here is Wilson's 1998 work *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* which returns to what he sees are the original ideals of the Enlightenment. *Consilience*, also advocated by Goodenough and Rue, advocates for closing the gaps between the physical universe and humanity by reorganizing scholarship (including university curriculum) around an enchanting integration of both the sciences and humanities as they work together to establish a secular ground for ethics. Keeping these texts in mind, scholars interested in the confluences of religion and ecology understandably gravitate toward numerous themes in his writing. Wilson's poetic style, olive-branch extension to the humanities, and interest in cosmology/mythology resonate with commitments in religion and ecology to maintain the importance of religious studies within larger conversations of environmental concern.

One of the lasting themes of Wilson's writing, Barlow argues, is the concept that humans can satisfy their evolutionary innate longing for "religious grounding," "spiritual allurements and atonement," and aptitude for reverence through a "cultural explanation derived from science . . . based on the evolutionary epic."⁵⁵ Through this grand and inspiring narrative, Wilson assures that humans can continue to "revisit questions of ultimate meaning and value" while dedicating a "good portion of our religious zeal to reverence for the vast diversity of life produced by nearly four billion years of struggle and symbiosis on Earth."⁵⁶ In a 1996 interview with Barlow, Wilson argued, "I believe that humanity must have an epic— must have its epics, plural . . . An

⁵⁵ Connie Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time: The Way of Science* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1997), 6.

⁵⁶ Barlow, 6.

epic is a grand narrative usually in poetic form, that utilizes archetypes in explaining a theme that engages all of the nation or all of humanity.”⁵⁷ Advocating for its potential to captivate, Wilson writes, “the evolutionary epic is probably the best myth we will ever have.”⁵⁸ Through a deft storyteller like Wilson, Barlow contends, scientific history of the universe “becomes our shared story, our creation story, our sacred story.”⁵⁹

The power of the epic myth, Barlow emphasizes, is its ability to orient “people with a placement in time— a meaningful placement that celebrates extraordinary moments of a shared heritage. Those of us who have not only learned but embraced the scientific story of our roots know ourselves to be reworked stardust, biological beings with a multi-billion-year pedigree . . . For us, the history of life and the universe as told by science becomes more than a sequence of strange and arresting events.”⁶⁰ Wilson deliberately invokes the epic form in numerous texts, he argues, because of the archetypes it offers including “cataclysm, rebirth, the summoning of heroes.”⁶¹ Wilson believes “that science offers humankind not only an awareness of the biodiversity crisis and the tools for saving species but also a story that can charge our very souls to take on the task.”⁶² In *The Diversity of Life*, Robert May argues, Wilson offers up the Environmental Ethic as “nothing less than a new religion” by side-stepping seemingly

⁵⁷ Wilson, interview with Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time: The Way of Science*, 24.

⁵⁸ Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 201.

⁵⁹ Barlow, 24.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁶¹ Wilson in conversation with Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time: The Way of Science*, 25.

⁶² Barlow, 26.

anthropocentric religions to offer a vision for seeing the human “as one among many species, with our only special responsibility being to respect and conserve the biological riches we have inherited.”⁶³ Concluding *Diversity*, Wilson argues that he ends the text with “what, among the Methodists, is known as the altar call. The altar call is that moment at the end of the sermon when the pastor calls all believers who wish to declare themselves for Jesus or to reaffirm their faith to do so by coming forward, to the altar or to the prayer rail, while hymns are sung.”⁶⁴ Humans can become the heroes of this sacred narrative if they answer the call to protect biodiversity. While Connie Barlow concedes that Wilson has never “explicitly told his version of the evolutionary story in flat-out epic form” others have made such attempts including our second progenitor of new cosmology, Thomas Berry.⁶⁵

The “Universe Story”⁶⁶ is an intellectual project with similar affinities originating in Thomas Berry’s writings and continued by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Brian Swimme.⁶⁷ Trained in western history and history of religions, Berry’s prolific scholarship spans interest in Asian traditions, the philosophy of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and cosmology of religion.⁶⁸ In his 1978 essay for *Teilhard Studies*, “The New Story: Comments on The Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values,” Berry first articulates that humans need a new orienting mythos in order to meet contemporary social and ecological concerns:

⁶³ Robert M. May, “The End of Biological History?” *Scientific American* March (1993): 146.

⁶⁴ Wilson, in conversation with Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time*, 23.

⁶⁵ Barlow, 48.

⁶⁶ Also termed Big Story, New Story, and Journey of the Universe.

⁶⁷ Callicott, “Science as Myth (Whether Sacred or Not), Science as Prism,” 154-55.

⁶⁸ Explorations of the origins and evolution of the cosmos.

It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The Old Story—the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it—is not functioning properly, and we have not learned the New Story. The Old Story sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were . . . Today, however, our traditional story is nonfunctional in its larger social dimensions even though some persons believe it firmly and act according to its dictates . . . When we look outside the traditional believing community we see a society that is also dysfunctional. Even with advanced science and technology, with superb techniques in manufacturing and commerce, in communications and computation, our secular society remains without satisfactory meaning or capacity to restrain the violence of its own members. Our miracle machines serve ephemeral purposes. So we begin to talk about values. Where do we begin? My suggestion is that we begin where everything begins in human affairs, with the basic story, the account of how things came to be at all, how they came to be as they are, and how the future life of man can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate man, heal him, guide him.⁶⁹

The new orienting narrative Berry proposes, one that shapes us emotionally and ethically, is a negotiation of the impasse he sees between dysfunctional Christian cosmology and the spiritually detached scientific cosmology inherited from Charles Darwin.⁷⁰ The difficulty of redemptive Christian cosmology, he writes, “is that it presents the world as an ordered complex of beings that are ontologically related as an image of the divine; it does not present the world as a continuing process of emergence in which there is an inner organic bond of descent of each reality from an earlier reality . . . Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with any cosmological order or process since the essential thing is redemption out of the world through a personal Saviour relationship that transcends all such concerns.”⁷¹ While Berry recognizes the invaluable knowledge derived from scientific cosmology and evolutionary biology, he argues that this scientific story in its “commitment to the realm of the physical to the exclusion of the

⁶⁹ Thomas Berry, “The New Story: Comments on The Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values,” *Teilhard Studies*, 1 (1978): 1-2.

⁷⁰ Berry, “The New Story,” 3-6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

spiritual” results in a “lack of meaning. It is not an integral story.”⁷² Berry draws from the work of Teilhard de Chardin to propose “The Story of the Universe,” a scientific cosmology that would provide an account of our shared universe. The Story, he argues, is infused with spiritual resonances appealing to “both scientist and believer” through images of creativity, communion, and intimacy.⁷³ The New Story, he writes, decenters what it means to be human by arguing that the universe is a “web of relationships” and through a “more intense communion within the material world” life emerges into being.⁷⁴ For Berry, the New Story establishes “a new paradigm of the human,” one that views humanity as a small but remarkable part of this “cosmic-earth process.”⁷⁵ Becoming sensitized to their part in this grand narrative, humans can have “confidence in the future” that “awaits the human venture.”⁷⁶

Berry’s later works build from these sentiments by focusing on his concern for the “effects of rapid industrialization on the ecosystems of the planet and the lack of response of the religions to this growing crisis.”⁷⁷ Berry’s essays on religion and ecological healing encourage both interreligious dialogue and dialogue between science and religion. Berry calls for engagement of all the world’s religions in recovering their “cosmological sensibilities, to see the human as a microcosm as profoundly related to the universe as a macrocosm.”⁷⁸ In 1992, with

⁷² Berry, “The New Story,” 6.

⁷³ Ibid., 8-11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Mary Evelyn Tucker, foreword to *Thomas Berry The Sacred Universe: Earth Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Columbia Press, 2009), xii.

⁷⁸ Tucker, xiv.

cosmologist Brian Swimme, Berry wrote *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding Cosmos*. Similar to Wilson’s rich narrative telling of the Epic of Evolution, *The Universe Story* describes evolutionary history with similar grandeur. *Universe Story* combines contemporary science with the “world’s great wisdom traditions” to explore “humanity’s place in the evolving cosmos and our ecological imperative.”⁷⁹

Thomas Berry’s students Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim continue his sacred cosmology work through the *Journey of the Universe* project which includes a film, a book by Swimme and Tucker, “20 conversations with scientists, historians, and environmentalists,” conferences, colloquia, and teaching curriculum that all narrates the “14 billion-years story of the universe’s development, from the great flaring forth of the universe” to the evolution of “planetary life of greater complexity and consciousness.”⁸⁰ Tucker describes *Journey* as a “functional cosmology” that combines astronomy and physics, chemistry and geology, biology, botany, anthropology and the humanities together to “trace the rise of humans” in a way that “allows for a comprehensive sense of mystery and awe to arise.”⁸¹ Described as capable of capturing the human spirit and dependent upon a “profound appreciation of humans experiencing nature,” *Journey* continues Berry’s legacy of guiding “humans into the next period of human-Earth relations” by conveying the role of humans as “critical to the further flourishing of the

⁷⁹ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era- A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), cover materials.

⁸⁰ Mary Evelyn Tucker, “*Journey of the Universe: An Integration of Science and Humanities*,” *Journal of Religion, Nature, & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2015): 206.

⁸¹ Tucker, “*Journey of the Universe*,” 207-8.

Earth community.”⁸² In book form, Swimme and Tucker argue that *Journey*:

evokes wonder from scientists and nonscientists alike. And it challenges some religious traditions to rethink or expand their worldviews . . . *Journey of the Universe* is intended not to over-ride or ignore these other stories, but rather to bring into focus the challenge of creating a shared future. The great opportunity before us today is to tell this new universe story in a way that will serve to orient humans with respect to our pressing questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? How should we live together? How can the Earth community flourish?”⁸³

Echoing her mentor, Tucker writes “humans are the microcosm of the macrocosm—they are the mind and heart of the vast, evolving universe” and the *Journey* project hopes to capture hearts and minds for a new mission of earth healing.⁸⁴

While there is little evidence Wilson and Berry exchanged ideas (though Berry does cite Wilson in numerous texts) through those inspired by their work like Barlow, Rue, Goodenough, Tucker and Grimm, these conversations have intermingled via “spiritualizing and aestheticizing science”⁸⁵ into a “commitment to mythopoetic science”⁸⁶ as both a possibility for the development of secular ecological ethics and as a way for religions with various traditions/practices/beliefs to come together to promote sustainable futures. While one of the shared criticisms of Sideris’s collection of these voices under “new cosmology” is that she conflates diverse perspectives too easily,⁸⁷ I am nevertheless compelled by their references of

⁸² Tucker, “*Journey of the Universe*,” 209-10.

⁸³ Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 4-5.

⁸⁴ Tucker, “*Journey of the Universe: An Integration of Science and Humanities*,” 208.

⁸⁵ J. Baird Callicott, “Myth and Environmental Philosophy,” in *Thinking Through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, K. Schilbrack, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 168.

⁸⁶ Sideris, “Response to Critics,” 225.

⁸⁷ See Ursula Goodenough, “Honoring Nature All the Way Down,” J. Baird Callicott, “Science as Myth (Sacred or Not), Science as Prism,” and Mary Evelyn Tucker, “*Journey of the*

one another that they do recognize affinities between The Epic of Evolution and the Universe Story.⁸⁸ Loyal Rue writes that the Epic of Evolution is synonymous with “cosmic evolution” and “the universe story,”⁸⁹ and Connie Barlow’s text *Green Space, Green Time* includes interviews with/conversations between Wilson, Goodenough, Tucker, Grim, and Swimme. Furthermore, Tucker’s criticism that Sideris, “has lumped together a group of thinkers with quite different specializations and trainings and with widely divergent publications and teaching commitments”⁹⁰ rings with a bit of irony since this criticism seems to echo in many ways much of what the *Journey of the Universe* project, Berry’s Universe Story, and Wilson’s Epic of Evolution claim to accomplish— a path for divergent specializations and perspectives to come together guided by a new orienting vision. Universe Story and Epic of Evolution both offer a shared orienting narrative, one that scientifically details our beginnings with moving rhetorical power, as a way to position the human within a shared evolutionary history and hopefully to encourage respect for that history. This shared sacred history, they argue, cannot be contained by academic discipline or religious affiliation and it offers the opportunity for theorists and believers to galvanize one another. Neither Berry nor Wilson sees these evolutionary epics as necessary replacements for all other cosmologies or religions but they do offer what Barlow calls, a “planetary ethic,” that makes “no claim to supplant existing traditions but would seek to

Universe: An Integration of Science and Humanities,” in *Journal of Religion, Nature, & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2015).

⁸⁸ Strangely, and I concur with Sideris again here, while critics accuse Sideris of conflation in her arguments there is very little specificity from these critiques about what distinctions there can and should be made between Universe Story and Epic of Evolution.

⁸⁹ Loyal Rue, “Epic of Evolution,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Bron Taylor, ed. (New York: Continuum, 2005), 612-615.

⁹⁰ Tucker, “*Journey of the Universe: An Integration of Science and Humanities,*” 206.

coexist with them, informing our global concerns while we continue to orient our daily lives in our cultural and religious contexts.”⁹¹ Keeping this commitment to universal appeal and planetary relevance in mind, for the rest of the chapter I will continue to speak about Epic of Evolution and Universe Story advocates interchangeably as a constellation that promotes the retelling of grand scientific cosmologies as sacred orientations meant to awaken humans to new ways of thinking about meaning, value, belonging, and purpose.

Sacred Natures

“The stream of stars blinking on, blinking off, and the living stream of organisms coming into existence, going out of existence,” Barlow writes, “is beyond judgment of good and evil. It is, rather, magnificent. It is sublime, precious, and exceedingly worthy of reverence.”⁹² One of the defining features of the new cosmology constellation is the work these authors undertake to “awaken” others to the specialness of our universe and its profound complexity. “Reverence,” Goodenough writes in *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, “is the religious emotion elicited when we perceive the sacred” and we “are called to revere the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole and all of its myriad parts as they catalyze and secrete and replicate and mutate and evolve.”⁹³ For new cosmology authors, planetary existence is *sacred*. Nature, from cell to forest, ant to ocean, is sacred. Strangely, though, in much of this work what the author means by *sacred* is not discussed. It is the case that within religious studies that sacred/the sacred/sacrality is so ubiquitous that many feel it does not need the pause for explanation. But it is curious that all of

⁹¹ Goodenough, xv-xvi.

⁹² Barlow, 28.

⁹³ Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 170.

these authors, particularly those who argue that they do not find fulfillment to questions of meaning and value within the world's religions, use "sacred" and its affective resonances (awe, wonder, reverence) to describe their relationships with/to the natural world. Their use of "sacred" deserves pause, I argue, because this uncritical use sidesteps particular questions, like which creatures, bodies, environments, and encounters actually count as "sacred," that can unsettle new cosmology's seemingly straightforward care for the whole cosmos. For my purposes in this chapter I will leave the term speculatively open and dwell briefly with three familiar articulations in religious studies to think more about how they might resonate with new cosmology material.

For sociologist and philosopher Émile Durkheim, the sacred is something set apart from our quotidian realities and attributed with "some kind of divine or transcendent characteristic, power or significance" that is essential for religious experience.⁹⁴ Sacred things, Durkheim argues, "should not be taken to mean simply those personal beings we call gods or spirits. A rock, a tree, a spring, a stone, a piece of wood, a house, in other words anything at all, can be sacred," but, he emphasizes, our "notion of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from [our] notion of the profane" its opposite, "by a sort of logical gulf between the two, the mind radically rejects any mingling or even contact between the things that correspond to these realms."⁹⁵ For Durkheim, any material could be sacred but he maintains a dichotomy between sacred materials and profane materials. The sacrality of material, he contends, is not inherent. Rather, "sacredness sets in by contagion . . . A special emotion gives it reality; it is attached to an object because this emotion has encountered that object on its path. Therefore it is natural that it

⁹⁴ Bronislaw Szerszynski, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 10.

⁹⁵ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36-39.

should spread from that object to all those it finds in proximity.”⁹⁶ Durkheim’s affirmation that any material could be sacred and that this sacredness is affectively contagious, so that attraction to certain material could lead to proximally related material being caught-up in this specialness, is potentially galvanizing for new cosmology but his insistence on a sacred/profane dichotomy is more dubious for movements that use sacrality to argue all material is intrinsically valuable.

Historian of religion Mircea Eliade, weaving Durkheim’s conception of the sacred with Rudolph Otto’s experience of the Holy, similarly envisioned distinctions between sacred and profane. Our profane world, for Eliade, is suffused with the sacred, that which is wholly other awe-inspiring mystery, via revelatory phenomena Eliade calls “hierophanies” or acts of manifestation where the sacred “shows itself” to humans.⁹⁷ At times, Eliade’s conception of the sacred sounds much like the trajectory of dark green religion⁹⁸ when he writes, “the cosmos as a whole is an organism at once *real, living, and sacred*.”⁹⁹ But he seems more ambiguous about whether the natural world, nonhuman material, can *itself* be sacred. “Nature,” he argues, “always expresses something that transcends it... a sacred stone is venerated because it is sacred, not because it is a stone; it is the sacrality *manifested through the mode of being of the stone* that reveals its true essence.”¹⁰⁰ Any material could potentially be the occasion of a hierophany yet,

⁹⁶ Durkheim, 241.

⁹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1957), 11.

⁹⁸ As I outlined in the introduction, Bron Taylor argues that dark green religions are contemporary ways of reading the earth itself as “sacred text” that may not easily fall into the borders of normative religions and are characterized by “deeply ecological, biocentric, or ecocentric” elements “considering all species to be intrinsically valuable, that is, valuable apart from their usefulness to human beings.” Taylor, *Dark Green Religions: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 10-13.

⁹⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 116-17.

¹⁰⁰ Eliade, 118.

he writes, the hierophany “transforms the place where it occurs: hitherto profane, it is thenceforward a sacred area.”¹⁰¹ Like Durkheim’s sacred potential in all material, Eliade’s conception of the sacred could prove ecologically fruitful. Though, his insistence that the sacred value of material “is always due to that something or that somewhere” of the hierophany toward which the sacred space or material directs, but “never to its own actual existence,” should be a stumbling block for theorists trying to articulate that every fiber of the unfolding mysterious universe is, in itself, sacred.¹⁰²

Social anthropologist Kay Milton’s articulation of “sacred,” I suspect, is the friendliest to new cosmology when she suggests the term sacred can be “applied to anything whose value is not based on reason, but is experienced directly, through the senses, and, when necessary, asserted dogmatically. Sacredness is thus linked to aesthetics, to affective experience.”¹⁰³ For Milton, sacredness describes, “what matters most to people . . . What is sacred to someone is simply what they value most highly, be it their mother’s memory, their religious traditions, the mountain scenery near their home . . . What this understanding of sacredness depends on very heavily is emotion and feeling.”¹⁰⁴ But Milton cautions that this conception of sacred, as affective attachment, is susceptible to bifurcations like the sacred/profane dichotomy. She makes the compelling argument that many people in the global north, particularly conservationists, already view the material world as “sacred” in this way, but this material is sacred only in so far

¹⁰¹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 216.

¹⁰² Eliade, *Patterns*, 216.

¹⁰³ Kay Milton, “Nature is Already Sacred,” *Environmental Values* 8 (1999): 440.

¹⁰⁴ Kay Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 104.

as it is set apart from humans—a pristine nature.¹⁰⁵ For many people, she claims, “nature untouched by human hand is worth conserving, whereas nature that has been influenced by human activity is less valuable,” highlighting that “‘nature’ is an ambiguous term, used sometimes to include and sometimes exclude humanity.”¹⁰⁶ For some environmental perspectives, Milton writes, this nature/culture dichotomy is too important and cannot be abandoned as the sacredness of certain material (places, creatures, landscapes) relies on the maintenance of clear boundaries between humanity and the natural world.¹⁰⁷

While I will question in chapters two and three if new cosmology is able to welcome environmentally devastated material and toxic bodies as sacred, I believe Goodenough’s call to revere “the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole and all of its myriad parts as they catalyze and secrete and replicate and mutate and evolve” generally reflects the sentiments of new cosmology—the universe in all its complicated existence, known and unknown, massive and miniscule in scale and perspective, is sacred not because a religious tradition has deemed it so but in the sense that Milton suggests.¹⁰⁸ It is sacred as affective experience and intrinsically valuable for those humans who are able to tap into this consciousness. This depth, complexity, and sacrality can be anyone’s experience if they desire to have an intimate connection with the more-than-human universe. The intensity of emotions that bubble-up when humans spend sincere time contemplating this richness or experiencing elements of it, new cosmology argues, is similar to other human religious experiences. From Wilson’s perspective, human capacity for

¹⁰⁵ Milton, “Nature is Already Sacred,” 439-446.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 443.

¹⁰⁸ Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 170.

awe, wonder, and reverence for the natural world may be evolutionarily innate but needs to be reawakened in order for this life-process to provide ultimate meaning to the big questions of who we are. “Building the evolutionary epic, telling the story,” he tells Barlow, “this is our best way to reanimate the deep emotions that are innate to the human mind, having evolved over thousands of generations of religious context. The self-assembly of complex systems, the evolutionary process: this is the epic we can create by exploring the material world. And there’s so much left to explore. It is of such profound and Olympian magnitude.”¹⁰⁹

Wilson and Goodenough argue that the epic of evolution, nurtured through deep driving emotional connections with the existence it details, has the potential to convey meaning, purpose, and shared morality to seeking humans. “Religions have come to serve many roles,” Goodenough writes, “addressing what we can call the Big Questions: What is the meaning of life? What is my life for? In Western faith traditions, the explanations offered are framed in the context of a creating, interested God who has both a purpose and a plan. The disciplines of science also seek to provide explanation, and although they do not directly take on the Big Questions, they offer up a worldview which is not obviously dictated by a personal God concerned with human beings.”¹¹⁰ Goodenough argues that science, particularly what we’ve come to understand in the evolutionary epic, “allows us to experience cognitive affinity as well as spiritual affinity with the rest of nature” and we can seek “guidance from nature as we articulate religious principles.”¹¹¹ “The collective planetary enterprise of meaning, value, and purpose,” she writes, “is a sacred enterprise” and its “existence can serve” to provide “guidance

¹⁰⁹ Wilson in conversation with Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time*, 27-28

¹¹⁰ Ursula W. Goodenough, “The Religious Dimensions of the Biological Narrative,” *Zygon* 29.4 (1994), 603.

¹¹¹ Goodenough, “The Religious Dimensions,” 604.

and spiritual resources for human existence and global resolutions.”¹¹² Goodenough structures her text *The Sacred Depths of Nature* as a beautifully lyric daily devotional with short stories narrating biology followed by a meditation. The stories unfold out through The Epic of Evolution like a guiding light. For example, after a story on the origins of the Earth she evocatively unfurls the following:

The realization that I needn't have answers to the Big Questions, needn't seek answers to the Big Questions, has served as an epiphany. I lie on my back under the stars and the unseen galaxies and I let their enormity wash over me. I assimilate the vastness of the distances, the impermanence, the *fact* of it all. I go all the way out and then I go all the way down, to the fact of the photons without mass and gauge bosons that become massless at high temperatures. I take in the abstractions about forces and symmetries and they caress me, like Gregorian chants, the meaning of the words not mattering because the words are so haunting. Mystery generates wonder, and wonder generates awe. The gasp can terrify or the gasp can emancipate. As I allow myself to experience cosmic and quantum Mystery, I join the saints and the visionaries in their experience of what they called the Divine.¹¹³

What is important, what has the value and meaning humans seek, are the life processes themselves and their very existence. The *fact* they exist at all, she relates, fills her with such awe and wonder that she borrows from Christian mysticism in order to attempt to articulate these feelings. Concluding the text, Goodenough writes that the evolutionary epic story, “our story,”

tells us of the sacredness of life, of the astonishing complexity of cells and organisms, of the vast lengths of time it took to generate their splendid diversity, of the enormous improbability that any of it happened at all . . . And so, I profess my Faith. For me, the existence of all this complexity and awareness and intent and beauty, and my ability to apprehend it, serves as the ultimate meaning and the ultimate value. The continuation of life reaches around, grabs its own tail, and forms a sacred circle that requires no further justification, no Creator, no superordinate meaning of meaning, no purpose other than the continuation continue until the sun collapses or the final meteor collides. I confess a credo of continuation. And in so doing, I confess as well a credo of human continuation. We may be the only questioners in the universe, the only ones who have come to understand the astonishing dynamics of cosmic evolution. If we are not, if there are others who Know, it is unlikely that we will ever encounter one another. We are also, whether we like it or not, the dominant species and the stewards of this planet. If we can

¹¹² Goodenough, “The Religious Dimensions,” 605.

¹¹³ Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 13.

revere how things are, and can find a way to express gratitude for our existence, then we should be able to figure out, with a great deal of work and good will, how to share the Earth with one another and with other creatures, how to restore and preserve its elegance and grace, and how to commit ourselves to love and joy and laughter and hope . . . The Epic of Evolution is our warp, destined to endure, commanding our universal gratitude and reverence and commitment . . . Humans need stories—grand, compelling stories—that help to orient us in our lives and in the cosmos.¹¹⁴

The continuation of it all, being part of this history long before her that is also a part of every creature in every corner of the planet, is the bottomless spiritual well that provides not only orienting mythos, but sustaining emotion, value, and purpose. “The contemplation of all this continuation, all this connection, all this enormous effort to reach our present level of diversity,” she writes, “is for me a deep spiritual resource. I *care* about having it continue. Its continuation is a commandment.”¹¹⁵ Contemplation of the intricacy of the universe infuses us with awe in the presence of its splendor. Filled with awe, Barlow and Goodenough contend, humans can come to understand their place as a small but pivotal speck of this shared wonder and will begin to respond with reverent care for the sacred planet.

While Wilson, Barlow, and Goodenough detail how the evolutionary epic can provide orientation, meaning, belonging, and purpose for anyone including those who are less attracted to religious cosmologies, Berry and Tucker speak primarily to the world’s religious traditions arguing that the powerful religious imagination can only be strengthened by re-awakening a sacred connection with the material world that has been lost. They call out to religions to fold their stories and histories into the mystery of the universe asking what an “ecological phase” for the Earth’s religions might look like. Part of what religions can be, Mary Evelyn Tucker suggests, is “vessels for nurturing the sense of the sacred” and as religions enter their ecological

¹¹⁴ Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, 170-74.

¹¹⁵ Goodenough, “The Religious Dimensions of the Biological Narrative,” 616.

phase their challenge is to reinvigorate a “sense of awe and reverence for the Earth” in all its dynamic intricacy “as a numinous matrix of mystery.”¹¹⁶ Berry, perhaps in response to Eliade, contends that “the universe is the supreme manifestation of the sacred”¹¹⁷ and he argues that the world religions should come to appreciate that the sacred is this wondrous mystery we can barely comprehend:

the communion that comes through these experiences of the wild where we sense something present and daunting, stunning in its beauty, is beyond comprehension in its reality, but it points to the holy, the sacred . . . This notion is fundamental to establishing a cosmos, an intelligible manner of understanding the universe or even any part of the universe . . . We must remember that it is not only the human world that is held securely in this sacred enfoldment but the entire planet. We need this security, this presence throughout our lives. The sacred is that which evokes the depths of wonder. We may know some things, but really we know only the shadow of things.¹¹⁸

Experiences in nature, enriched by expert scientific knowledge about the workings of life, Berry writes, should move humans (particularly those who feel moved by religious traditions) to understand there is still wonder here on this planet, a wilderness of spiritual riches left to be explored. However, Berry urges, our impending ecological concerns should fill us with a sense of urgency because of the devastation that we are causing to the natural world. “We will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred,” he writes, “only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things come into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us.”¹¹⁹ Integrating human stories

¹¹⁶ Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (Peru, Illinois: Carus Publishing, 2003), 51.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, Mary Evelyn Tucker, ed. (New York: Columbia Press, 2009), 176.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 176.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Random House, 1999), 49.

of meaning and purpose into the Universe story, being moved by this grand narrative, reorienting ourselves in reverent respect for the planet are, Berry believes, the future for religious studies.

“We are moving,” he writes:

from a theology of religion and an anthropology of religion to a cosmology of religion. This is the direction where, I think, religious studies will inevitably go in the future . . . In the immediate future, our religious concerns will, I believe, be more cosmological. They will be much more sensitive to the universe as the primary religious mode of being and to ourselves being religious through our participation in the religion of the universe. There will, I believe, be an emphasis on the planet Earth and on the universe itself as a single sacred community. The natural world will once again become scriptural text. The story is written not in any verbal text but in the very structure of the universe the galaxies of the heavens and in the forms of the Earth. . . This will require an immense shift in orientation, one that recognizes our emergence out of the long evolution of the universe and the Earth.¹²⁰

Rethinking the human as no longer the center of the universe but rather one part of one immense sacred community brings up questions of how humans should relate to others within this community. New cosmology teaches that humans should not only feel awe, wonder, and reverence as universe dwellers but should also act to protect and sustain each other as universe family.

Evolutionary Kinship

What does it mean to be a part of one endless sacred community? What does it mean to live life planetarily? Who are my ecological kin and how do I learn to give them reverent care? Another defining feature of new cosmology is their argument that regarding nonhuman others as our evolutionary kin, all related to one another and all a part of the same matter that makes up the cosmos can encourage ethical action. “A recovery of the sublime meaning of the universe,” Berry writes, “could lead both to a greater intimacy of the human with the manifestation of the

¹²⁰ Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 99-100.

divine in the natural world and to a greater intimacy of the different religions among themselves. It becomes increasingly clear that humans have a common origin and a common destiny with every other component of the Earth community. We live on the same planet. We breathe the same air. We drink the same water. We share the same sunlight. We are nourished by the same soil.”¹²¹ Here, Berry speaks of intimacy on different levels. One, being part of one immense sacred community, Berry believes, offers opportunities for religious traditions to recognize their intimate connections with one another rather than differences—a closeness offered by sharing this Earth space and its resources. From a planetary perspective, we share the same table, food, drink, and shelter. Two, Berry recognizes deep intimacy between humans and all other material on Earth as one immense sacred family sharing the same heritage, essence, and genealogy. From a planetary perspective, we are all extended kin. While in chapters two and three I speculate about how new cosmology might react to unwelcome family members, untidy houseguests, toxic lovers, and threatening neighbors, this kinship language has significant affective power. As my opening epigraph from Stephen Jay Gould captures, humans (ideally) protect their beloveds. Bonds of intimacy and affiliation galvanize us to protect and care for each other. Feelings of awe, wonder, and reverence, new cosmology argues, awaken humans to rethink their orientation in the universe. Affects of intimacy and attraction, feelings we might call love, that new cosmology contends work similarly to spark change. “We now have the wonder,” Berry and Swimme write, “not merely that we are related to and intimate with everything about us, but that we have a cousin relationship with every being in the universe, especially with the living beings of the planet Earth. We have not descended to a lower level; they have, as it were, been recognized at a higher level. Both their lives and ours are infinitely expanded by this intimate

¹²¹ Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 81.

presence to each other.”¹²² What does it mean to be in intimate presence with planetary others? What is required of humans who recognize these relationships?

E. O. Wilson’s work on *biophilia*, while speculative, is influential for not only new cosmology authors in expressing these kinship intimacies but also broader conversations in religious environmental ethics on the inexhaustible question of human/nonhuman attraction and relationship. “Biophilia,” Wilson writes:

if it exists, and I believe it exists, is the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. Innate means hereditary and hence part of ultimate human nature. Biophilia, like other patterns of complex behavior, is likely to be mediated by rules of prepared and counterprepared learning—the tendency to learn to or to resist learning certain responses as opposed to others. From the scant evidence concerning its nature, biophilia is not a single instinct but a complex of learning rules that can be teased apart and analyzed individually. The feelings molded by learning rules fall along several emotional spectra: from attraction to aversion, from awe to indifference, from peacefulness to fear-driven anxiety. The biophilia hypothesis goes on to hold that the multiple strands of emotional response are woven into symbols composing a large part of culture. It suggests that when human beings remove themselves from the natural environment, the biophilic learning rules are not replaced by modern versions equally well adapted to artifacts. Instead, they persist from generation to generation, atrophied and fitfully manifested in the artificial new environments into which technology has catapulted humanity. For the indefinite future more children and adults will continue, as they do now, to visit zoos than attend all major professional sports combined (at least this is so in the United States and Canada), the wealthy will continue to seek dwellings on prominences above water amidst parkland, and urban dwellers will go on dreaming of snakes for reasons they cannot explain . . . The significance of biophilia in human biology is potentially profound, even if it exists solely as weak learning rules. It is relevant to our thinking about nature, about the landscape, the arts, and mythopoeia, and it invites us to take a new look at environmental ethics.¹²³

While there is no direct evidence for biophilia and whatever biophilic tendencies we have may have atrophied, Wilson contends that what we do know about evolutionary history would lead us to the logical understanding that since we evolved alongside other creatures they play a

¹²² Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story*, 246.

¹²³ E. O. Wilson, “Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic,” in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Stephen Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 31-2.

tremendous role in what it means to be human not just in practical knowledge of our environments (what is food, what are possible tools, what to fear) but also as a resource for metaphor and myth. Coupled with the innate tendency Wilson sees in our species an ability to “translate emotional feelings into myriad dreams and narratives,” art and religious belief, poverty of biodiversity must impact the human psyche.¹²⁴ Stephen Kellert expands further arguing that the biophilia hypothesis proclaims absolute “human dependence on nature” and extends much beyond basic sustenance to encompass “the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction.”¹²⁵ Wilson’s daring assertion, Kellert writes, also “reaches beyond the poetic and philosophical articulation of nature’s capacity to inspire and morally inform to a scientific claim of a human *need*, fired in the crucible of evolutionary development, for deep and intimate association with the natural environment, particularly its living biota.”¹²⁶ The notion of biophilia should compel us to, in Wilson’s terms, “look to the very roots of motivation and understand why, in what circumstances and on which occasions, we cherish and protect life.”¹²⁷

Wilson’s understanding of biophilia manifests as an onto-affective attunement, one that again sits in the realm of interest of both religion and science, toward life in all its forms. “Humanity,” Wilson writes, “is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life.”¹²⁸ Learning more about our

¹²⁴ Wilson, “Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic,” 33-36

¹²⁵ Stephen R. Kellert, “Introduction,” in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, Stephen Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), 20.

¹²⁶ Kellert, 21.

¹²⁷ E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 138-39.

¹²⁸ Wilson, *Biophilia*, 22.

affiliation and nurturing our attraction to nonhuman others, Wilson argues, leads us toward protecting biodiversity and our capacity for biophilia, he suggests, is crucial for preservation and ecological activism. To the degree that humans are fascinated by and strive to understand this wilderness all around, Wilson argues, “we will place a greater value on them, and on ourselves.”¹²⁹ Here, Wilson suggests, in this “innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms,” is the “spirit” of environmental ethics since humans need, he contends, endless biodiversity to be fully human.¹³⁰ “*Other species are our kin,*” Wilson writes:

this perception is literally true in evolutionary time. All higher eukaryotic organisms, from flowering plants to insects to humanity itself, are thought to have descended from a single ancestral population that lived about 1.8 billion years ago. Single-celled eukaryotes and bacteria are linked by still more remote ancestors. All this distant kinship is stamped by a common genetic code and elementary features of cell structure. Humanity did not soft-land into the teeming biosphere like an alien from another planet. We arose from other organisms already here, whose great diversity, conducting experiment upon experiment in the production of new life-forms, eventually hit up the human species.¹³¹

What we are as humans is also what the planet is, a swarm of related life living together.

Attraction to certain landscapes, the notice of creature movement around us, yearning for connection with Earth-others may all be the lingering remnants of what were more active affinities.

In later chapters I will return to biophilia but here I want to highlight the tendency in new cosmology readings of biophilia to rely only on affects of love and delight despite Wilson and Kellert framing biophilia more as an “array of affective qualities”¹³² that include awe and wonder

¹²⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁰ Edward O. Wilson, “Biophilia and the Conservation Ethic,” 31-39.

¹³¹ Ibid., 39.

¹³² Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 195.

but also aversion, indifference, and anxiety.¹³³ Biophilia is exciting in this context because it hypothesizes why nonhuman others fascinate us so and suggests that to be human is to live respectfully within this tremendous diversity providing a pathway for action. The planet needs care, the planet needs love, these Earth-others are our kin and need our protection because we also have always needed them in return. “The diversity of life, past and present,” Barlow writes, “contributes all the characters for the Earth episodes of this epic. Plants, animals, fungi, protoctists and bacteria alive today are the current players in a multi-billion-year, continuing saga. This pageant of life embeds our species in something far more magnificent than the comings and goings of cultures and kings. The diversity of life here today is our extended family, and the very epic that reveals our wide kinship can also help us re-story those beings.”¹³⁴ The re-storying Barlow describes reorients humans into a tale of “honor for those who came before,” and responsibility for all those who come after for even the loss of one species is a loss to “the universe of a particular way of *perceiving* a part of the cosmos,” our understanding of who we are, and our purpose for how we should live.¹³⁵ “It is by way of this story,” Barlow writes, “that one’s very being can expand and fill with a passionate caring for the vast diversity of life- past, present, and future.”¹³⁶ When we begin to truly understand “the universe as a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects,” Berry argues:

we hear the voices of all the living creatures. We recognize, understand, and respond to the voices of the crickets in the fields, the flowers in the meadows, the trees in the woodlands, and the birds all about us; all these voices resound within us in a universal chorus of delight in existence. In their work *Biophilia*, E. O. Wilson and Stephen Kellert

¹³³ One possible explanation for the reason new cosmology authors seem to use only a positive reading of biophilia may be their commitment to connect affects to prescriptive ethics.

¹³⁴ Barlow, 85.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86-90.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

have emphasized the feeling of humans with the larger array of living beings . . . New religious sensitivities emerge as we understand better the story of the universe, which is now available to us through scientific inquiry into the structure of the universe and the sequence of transformations that have brought the universe, the planet Earth, and all its living creatures into being. The new scientific story of the universe has a mythic, narrative dimension that lifts the story out of a prosaic study of data to a holistic spiritual vision. This new creation narrative enables us to enter into the deep mystery of creation with a new depth of understanding. It is our human version of the story that is told by every leaf on every tree . . . Through this story we understand with new insight how every component of the universe is integrated with every other member of the universe community. To be is to contribute something so precious that nothing before or afterward will ever contribute that special glory to the created world.¹³⁷

Through these sacred kinships new cosmology authors offer an ethics of reorientation for humans. Reconceptualizing our home in the universe, who our evolutionary kindred are, and how we are called to protect our mutual home engenders a humbling new perspective, new cosmology contends, one that traces deep emotional investment coupled with scientific understanding as the path into better futures.

Affective Investments

Concluding this chapter, I will briefly synthesize some of the critiques of new cosmology scholarship and then move on to the core questions that will drive the rest of this project. Much of the criticism of new cosmology scholarship circulates around the significant concern of whether “scientific worldviews provide sufficient information and motivation to galvanize widespread action on environmental issues.”¹³⁸ From the perspective of new cosmology, investing science with “mythic, revelatory power; far from disenchanting our world,” offers a

¹³⁷ Berry, “Religion in the Twenty-first Century,” 86-7.

¹³⁸ Carlo Ivernizzi Accetti et. al., “Cosmology and the Environment,” in *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*.
<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2015/09/14/cosmology-and-the-environment/> (accessed April 23, 2016.)

global cosmology as “primary vehicle for restoring wonder, meaning, and value.”¹³⁹ But some scholars are less convinced about its universal appeal and are wary of its overlooked assumptions and its impact on other environment-related beliefs, practices, and ethics. In a 2015 response forum in *The Immanent Frame*, six religion scholars gave brief responses to these questions on cosmology and the environment. Bron Taylor and Lucas Johnston responded positively toward new cosmology material suggesting it offers opportunities for meaning and value for those experiencing “increasing disaffection” with “traditional institutionalized religions.”¹⁴⁰ Taylor argues that given religions “penchant for setting up categories of inclusion and exclusion, purity and defilement,” “science-based worldviews are far less likely to have such effects than the world’s predominant religions.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the kinship ethics new cosmology promotes, Taylor argues, “erode supremacist ideologies, whether racist or anthropocentric.”¹⁴²

Whitney Bauman, Willis Jenkins, Mary-Jane Rubenstein, and Lisa Sideris, however, expressed more hesitancy toward the promise of new cosmology. Bauman contends it must be recognized that these stories “are not without their own socio-historical locations. No narrative, religious or scientific, can skirt its ‘locatedness.’”¹⁴³ Furthermore, he argues that while “we as humans will find many common grounds in the emerging planetary story . . . this doesn’t mean it is a story that can be The One Story,” and “polydoxy of meanings and interpretations of the multiplicity of life” is a more appropriate reflection of our diversity.¹⁴⁴ Jenkins argues that it is

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Lucas Johnston, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴¹ Bron Taylor, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴² Taylor, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴³ Whitney Bauman, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

unclear “what we can expect big stories to do for our practical arguments” about how we should live in a rapidly warming world.¹⁴⁵ Jenkins contends that he does not find cosmologies morally irrelevant but finds little reason to think “that any cosmology will go far in practically specifying how humans should meet planetary challenges.”¹⁴⁶ While Mary-Jane Rubenstein says new cosmology is a tempting proposal, “if only everyone believed the transcultural truth of our having crawled from the same primal ooze, or burst from the same cosmic blast, we might heed the convulsive warnings of our planetary home,” she worries this “fantasy is misguided, dangerous, and self-sabotaging.”¹⁴⁷ Rubenstein warns that hidden perspectives “often encode anti-ecological values into scientific stories: the reproductive warfare of some linear biologies, for example; or the anthropocentrism of many emergence theories; or the disposable worlds of most multiverse cosmologies.”¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, she points out with guidance from Nietzsche, “the fantasy of a scientific triumph over religion is self-sabotaging because *belief in a single, objective truth* is arguably the legacy of monotheism in the first place.”¹⁴⁹ Like Bauman, Rubenstein recognizes valuing earth diversity is more appropriate through “*multiple accounts* of that multiplicity.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Willis Jenkins, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Finally Lisa Sideris, who has offered sustained critiques of the constellation she calls new cosmology for some time,¹⁵¹ argues that if “wonder is present in these narratives, it appears in disappointingly familiar forms—wonder at humans as the *consciousness, heart, or mind* of a self-organizing, ever-complexifying universe in which the emergence of our species was implicit from the beginning: wonder at the modern human subject knowledgeable enough to have ‘discovered’ cosmic patterns and processes that were opaque to all previous, unenlightened generations.”¹⁵² Sideris suggests new cosmology efforts to decenter, or at least reorient, the human might not be as successful as their authors intend. The generally “anthropic and anthropocentric flavor of the new cosmology,” she argues, “constitutes no marked improvement over the human-centeredness that is assumed to taint and disqualify traditional religions as sources of environmental values.”¹⁵³ Compellingly, Sideris contends, in a strange way new cosmology’s attempts at resisting anthropocentrism within certain religious traditions have the potential to solely offer up one exceptional human for another. Humans need not look toward a deity for their design and destiny but can marvel at the intricate workings of evolutionary existence that led to marvelous appearance of humanity. Regardless, as Sideris highlights, humans are afforded exceptional status in their ability to make meaning about the universe around them and this exceptionalism affords little opportunity for humility. I find that new cosmology spends so much time focusing on reorienting the human within this grand scientific

¹⁵¹ Efforts to pull Sideris’ critiques of new cosmology from an edited collection on ecological ethics organized by Universe Story proponents, as well as deletion of her lecture from the conference archive the collection was based on, prompted the issue of *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* dedicated to discussion of her arguments. This somewhat stunning erasure serves to only support Sideris’ characterization of consecrated science approaches as resistant to perspectives that cannot be qualified as uncritical promotion.

¹⁵² Lisa Sideris, “Cosmology and the Environment,” *The Immanent Frame*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

narrative, it has missed opportunities to dig deeper into what it even means by “the human” and which humans serve as its ideal.

One of Sideris’ most compelling critiques, and often overlooked by her detractors, is that “as a whole these movements discourage sensory, experience-infused forms of engagement with nature that are less dependent upon and mediated by expert knowledge.”¹⁵⁴ While Sideris recognizes that new cosmology authors are careful to say their evolutionary epics do not supersede or wholly replace religious cosmologies, they do conflate “all that is real with whatever is scientifically known or knowable” and this conflation:

encourages a disparagement of human-level, lived experience of the natural world as *unreal*. It asks us to look behind the scenes, beyond the senses, to what is assumed to be a more fundamental domain of reality. The result is a displacement of primary experience—encounters with a more directly sensed world— with a secondary and, for the most part, abstract and vicarious experience in the form of information dictated by experts. I accept that it is problematic to assert that our sensory experiences constitute an unmediated encounter with nature; nevertheless, *science* is not the same thing as *nature*, and to study the former is not to experience the latter. Nor is the study of the former necessarily conducive to seeking out experiences of the latter. . . This radical privileging of scientific reality puts environmental values on shaky ground. It estranges us from what we experience as real, meaningful, and beautiful. Why attach ourselves to this world of illusion?¹⁵⁵

Sideris weaves in David Abram’s work on ordinary experience in nature to suggest “relegating ordinary experience of the world to a secondary, derivative realm increases our reliance on experts to inform us of what is real and true about the world, what is worthy of our wondering response.”¹⁵⁶ Additionally, while new cosmology authors argue that humans “grapple with a sense of alienation, that we do not feel sufficiently ‘at home’ in nature,” and evolutionary epics can offer a reoriented sense of the Earth as our shared home, Sideris expresses skepticism of new

¹⁵⁴ Sideris, “Science as Sacred Myth? Ecospirituality in the Anthropocene Age,” 147.

¹⁵⁵ Sideris, “Science as Sacred Myth,” 156.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 156-57.

cosmology's ability, with its "almost unfathomably broad sweep of cosmic events," to be able to "elicit or encourage positive responses to particular local *places*."¹⁵⁷ Granting their diagnosis of alienation as correct for the sake of argument, Sideris contends, "it is not altogether clear how exposure to the grand narrative of the universe will rectify the situation. Ultimately, this story situates us not so much in *place* as in *space*. There is something distinctly *dislocating* about the story's all-encompassing scope. The sheer scale and remoteness of the universe vis-à-vis everyday life and lived experience may interfere with rather than foster a sense of being meaningfully connected and *emplaced* in our natural environments."¹⁵⁸ I am compelled to agree with Sideris' assessments but with the caveat that it is not so much the case that new cosmology is adverse to sensory experience, I would argue, or human attraction and attachment to affective encounters with nature. Rather, new cosmology material is resistant to affective encounters outside the realm of awe, wonder, and reverence. New cosmology authors want us to feel, and to connect deeply via those feelings, but they want us to feel within in a particular context and toward a particular outcome. What happens when our encounters with "nature" stir up other feelings?

Any discourse that attempts to traverse the rocky territory between religion and the sciences (or the humanities and sciences) will meet critiques about the uses and abuses of both science and religion in this material. Sideris and her interlocutors have lengthy exchanges on whether or not new cosmology trades in scientism. My interests for this project, however, are in what new cosmology authors have to say about affinity and attachment with/to nonhuman others, a conversation that is obviously apt for this context and of interest to religion and ecology in a broader sense but can also hold relevance for other trajectories in environmental ethics. In much

¹⁵⁷ Sideris, "Science as Sacred Myth," 157.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of this material I find myself questioning if this discussion is really about what science can lend to religious ecologies or if it is even about science at all. Rather, I find new cosmology and the repetitive retelling of the evocative evolutionary narratives to be about normative ethical framing through habitual emotional orientation. We ought to be awed by these truths and then act accordingly. To not do so is counter to what new cosmology believes is human destiny—our ontological purpose.

In his article “Telling the Facts of Life: Cosmology and the Epic of Evolution,” science writer Jon Turney characterizes new cosmology work, particularly Barlow’s *Green Space, Green Time*, as part of a larger resurgence in popular science writing that “while offering interpretations of how things are in the natural world, becomes another arena for disputing about the human future,” and ultimately promotes “one particular set of values.”¹⁵⁹ Picking up on Barlow’s language describing the evolutionary epic as the pageant of life in which all beings throughout space and time have a role, Turney argues that in order for all this history to have coherence as a set of values, it needs a moral. New cosmology authors tell the story as a grand spectacular display, one that “places the observer in relation to past events,” and can answer questions about how the world came into being but answering questions of “meaning and purpose requires further work by authors appropriating answers figured in technical terms for their own diverse ends.”¹⁶⁰ For Barlow, and others, the ends are investment in the potential of affective encounters, through contemplation and direct experience, with the natural world to offer ethical guidance. It is unclear, though, how we directly experience the spectacular universe Berry, Tucker, and Swimme spend so much time detailing other than through the narratives of “expert” knowledge.

¹⁵⁹ Jon Turney, “Telling the Facts of Life: Cosmology and the Epic of Evolution,” *Science as Culture* 10.2 (2001), 226.

¹⁶⁰ Turney, 230.

The problem with spectacular displays is that their brilliance and orchestration can blind one to overlooked cracks and corners. I continue to wonder if there are misfits at the borders of the pageant procession that are out-of-step with this affective modeling. What kinds of affective experiences does new cosmology normalize and what places, spaces, and creatures do they obscure by doing so?

“The way we speak about the natural world is not a transparent window,” Brendon Larson writes, “because it reflects the culture in which we live and its priorities and values. In the discourse about sustainability, for example, we look to environmental science for the facts, often neglecting the value-laden language in which they are communicated . . . they represent a complex way of human knowing.”¹⁶¹ While Larson is primarily concerned with ecolinguistics, addressing whether the language used in environmental science really promotes the sustainability outcomes scientists hope for, his observations about the sociocultural locatedness of language reverberates here for questions of religion, ecology, and emotion. The words we use matter and it is curious that repeatedly in both materials affiliated with the Epic of Evolution and the Universe Story, authors rely on awe, wonder, and reverence to convey meaning, value, and purpose. Why these emotions and only these? Are these emotions our only religious emotions? Are these emotions the only ones that lead to ethical action?

This work in sacred evolutionary kinships expresses fear about the rapid decline of biodiversity, sadness over lost species, and anxiety about what the future will hold but descriptions of encounters with nonhumans are very often descriptions of ideal ecological systems expressing wonder at their intricacy and reverence for being a part of their sacred lineage. In cases where the language tends toward the cosmic, particularly I find in Berry and

¹⁶¹ Brendon Larson, *Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability: Redefining Our Relationship with Nature*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), ix-xi.

Tucker's work, "nature" can actually seem quite removed from many quotidian concerns. While I would imagine that individually these authors would express concern for damaged environments and ill creatures, the challenges of communities recovering from disaster or negotiating environmental decline are not present at our immense shared table. Their stories are not folded into the New Story. This absence is a problem because it begs the question if these evolutionary epics and their ethics of reorientation are truly able to speak to contemporary ecological concerns. What does it mean to cultivate relationships in critically damaged environments? What does affinity and attachment look/feel like after ecological disaster? Are ill, damaged, disabled, and mutated creatures/habitats a part of our one sacred family? Given that new cosmology makes no mention of toxic or damaged environments, disabled or ill creatures, new cosmology is less resistant to categories of purity/defilement as Bron Taylor claims. The absence weighs here, I contend, as presence of discomfort and disillusionment with quotidian environmental realities. Furthermore, as I will trace in detail in the next chapter, since the burden of ecological devastation and decline (historically and presently) is disproportionately shouldered by poor communities of color, the refusal to engage environmental destruction in new cosmology visions seems to do little, counter to Taylor's hopes, to "erode supremacist ideologies, whether racist or anthropocentric."¹⁶²

In chapters two and three, in conversation with affect studies and feminist materialisms, I consider these questions in the midst of everyday encounters post-disaster. Touching the land and creatures in these environments, engaging in restoration projects, consuming their bodies as food, taking in the air and waters of the Gulf all present humans with an unsettling experience of vulnerability as these interactions take a toll on not just our physical health but also our

¹⁶² Taylor, "Cosmology and the Environment," *The Immanent Frame*.

emotional wellbeing and, perhaps, our confidence that we could control our relationships with nonhuman others. While all humans live in enmeshed environments, in devastated landscapes it is more difficult to deny our entanglements. In these encounters, human and nonhuman others form disconcerting zones of proximity in which scenes of devastation tug at the onto-ethical cohesion of new cosmology that expects certain affective orientations. When the fallout of ecological disaster results in broken, damaged, wounded, deformed, and absented biodiversity, what do humans love and how do we love it? If these places, spaces, and creatures become no longer desirable as model habitats, what happens to these unloved others? What might a robust conception of biophilia that is able to speak to the ethical complexities of loving the “unloved others” of devastated landscapes look like? ¹⁶³

Thinking with common conceptions of “sacred” we have articulations of sacred as special material, set apart from other material, that moves us as we experience it through feelings we might call awe, wonder, or reverence. But when the material landscapes we live in are not pristine (as much of the planet is not) and these spaces, creatures, and material are decidedly not separate from humans (in fact at times terrifyingly close) what do we think about our relationships with material impacted by pollution and disaster? Can these spaces be sacred? Can contaminates be enfolded within the contagious sacred? Can toxic bodies be our ultimate concern? In what follows, I will return to these questions and trace how toxic materials and toxic relationships prove to be tricky for religion and ecology as they slip beyond dichotomies like sacred/profane, subject/object, nature/culture, human/nonhuman. Furthermore, the changes

¹⁶³ Kirksey, Eben, Nicholas Shapiro, and Maria Brodine. “Hope in Blasted Landscapes,” in *The Multispecies Salon*, Eben Kirksey ed, 29-64 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 29.

wrought by disaster and toxic exposure provoke emotional responses but, I suggest, responses that may disrupt the awe, wonder, and reverence sacred natures are expected to evoke.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ A note on wonder—as we will find with new cosmology’s use of “sacred” and “kinship,” often the keywords used by new cosmology have rich and lengthy theoretical engagements that new cosmology almost completely ignores. Beyond their select dialogues with science authors, new cosmology does not wrestle with the genealogies that have explored the nuances of wonder. Consequently, I have not included affective engagements with wonder, particularly wonder’s more monstrous forms or where wonder is a fascination with the grotesque or anomalous, that would be particularly helpful for puzzling through devastated landscapes in favor of dealing with the habitual positivity in new cosmology’s affective project. Sideris calls these “diminished accounts of wonder” and their “elevation of abstract, expert knowledge above our lived experience of the world,” *distorted, deracinated wonder* that is rooted in “hubristic, quasi-authoritarian, and intolerant attitudes toward the nonexpert, nonscientist, and members of other faith communities” (2017, 3; 8-12). New cosmology wonder is always positive and because it is divorced from any cultural/historical contexts, is limited in which bodies, identities, and relationships are able to resonate with their framing of wonder. For more nuanced and productive explorations of wonder see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998; Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008; Lisa Sideris, *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

Chapter Two

Disasterscapes: Depletion, Abandonment, Toxicity

“‘My wound is geography,’ writes Southern novelist Pat Conroy. ‘It is also my anchorage, my port of call.’ Some wounds—we are grateful to confess—never heal. They grow with us, festering and prodding, reminding us often that the wound is what grants the storyteller his narrative power. Most people, I suspect can plot a geography of broken places in their lives, pointing to fierce landscapes and threatening terrain they have negotiated alone or with others. Their wound even becomes, sometimes, an anchorage... The quest for the mystery of place functions as an infirmity of sorts, summoning ever-new forms of diagnosis and methods of treatment. Understanding the incurable attraction of human beings to places they perceive as sacred is an ‘affliction’ I have come to love. I can’t get over it.”

Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*¹⁶⁵

One of the most moving stories of cleanup efforts after the BP spill is the origin of the Hermit Crab Survival Project. Park ranger Leanne Sarco working Grand Isle State Park Beach in Louisiana describes the project as a hopeful opening within weeks of frustration, anxiety, and desperation. “‘When we initially saw oiled animals,’” Sarco said, “‘we would call the US Fish and Wildlife hotline . . . I was frustrated by their response. At best, it would take them an hour or two to show up. By that time, the bird had moved on or already died.’”¹⁶⁶ Cleanup officials told volunteers that they were not allowed to clean the beach or help wildlife common to the coast because they lacked the required special training.¹⁶⁷ Amid her frustration Sarco said she saw, “‘hundreds of hermit crabs attempting to scramble ashore, only to get stuck under the sheen and

¹⁶⁵ Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ix.

¹⁶⁶ Eben Kirksey, Nicholas Shapiro and Maria Brodine, “Hope in Blasted Landscapes,” 38.

¹⁶⁷ Jacoba Charles, “Oil Pooling Elbow Deep Under the Sand of Grand Isle,” *Inside Climate News* August 2nd, 2010 <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20100802/oil-pooling-elbow-deep-under-sand-grand-isle>

suffocate.”¹⁶⁸ “BP and Fish and Wildlife were busy saving the birds, as well as edible wildlife—animals with either an economic benefit or cuteness factor,” Sarco said, but “hermit crabs were just part of the beach. When I saw the BP workers shoveling living hermit crabs covered with oil into bags for disposal, I knew I had to at least try to help them.”¹⁶⁹ The crabs, it turns out, were not off-limits to Sarco and her hundred volunteers who using everyday objects in a makeshift lab cleaned and released approximately ten thousand creatures.¹⁷⁰

Artist Jacqueline Bishop originally came to Grand Isle to collect oil to use in her dystopian collage work. After experiencing alarming skin reactions to the dispersants in the Gulf water, Bishop abandoned her plan to collect the oil and “began to use her camera to document the extent of the disaster and to chronicle the cleanup response. She took pictures of oiled marshlands and tar balls on beaches, as well as of BP work crews—including teams of supervised inmates from the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. She also began taking an inordinate number of pictures of hermit crabs.”¹⁷¹ In an interview with Eben Kirksey, Nicholas Shapiro, and Maria Brodine, Bishop described grounding her “desire for a liveable future in the figure of the hermit crab” by joining the Survival Project.¹⁷² Cleaning the little creatures “involved edging Q-tips into their shells without injuring their delicate bodies. ‘I felt so comfortable cleaning the hermit crabs,’” Bishop said, “swabbing with the Q-tip was the same gesture as painting, except I was taking oil off instead of applying it.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Kirksey, Shapiro, Brodine, 38.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷⁰ “Oil Pooling Elbow Deep Under the Sand of Grand Isle,” *Inside Climate News*.

¹⁷¹ Kirksey, Shapiro, Brodine, 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

This brief glimpse into interspecies encounter is a profound model of affiliation and attachment. It also, however, stirs up troubling ethical questions. Why are some humans drawn to the struggling crabs but not others? Why are some humans compelled to care for these creatures while others regard them as refuse? Stories like this one provide yet another occasion (albeit with some peculiar twists) to do as biophilia proponent E. O. Wilson suggests: inquire after the motivations (what circumstances and on which occasions) of human action to protect nonhuman others. In chapter one, I traced arguments from influential voices within religion and ecology that regard disincentive to cherish life as the result of ontological orientations that do not recognize affinity with the more-than-human world as our evolutionary legacy and ethical attachments as our sole hopeful recourse. Championing the unifying and galvanizing power of scientific cosmologies to provide an orienting mythos for *all* humans, these spectacular retellings of the universe story offer opportunities for emotional investment in the more-than-human world by positioning humans as a small part of the wondrous planetary family. In awe of the beauty of our shared universe and feeling the appropriate reverence for its sacred intricacy our ethics will shift, these scholars contend, in favor of biophilic care for our genetic kin. However, what stories, relationships, bodies, and politics do we disregard in this pursuit of a single orienting narrative? This chapter argues that painful environmental legacies and unsettling quotidian encounters render questions of affinity and attachment particularly troubling for religion and ecology.

Considering the Hermit Crab Survival Project, new cosmology authors would resonate with the compulsion to care for these little creatures. New cosmology proponents might site Sarco's undergraduate work in hermit crab biology¹⁷⁴ as a catalyst for later interventions, arguing that scientific inquiry can lead to empathy. Indeed in conversation with Connie Barlow, E. O.

¹⁷⁴ Kirksey, Shapiro, Brodine, 38.

Wilson, Lynn Margulis, Paul Mankiewicz, and Stephen Harding describe forming allegiances with species they study, “intimate involvement with wild things— sometimes very intimate,” that leads to conservation work.¹⁷⁵ Others, like Lee Klinger, describe affinities for particular habitats (the formation of bogs) and bioregions— a love for place that guides their projects.¹⁷⁶ These narratives, Barlow argues, are indicative of the conviction that “life loves life” and those who “deeply value biodiversity, who find it sacred, have fired that conviction with the memory of an intimate encounter with one or more real organisms at some point in our lives” organisms that are familiar and “creatures that are still alien, that are at home in the wild and can therefore never be fully at home with us— try as we might.”¹⁷⁷ These biophilic attractions, flashes of fellow feeling or familial affinity even with very different organisms and strange regions, can become attachments that new cosmology argues could be affectively cultivated. While this material rarely delves into the mechanics of affinity and attachment, how we affect and are affected by others and how we form emotional bonds, new cosmology nevertheless offers a normative conception of the human characterized by affective investment. To be appropriately human is to be in relationship with nonhuman others, awed by their existence and invested in caring for their wellbeing. But, as I contend in chapter one, there is an unspoken limit to these relationships and investments. Why do some encounters, feelings, and attachments post-disaster seem out of step with these affective norms? In this chapter I begin to ask why intimacies post-disaster seem to fall outside the onto-ethical paradigm of new cosmology by pairing new cosmology’s universal narrative with a particular context. Here, I dig into the environmental history and contemporary concerns of the U.S. Gulf Coast where 2005 sister storms Hurricane

¹⁷⁵ Connie Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time*, 109.

¹⁷⁶ Barlow, 116.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

Katrina and Hurricane Rita (two of the strongest storms the Atlantic has ever experienced) and the 2010 BP oil disaster (the largest “accidental” marine oil spill in history) drastically altered what can be said about environmental concerns in the region.

While new cosmology speaks to hermit crab affinity, this material is less helpful for making sense of the motivations of the other actors in our opening. It would be less complicated to let the faceless BP funded cleaning crews remain as corporate foils, all that was wholly awful about the spill represented by their careless shoveling of live creatures into bags. In hindsight, however, we know that while gaining tax credits BP largely employed migrant worker and supervised work release labor from the prison in Angola to clean the spill, factors that necessitate conversations on the circulations/distributions of power, privilege, and vulnerability.¹⁷⁸ Racial tensions in Grand Isle heightened during the cleanup as the predominantly white and Cajun community verbalized discomfort with black crews leaving their worksites and docked sleeping quarters to venture into the community for meals and leisure.¹⁷⁹ While we can only speculate, what might it *feel* like for the predominantly black and brown bodies, working for grossly low wages in sweltering heat and exposed to chemical dispersants, to encounter these crabs? What might cleanup workers think about these zones of intimacy as their bodies began to manifest the long-term health effects related to the spill?

¹⁷⁸ Abe Louise Young, “BP Hires Prison Labor to Clean Up Spill While Coastal Residents Struggle,” *The Nation*, July 21st, 2010. <https://www.thenation.com/article/bp-hires-prison-labor-clean-spill-while-coastal-residents-struggle/>

¹⁷⁹ Brentin Mock, “Cleaning Up Oil is Awful Work, But at Least You Can Get it,” *Colorlines*. August 17th, 2010. <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/cleaning-oil-awful-work-least-you-can-get-it>.

I will return to these difficult questions in the following chapters but for now, the open questions for religion and ecology are, why is environmental disaster beyond the frame of dominant discourses in the field? And, how do we begin to better address environmental disaster and uncertain futures? The first step is to start recognizing environmental disaster is an everyday reality for many communities. American studies scholar Curtis Marez argues that the aftermath of disasters and the complicated problems associated with their names (Katrina, BP) have a way of transforming what we thought we knew about the past and the present's pressing issues.¹⁸⁰ "To what extent is disaster 'exceptional,'" Marez asks, "and to what extent is it the norm?"¹⁸¹ The U.S. Gulf Coast is a devastated landscape in recovery not only from BP but also from the spectacular failures of response to Hurricane Katrina and the lack of care for black bodies. The entire Katrina event visibly testified to the kind of racial inequality and environmental injustice many Americans claimed did not exist in their nation, thereby illuminating numerous ways that "particular bodies and populations are made disposable."¹⁸² In the case of Katrina, is disaster the "moment the levees broke" or, Marez asks, does disaster also "signify the political-economic context that preceded the hurricane" and the "matrixes of disposability" exposed by its wake?¹⁸³ The Gulf Coast after BP, Katrina and Rita, I argue, offers an opportunity to scholars in religion and ecology to consider how our theory disregards disasters and their function as the norm for many beings on the planet.

¹⁸⁰ Curtis Marez, "What is a Disaster?" *American Quarterly*, 61:3 (2009), x.

¹⁸¹ Marez, "What is a Disaster?" x.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

One could counter that to force new cosmology and evolutionary history to engage and account for quotidian concerns, to compel big history to speak to daily injustice, struggle, and despair, is unfair. However, I make the argument in the previous chapter that while new cosmology hopes to cultivate a galvanizing narrative with the kind of awe-inspiring grandiosity that rivals religious myths, they do intend for these stories to influence everyday ethics—a reorientation of our relationship with/to nonhuman others in such a way that we see ourselves as part of a cosmic sacred family with responsibilities to care for this family. These stories of wonder and intimacy are effective, they argue, because of their universal appeal with the ability to be grafted onto religious traditions or act as a civic home for those exploring emotional connections with/to non-human others. But if they struggle to include disasterscape where awe, wonder, and reverence compete with anxiety, aversion, and apathy, and they do not speak to large populations living after environmental decline where intimacies with nonhuman others risk vulnerability and exposure, can new cosmology claim universal appeal? Can the sacrality of new cosmology negotiate toxicity? Are all non-human others truly regarded as sacred or does this sacrality hover above quotidian encounters as an ideal, glossing over histories of injustice, abuse, and pollution? How might religion and ecology address the skeletons here in this branch of the planetary family? At face value, new cosmology offers an intriguing bend to this conversation—an exciting democratization of sacrality, space, and ontology by positioning the whole universe, and its dizzying array of intricate, alien, unfathomable parts, as sacred. However, as I summarized in the previous chapter, this sacrality is vaguely unparticular, un-rooted, un-inclusive of large portions of the planet in its sidestepping of environmental degradation. My contention is that the focus of new cosmology on one affective-ethical narrative renders this discourse unable to attend to contemporary concerns. Drawing critical geographies, space and place, and environmental justice scholarship into a conversation that unsettles new cosmology

conceptions of sacred nature, here I sit with the particulars of degradation along the Gulf Coast to advocate for opening sacrality to damage, loss, and mutation.

Landscapes of Depletion: Erosion, Super Storms, Spills

“I have got in touch with a few people. Or they have managed to get in touch with me. I have managed to send some emails out. The happiness that comes from knowing people are still alive is brief like the flame of a match. Be happy, then be miserable. I have to watch all this gut-twisting stuff on TV—water, angry people, lies, familiar street signs in water, pregnant women wading in the water. *Wade in the Water* is part of the title of my poetry anthology. Irony. A boat is anything that floats . . . They are not showing my neighborhood on TV. It may be that I have no neighborhood, no house, no nothing. How to start . . . to start over . . . All the faces and hands are African American. The news informs us all the people are black. I feel miserable, sick. I guess I have trauma. Unlike the common cold, trauma affects the mind, the soul, the body. I am restless. All the African Americans are . . . Guns, gunfire. Who is shooting? Some people in the shelter make ugly comments about the stupid people who are still in New Orleans. It does no good to respond. They are convinced anyone who stayed was stupid. They are convinced thugs are shooting at helicopters. Anger makes my body hot . . . That is a dead man in the water? Who is killing? Time. Football lives. Writing something other than the information people give me for their FEMA applications helps. Dead. And no drinking water. And wading in poisoned water with the snakes and the dead bodies of animals and people floating by. Writing. Help! I have not been writing the way I want to write. I have been thinking about writing, the fragility of writing, how personal it is. Water can wash it away. Baseball games—the national pastime lives. Boats and helicopters and the military . . . the people who could help are over there-Iraq- killing terrorism. Sand. They must be killing shadows in the sand. The terrorism is here- hurricanes in the South, on the Gulf Coast, in and around the Crescent City. Yes, I have to write.” Jerry W. Ward, Jr. *The Katrina Papers*¹⁸⁴

“Explosion. Fireball. Destroyed: Eleven men. Created: Nine widows. Twenty-one father-less kids, including one who’ll soon be born. Seventeen injured. One hundred and fifteen survive with pieces of the puzzle lodged in their heads. Only the rig rests in peace, one mile down. Only the beginning. Blowout. Gusher. Wild well. Across the whole region, the natural systems shudder. Months to control it. Years to get over it. Human lives changed by the hundreds of thousands. Effects that rippled across the country, the hemisphere, the world. Imperfect judgment at sea and in offices in Houston, perhaps forgivable. Inadequate safeguards, perhaps unforgivable. No amount of money enough. Beyond Payable.” Carl Safina, *A Sea in Flames*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Jerry W. Ward, Jr. *The Katrina Papers: A Journal of Trauma and Recovery* (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Publishing, 2008), 11-12.

¹⁸⁵ Carl Safina, *A Sea In Flames: The Deepwater Horizon Oil Blowout*. (New York: Random House, 2011), 4.

2005. A very bad year. By the morning of August 25th Tropical Depression Ten circling near the Bahamas began to look more ominous. “Upgraded” to Tropical Storm Katrina, the storm moved toward northeastern Miami-Dade County and became a Category 5 hurricane shortly after pulling into the balmy bath of the Gulf of Mexico. When August 26th projections moved Katrina’s eye toward Grand Isle, emergency management officials on the Louisiana coast began discussing catastrophic impact for below sea-level New Orleans. August 28th at 9:30am, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco issued the first-ever mandatory evacuation for the city warning that “the storm most of us have feared” was soon to make landfall.¹⁸⁶ Blanco urged residents to get out as soon as possible and for those 112,000 residents without cars to find rides wherever they could. Those who could not get rides were directed to relocate to the Superdome as a shelter of last resort as soon as possible.¹⁸⁷

When Katrina made landfall at 6:00am on August 29th near Buras-Triumph Louisiana, the destruction was more devastating than even the grimmest predictions. Storm surge and seventeen hours of hurricane-force winds severely damaged the shores of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. 80% of the greater New Orleans area was under water, many areas under more than ten feet of water, mostly due to engineering policy failures like 53 levee and floodwall breaches spilling billions of gallons of water from the Gulf of Mexico, Lake Borgne, and Lake Pontchartrain into New Orleans.¹⁸⁸ 2006 reports estimated in New Orleans alone, at least 1,118

¹⁸⁶ Gordon Russell, “Nagin Orders First-Ever Mandatory Evacuation of New Orleans,” *Nola.com*, August 13th, 2010. http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2005/08/nagin_orders_first-ever_mandatory_evacuation_of_new_orleans.html

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Christine. F. Anderson, et.al., “The New Orleans Hurricane Protection System: What Went Wrong and Why,” American Society of Civil Engineers Hurricane Katrina External Review Panel 2007 <http://biotech.law.lsu.edu/katrina/reports/ERPreport.pdf>

people lost their lives, 135 are missing and presumed dead, and more than 400,000 residents had to flee the city— many will not return. Direct damage to property is estimated at \$21 billion with public infrastructure damage estimated at an additional \$6.7 billion.¹⁸⁹ 121 known dead in Mississippi, 67 missing, and 90% of structures up to mile inland from the shore were completely obliterated.¹⁹⁰ Most troubling for long-term restoration projects, Katrina flooding saturated the region in a toxic combination of oil, chemicals, waste, sewage bacteria, and garbage. The Coast Guard reported five major oil leaks from damaged tankers and refineries including at least 819,000 gallons leaking into south New Orleans.¹⁹¹ Surrounding downtown New Orleans is a 95-acre superfund site, a former toxic dump that lost its topsoil covering in the flooding and leached its chemicals into the area.¹⁹² Survivors either had to swim, float, or wade through this hazardous muck to safety or wait, days of waiting on rooftops, for rescue. Three weeks later Hurricane Rita, the fourth-most intense storm ever recorded in the Gulf, hit Louisiana's western coast decimating what was left of the coastal communities after Katrina. The two storms were so large "Katrina destroyed the Louisiana coast from the Mississippi state line to Grand Isle and Rita pretty much finished the job from Grand Isle to the Texas border."¹⁹³ My attempts to summarize this level of destruction are grossly inadequate. I cannot do it justice.

¹⁸⁹ "The New Orleans Hurricane Protection System," v.

¹⁹⁰ Lloyd Vries, "Mississippi Coast Areas Wiped Out," *CBS News*, September 1st, 2005 <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mississippi-coast-areas-wiped-out/>

¹⁹¹ "The Mother of All Toxic Cleanups," *Bloomberg Business Week*, September 25th, 2005. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2005-09-25/the-mother-of-all-toxic-cleanups>

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Tidwell, 342.

Unnatural Disasters and Disposability

Why were these storms so devastating? While mind-stretching, the statistics about these disasters do not capture the truly immense, frustratingly complex, injustices impacting those that call this region home and that continue to shape the impact of these events. Helpful for understanding these complexities, in his groundbreaking work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon coins the term “slow violence”¹⁹⁴ to redirect our attention to “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight,” the “attritional catastrophes that overspill clear boundaries in time and space” and that are “marked above all by displacements—temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements that simplify violence and underestimate, in advance and retrospect, the human and environmental costs.”¹⁹⁵ Such displacements “smooth the way for amnesia,” Nixon writes, “as places are rendered irretrievable to those who once inhabited them, places that ordinarily pass unmourned in the corporate media.”¹⁹⁶ It might seem counterintuitive to use slow violence to think through disasters like Katrina with their spectacular impact and media attention, but Nixon and others in environmental justice provide ways to illuminate all the actions, choices, and abandonments that lead up to and follow (even speculatively in the very distant future) environmental catastrophes that remain beyond our “rapidly eroding attention spans.”¹⁹⁷ We must figure out ways to creatively address, politically and representationally, the “slow erosions of environmental justice,” and the particular environmental concerns of populations habitually positioned as disposable in order to understand

¹⁹⁴ Similar to what Rachel Carson called “death by indirection,” *Silent Spring* 238.

¹⁹⁵ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2-9.

¹⁹⁶ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2-9.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

that the world's poor "can seldom afford to be single-issue activists: their green commitments are seamed through with other economic and cultural causes as they experience threat not as planetary abstraction but as a set of inhabited risks, some imminent, others obscurely long term."¹⁹⁸ Nixon's work resists strains of environmental thought like new cosmology that continue to attempt to address environmental concerns separate from their political dimensions,¹⁹⁹ particularly the reverberations of chattel slavery, neocolonialism, and fast capitalism.

In a 2006 report *In the Wake of the Storm: Environment, Disaster, and Race after Katrina*, Manuel Pastor et al. argue that Katrina, while "sweeping away businesses, homes, and lives" and embedding "images of desperate and seemingly abandoned residents" into American minds, shattered two "illusions Americans usually associate with disasters."²⁰⁰ The first of these "is that the government would always be there as an effective safety net."²⁰¹ Shocked by the "slow and now much criticized federal response" and the "stranded individuals and families" that were "left to fend-or not to fend-for themselves," sentiment after the storms, they argue, is characterized by a "growing wave of criticism and cynicism about government capacity."²⁰² The second illusion that "Katrina swept away" was "the traditional belief that natural disasters are a sort of equal opportunity affair— acts of God that affect us all. But as the government's

¹⁹⁸ Nixon, 4-8.

¹⁹⁹ "Tensions between," Nixon writes, "what Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier have called 'full stomach' and 'empty-belly' environmentalism," 5.

²⁰⁰ Manuel Pastor et. al, *In the Wake of the Storm: Environment, Disaster, and Race After Katrina*, (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2006), 1.

²⁰¹ Pastor et. al, 1.

²⁰² Ibid.

emergency rescue and recovery efforts floundered,” they argue, “particularly in beleaguered New Orleans, the country began to realize that this was not the case.”²⁰³ Make no mistake, longtime environmental justice advocate Robert D. Bullard writes, “the disaster in New Orleans after Katrina was unnatural and man-made.”²⁰⁴

The disproportionate environmental burden dealt to poor communities of color is painfully unsurprising to those advocates who, since the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice’s 1987 groundbreaking study *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, continue to argue that environmental and social justice concerns are intertwined. In the 1980’s environmental issues became part of the civil rights agenda initiated by what Bullard calls a “fragile alliance” between labor organizers, environmental groups at the 1983 Urban Environment Conference in New Orleans, the UCC Commission for Racial Justice, and predominately black grassroots activists living in “cancer alley,” the chemical manufacturing corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.²⁰⁵ The UCC Commission findings from two cross-sectional studies of demographic patterns associated with “commercial hazardous waste facilities” and “uncontrolled toxic waste sites,” demonstrate entrenched environmental inequality with a consistent national pattern of race proving “to be the most significant among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities.”²⁰⁶ *Toxic Wastes*

²⁰³ Pastor et. al, 1.

²⁰⁴ Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, “Introduction,” in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, ed. Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009) 2.

²⁰⁵ Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* 3rd Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 14.

²⁰⁶ Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race: A National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites* (New York: United Church of Christ, 1987), xiii.

and Race reported, “three out of every five Black and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites” with more than “15 million Blacks” living in communities with “one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites.”²⁰⁷ *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty*, a 2007 update, found “many of our communities not only face the same problems they did back then, but now they face new ones because of government cutbacks in enforcement, weakening health protection, and dismantling the environmental justice regulatory apparatus.”²⁰⁸ While “Katrina blew the lid off the ‘dirty little secret’ of race, vulnerable populations, disaster response, and unequal protection,” Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo writes, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty* only reconfirmed what many living in these communities already knew: “people of color are particularly concentrated in neighborhoods and communities with the greatest number of hazardous waste facilities” raising serious questions “about the ability of current policies and institutions to adequately protect people of color and the poor from toxic threats.”²⁰⁹

What these studies recognize as national vulnerabilities is perhaps even more the case in the South, as Pastor et. al.’s *In The Wake of the Storm* report indicates. “The South,” they write, is “host to the majority of the nation’s African American population” comprising “32 percent of the population in Louisiana, 36 percent in Mississippi and 26 percent in Alabama.”²¹⁰ Those “left behind as the flood waters rose in New Orleans,” they write, “were from neighborhoods that were even poorer and more African American. Such increased vulnerability is typical of the

²⁰⁷ *Toxic Wastes and Race*, xiv.

²⁰⁸ The United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987-2007* (New York: United Church of Christ, 2007), 7.

²⁰⁹ *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty*, vii-xii.

²¹⁰ Pastor, *In the Wake of the Storm*, 3.

South, a place where the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and white resistance has affected both race relations and the region's ecology. The plantation system exploited not only humans but also the land, and the South has often been thought of as "a sort of dump for the rest of the nation's toxic waste."²¹¹ Pockmarking much of the landscape impacted by these storms are areas Vernice Miller-Travis calls "sacrifice zones" where residents suffer a "disproportionate burden" of toxic chemical exposure.²¹² "Sacrifice zones," Steve Lerner writes, is a term that was originally used "by government officials to designate areas dangerously contaminated as a result of the mining and processing of uranium into nuclear weapons."²¹³ During the Cold War, Lerner writes:

when the Soviet Union and the United States were racing to build up their nuclear arsenals, large areas in both nations were contaminated with radioactivity. In the United States, some of these catastrophically polluted places were fenced off and warning signs were posted; but others were not, and people continued to live in them and fall ill. Today hundreds of these national sacrifice zones are scattered across the United States, where the by-products of uranium mining operations, nuclear weapons production facilities, and atomic test sites have left behind irradiated landscapes unfit for human habitation.²¹⁴

But these locations contaminated by radioactivity are not the only "places 'sacrificed' to the ravages of intense pollution," Lerner contends.²¹⁵ He makes the case that the "'sacrifice zones' designation should be expanded to include a broader array of fenceline communities or hot spots of chemical pollution where residents live immediately adjacent to heavily polluting industries or

²¹¹ *In the Wake of the Storm*, 3.

²¹² Steve Lerner, *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 3.

²¹³ Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 2.

²¹⁴ Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones*, 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

military bases.”²¹⁶ Residents in these areas are overwhelmingly low-income minorities that “are required to make disproportionate health and economic sacrifices that more affluent people can avoid.”²¹⁷ The decision of where to locate these plants, dumps, and hazardous sites Miller-Travis argues, “takes us back to the question of who is valuable.”²¹⁸ “Permission to locate a new industrial facility adjacent to an existing residential area,” Lerner argues, “is often sold to the community in terms of the jobs it will create.”²¹⁹ This tradeoff, Miller-Travis explains, “is viewed by the environmental justice community as a kind of ‘economic blackmail’ . . . ‘It is a heinous thing to ask people to do, but it happens all the time,’” Miller-Travis asserts, “in essence, people are offered a choice between jobs and a shorter life.”²²⁰ These fenceline communities are one form of “spatial segregation,” Lerner argues, where the “geographic concentration and economic isolation of low-income and minority citizens in rural pockets, inner suburbs, and central-city ghettos” exposes communities of color, those on the “wrong side of the tracks,” to industrial development that zoning laws push far from white communities.²²¹

New Orleans itself is a staggeringly apt study in all these environmental justice issues harming communities “long before Katrina’s flood-waters emptied the city.”²²² New Orleans is located along the Mississippi River Chemical Corridor which is host to “more than 125

²¹⁶ Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones*, 3.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Lerner, *Diamond*, 3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Pastor, *In The Wake of the Storm*, 3.

companies that manufacture a range of products including fertilizers, gasoline, paints, and plastics.”²²³ Areas impacted by the disasters already disproportionately had problems with childhood environmental lead poisoning and air quality related asthma and respiratory disease.²²⁴ “When the hurricane hit,” Pastor et. al. write, “the existing inequalities and the history of discrimination in the American South played out in tragic yet predictable ways. Evacuation strategies, for example, left the most vulnerable populations—the poor, minorities, the elderly—inadequately protected.”²²⁵ Weeks before Katrina and Rita, Bruce Nolan, a *Times-Picayune* reporter, distinctly summed up these abandonments in his critique of emergency transportation plans: “city, state and federal emergency officials are preparing to give the poorest of New Orleans’ poor a historically blunt message: In the event of a major hurricane, you’re on your own.”²²⁶

When thinking about these storms, “landfall is not just a physical question,” geographer Cindi Katz argues, because “geography is always socially produced.”²²⁷ Every landscape, she writes, “can reveal sedimented and contentious histories of occupation: struggles over land use and clashes over meaning, rights of occupancy, and rights to resources.”²²⁸ On the Gulf, “Katrina churned through historical geographies of extraordinary multiculturalism but extreme racial

²²³ Pastor, *In The Wake of the Storm*, 3.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Bruce Nolan, “In Storm, N.O. Wants No One Left Behind” *The Times-Picayune*, July 24, 2005. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/cases/katrina/Press/Times-Picayune/2005-07-24%20TP%20Evacuation.pdf>

²²⁷ Cindi Katz, “Bad Elements: Katrina and the Scoured Landscape of Social Reproduction,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 15:1 (2008), 16.

²²⁸ Katz, 16.

segregation, of amazing environmental wealth exploited rapaciously, of mythic significance in the American and even global imaginary whose celebrations masked the enduring legacies of poverty and discrimination that they fed off and opposed.” New Orleans, romanced as “the southernmost port of the United States and the northernmost port of the Caribbean,” is a city, Katz writes, “whose strange wonderfulness— that vibrant patchwork of beautiful, colorful, messy difference— is celebrated more than its hideous horribleness— the twisted legacies of venal corruption shot through with deep if quirky racism— is mourned and criticized.”²²⁹ The labor of Bullard, Lerner, Katz, and others working in environmental justice illuminates that what Katrina “revealed to the nation” was what the “hardened contours of racialized impoverishment and the residual costs of environmental exploitation” do to people’s lives, particularly black bodies, rendering them invisible, inconsequential.²³⁰

“The wholesale abandonment of the poor on the part of the state and capital in New Orleans was not a turn of phrase or hyperbolic calling to attention in the wake of Katrina,” Katz writes, “it was a social fact.”²³¹ “Underneath all the physical wreckage and debris,” Katz argues, “what Katrina and the flood in its wake scoured was the desperately uneven landscape of social reproduction in New Orleans. It revealed the costs of long term disinvestments in the social wage . . . the costs of enduring social and environmental injustice; the neglect of crucial infrastructure including even New Orleans’s intricate water management system; and the evisceration of public support for housing, healthcare, education, and social welfare . . . all jumbled together.”²³²

²²⁹ Katz, 16.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²³² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Within this, what Katz terms, “landscape of depletion” it is important to understand these disasters as the product of “long-term disinvestment” in the social reproduction, “environmental infrastructure, health care, education, housing, and social justice,” that ensures the futurity of the “material social practices of everyday life” for communities on the Gulf Coast.²³³ It is also an occasion to ask if the recovery years after the storms are producing more of the same.

Displacement and Dispossession

To get an idea of the immense material changes left after a superstorm the size of Katrina and Rita requires absorbing a set of stunning statistics. Katrina left an estimated 22 million tons of debris, more than half in Orleans Parish alone.²³⁴ 350,000 motor vehicles, 60,000 boats, 300,000 underground fuel tanks, and 42,000 tons of hazardous waste that all had to be collected and disposed of in ways that did not risk more contamination.²³⁵ Katrina blew down offshore oil platforms and refineries, caused six major oil spills releasing 7.4 million gallons of oil, hit five Superfund sites, and contaminated drinking water supplies.²³⁶ Of course injustices did not end once the waters began to recede and the cleanup began but the destruction wrought by Katrina and Rita reoriented justice efforts toward opportunities for resisting the “pre-disaster status quo” during the recovery and rebuilding process.²³⁷ However, as Manuel Pastor et. al.’s assessment *In The Wake of the Storm* details, distressing realities of disparity, dislocation, and dispossession

²³³ Katz, 18.

²³⁴ Pastor et. al, 29.

²³⁵ Ibid. 29.

²³⁶ Ibid., 30.

²³⁷ Eric Mann, “Race and the High Ground in New Orleans” *World Watch* 12:5 (2006), 40.

during recovery and rebuilding persist. Survivors of the storms suffered what they term the “second disaster” where those communities most impacted by the flooding were also most likely to be “underprepared and underinsured, and to be living in unsafe, substandard housing.”²³⁸ The slow distribution of federal aid to these communities left many residents of lower-income neighborhoods in New Orleans “concerned that federal, state, and local officials will not prioritize their communities for cleanup and reconstruction” rendering the city “little more than a theme park for tourists.”²³⁹ The “uneven geographies of cleanup and reconstruction,” Katz argues, are palpable in every day encounters like “mundane practices of disrespect and disregard such as the city’s failure to even replace street signs destroyed or washed away in many poor neighborhoods so that those intent on rebuilding might find their way.”²⁴⁰ Lack of investment in futures for these neighborhoods indicates, even in restoration opportunities, a clear distinction between “the visible city of tourism and the invisible city of residential deprivation.”²⁴¹

One of the most pressing concerns for working through pre-Katrina social and environmental erosion in recovery is the right to return and rebuild for those dislocated by the storm. “On August 29 a black city, called by activists the most Afro-centric city in the United States, was almost literally blown off the face of the Earth,” environmental justice advocate Eric Mann writes, and “the bungled and chaotic evacuation effort scattered more than a quarter of a million black people to the winds. The majority went to Shreveport and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; and Atlanta, Georgia, but New Orleans activists say that the dispossessed and

²³⁸ Manuel Pastor et. al, *In the Wake of the Storm*, iii.

²³⁹ Pastor et. al, iii.

²⁴⁰ Katz, 24.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

dispersed members of the black community are in 44 states. Many of them are still trying to find their way home.”²⁴² The five-day “active abandonment of New Orleans” Clyde Woods writes, was followed by years of “massive resistance to the demands of displaced residents to return.”²⁴³ Corrosive policies and governmental failures, Katz writes, “left gaping room” for non-governmental organizations, religious, and grassroots communities to continue facing “the sprawling rot that was there all along.”²⁴⁴ These activists²⁴⁵ identified housing, and grim possibilities for “low-income, non-white residents” to return as the leading impediment to recovery efforts.²⁴⁶ Katrina alone forced more than a million Louisiana residents to flee their homes with an estimated 100-300,000 of those residents at risk for ending up permanently displaced.²⁴⁷ FEMA contracted for 120,000 mobile homes but weeks after Katrina, faced with difficulty getting evacuees out of shelters due to water, sewer, and electricity infrastructure problems, FEMA still had 4,600 Louisiana families in trailers, hotel rooms, or cruise ships docked in New Orleans and 100,000 evacuees still housed in “barrack-style shelters scattered

²⁴² Mann, 40.

²⁴³ Clyde Woods, “Katrina’s World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source,” *American Quarterly* 61:3 (2009), 427.

²⁴⁴ Katz, 26.

²⁴⁵ Katz highlights the work of ACORN, the Common Ground Collective, the Common Ground Clinic, Critical Resistance, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, People’s Hurricane Relief Fund, and Safe Streets/Strong Communities as critical to recovery. Making their efforts more difficult, however, Katz details the majority of national donations to Katrina recovery were absorbed by a small number of national organizations, primarily The Red Cross, Salvation Army, United Way, and Bush Clinton Katrina Fund, with the Red Cross receiving the most funds “despite their poor track record on getting funds where most needed, their inefficiency, and their lack of accountability.” (25)

²⁴⁶ Katz, 21.

²⁴⁷ Bullard and Wright, “Introduction,” 4.

across twenty-six states.”²⁴⁸ To discourage evacuees from moving into their communities, some Louisiana parishes near New Orleans, Bullard and Wright detail, “adopted emergency ordinances limiting the density of mobile-home parks.”²⁴⁹ Compounding these abandonments, the trailers FEMA purchased for \$2.6 billion were notoriously vulnerable to inclement weather and later found to be toxic to their inhabitants.²⁵⁰ After evacuees started showing signs of formaldehyde exposure (nausea, rashes, asthma attacks, memory impairment, insomnia, headaches, intestinal problems) the Sierra Club tested FEMA trailers and found 83% of the tested trailers had formaldehyde levels way above the EPA limit leading to potential long-term health effects.²⁵¹ 2007 Congressional hearings found FEMA “deliberately neglected to investigate any reports of high levels of formaldehyde in trailers so as to bolster FEMA’s litigation position in case individuals affected by their negligence decided to sue them.”²⁵² Two years after the storm, an estimated 195,000 people were still living in FEMA trailers.²⁵³ For those that were able to stay or return but were not part of rebuilding investments, “people declared disposable by some ‘new’ economy to find themselves existing out of place in place,” they must negotiate what Nixon calls “displacement without moving,” referring to the “loss of the land and

²⁴⁸ Bullard and Wright, “Introduction,” 5.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, “Race, Place, and the Environment in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, ed. Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 35.

²⁵¹ Bullard and Wright, “Race, Place, and the Environment in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” 35.

²⁵² Bullard and Wright, 35.

²⁵³ Ibid.

resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable.”²⁵⁴

Prior to Katrina, 5% of the New Orleans population lived in public housing, about “7500 units of public housing” yet two years after the storm only 1200 units were made habitable while the rest remained barricaded or were demolished.²⁵⁵ For those barred from returning and settling elsewhere, disasters only serve to worsen competition for affordable housing. For example, the East Baton Rouge Parish population “surged from 425,000 to 1.2 million as a result of Katrina. Katrina made Baton Rouge one of the fastest-growing regions in the country. The influx of these new residents to the region created traffic gridlock and crowded schools,” and “many of the mostly white suburban communities and small towns are not known for their hospitality towards blacks.”²⁵⁶ Federal cash assistance programs to repair homes only served homeowners and 55% of the New Orleans community were renters.²⁵⁷ Where were those citizens who made up the “fabric of the city,” Katz argues, those “teachers, nurses, waiters, bellhops, taxi drivers, small business owners, police and firefighters supposed to live” without this infrastructure?²⁵⁸ “What hope is there for the future of New Orleans as a working, habitable city,” Katz asks, “as opposed to a theme park if the core of its working population is essentially evicted?”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 19.

²⁵⁵ Bullard and Wright, “Introduction,” 5.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Katz, 22.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Stormy, Oily Forecasts

Eroding social protections and opportunities for communities on the Gulf Coast, particularly poor communities of color, are intensified by erosion on the coastline. For some time before Katrina, environmental activists working in the Gulf warned that sinking land, rising seas, and warming oceans would lead to superstorms like Katrina and Rita.²⁶⁰ Oil and gas drilling and its effects have all but eroded away the protective wetlands and barrier islands that slow down hurricanes.²⁶¹ It is difficult to convey just how important the oil and gas economy is to the Gulf Coast. While many Americans might imagine a few rigs dotting the horizon, Mike Tidwell writes there are “no fewer than 4,000 colossal platforms in the Gulf used for oil drilling and production. They employ 85,000 workers, far more than the entire U.S. space program.”²⁶² Stretched end-to-end they would span from “Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia, rising more than ten stories above the ground and with a width nearly that of a modern aircraft carrier. On nautical charts, the individual oil platforms in the Gulf are so numerous they look like stars in the sky, a kind of galaxy at sea. They even group themselves—coincidentally—into ‘constellations’ not unlike the Big Dipper and Southern Cross.”²⁶³ Numerous studies, Tidwell writes, show “at least a third—and probably more—of Louisiana’s land loss stems directly from the erosion and altered hydrology caused by the industry’s ten thousand miles of pipeline canals and navigation channels.”²⁶⁴ As inland oil and gas reserves rapidly run out “all across the region, wells and tank

²⁶⁰ Mike Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana’s Cajun Coast* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), xiv.

²⁶¹ Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell*, xiv.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, xv.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

batteries have been abandoned, the hulking equipment rusting and falling apart waiting to be carted off as scrap metal,” and the “large companies- Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texaco, BP Amoco, and others” are eager to be “done with this old and dying coast, this depleted shoreline, free instead to turn to the vast reserves just beyond the horizon, there in the fathomless sea. Out there, along the ocean floor, lies the new frontier.”²⁶⁵ “The question persists,” Tidwell writes prophetically in 2003, “what *will* this coast do when a Category 4 hurricane finally *does* come ashore with almost nothing to stop its surge tide, which is likely to be in the neighborhood of eighteen feet? The water will furiously topple all levees in its path and go and go and go, all the way to the outskirts of Baton Rouge, like a liquid bulldozer, flattening everything it meets, and hundreds of thousands of people will be at risk of drowning.”²⁶⁶

In 2010 one of these rigs, *Deepwater Horizon*, one of so many, exploded killing 11 people. The damaged well at the Macondo formation pumped crude oil into the Gulf for 87 days. BP risked the health futures of 16,000 miles of coastline and its inhabitants to disperse the oil and disperse the blame. For those rebuilding after Katrina and Rita, some of them New Orleans residents who waited for days on rooftops without government response, what did it feel like to watch the underwater footage of plumes of crude gushing for days? For fishing communities that sorted through the haystack messes of splintered boats, docks, and homes in order to rebuild, what did it feel like to wait and see how much oil would wash ashore, how many fish would die, how many days they would be unemployed? How might activists feel facing another insurmountable disaster threatening their homes, bodies, and human/nonhuman neighbors? While difficult to represent, this complex environmental, racial, and economic history of “acceptable” risks, disinvestment, displacement, and dispossession shapes the Gulf landscape

²⁶⁵ Tidwell, 304.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

and how it is experienced by those that attempt to call it home through erosion, erasure, and haunting remainders. Like toxic exposures, do these abandonments also sediment in bodies shaping our emotional orientations and future attachments?

The Sacred and the Human

Keeping these historical and pressing environmental concerns in mind, I return to the discussion of sacred natures. In chapter one I argued that while new cosmology authors (some of whom claim their fidelity to nature is a secular feeling best expressed through religious affects) do not clearly define what they mean by “sacred” when they claim nature is sacred and should be revered/experienced as such, it seems to be the case that “sacred” likely functions as affective experience and ethical compulsion. Through working to revitalize our evolutionarily innate capacities to marvel at the more-than-human world by sacralizing scientific knowledge and encouraging others to treat the planet with reverent care, these authors argue humans will find renewed meaning and purpose on the planet as one type of being amongst the dizzying array of sacred kin. However, as I summarized, critiques of new cosmology point out the inability of their epic narratives to persuasively speak to practical environmental concerns or to the social locatedness of their own stories. But most troubling, I find, is their lack of reflection on what they mean by “the human” or which humans serve as their models. It seems to be the case, at least in its current iterations, that the onto-ethics of sacred natures discourse functions best under the assumption that encounters with nonhuman others do not shake our onto-ethical ideals too much.

For example, while new cosmology authors do not meditate at length on ontology, they do offer some insight into how they implicitly position the human within the universe through their relationships with sacred nonhuman others. In Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry’s *The*

Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos, they describe human relation within the epic of evolution thusly:

the human being within the universe is a sounding board within a musical instrument. Our mathematics and our poetry are the merest echoes of the universe entire. We are unable to capture more than fragments, even ciphers of fragments, in our most exalted moments. Even so, as we become captivated by the quantitative aspects of our knowledge of the epistemological concerns of our knowing, often forget this deeper psychic dimension of things that activated our awareness. We enter a narrowing of human reality and take the sounding board for the whole. Poetry and the depths of soul emerge from the human world because the inner form of the mountains and the numinous quality of the sky have activated these depths in the human. Just as with carbon, we can analyze a mountain into the form of rock and the type of mineral that compose the mountain. Mountains can also be understood as agencies in the world, participating in the ongoingness of the universe. That is, mountains act, and in a multivalent way. They sculpt the cycles of the hydrosphere and atmosphere. They shape the climates and thus the biology of the local region. And particular mountains also stun at least some of the animals. A human being, for instance, can climb a mountain and get hit by something so profound, at so deep a level, that the human will never be quite the same. This precise feeling will not occur on the ocean or in a cave or a valley. Other sorts of experience will take place there. This specific moment will emerge only in the presence of the mountain; it is evoked out of potentiality by the mountain. The dynamic of the mountain is accomplishing something in the universe, is acting, is altering reality. From our quantum perspective on evolutionary cosmology, we can approach the reality of a human stunned by a particular mountain only through a series of negatives. It is not accurate to say that the human has invented or created these feelings all by itself. It is not accurate to imagine that these feelings are present objectively in such a form within the mountain. It is not accurate to think that these same feelings would happen if a different sentient being were there, or a different mountain. The feelings are neither subjective fantasies of the animal nor simply objective experiences of the mountain. Such profound feelings, such emotions that are even tinged with personal significance and with hints of destiny, are the mutual evocation of mountain, animal, world. Depth communication of primordial existence is the reality at the foundation of all being. Humans give voice to their most exalted and terrible feelings only because they find themselves immersed in the universe filled with such awesome realities. The inner depths of each being in the universe is activated by the surrounding universe.²⁶⁷

This passage conveys the grandeur I discussed in chapter one. Our math, poetry, and other creative endeavors, they write, try to speak to the magnificence of the universe but it slips

²⁶⁷ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 40-41.

beyond our abilities. Compellingly, at first glance *The Universe Story* attributes nonhuman nature some stunning agentic capacity. Mountains are not inert matter but rather sculpt the environment around them. The mountain *acts* in the life processes of its home. Meditating on one of Earth's most awe-inspiring formations, Swimme and Berry infuse a sense of mystery into contemplating carbon and atmospheric cycles by writing humans, and "some" other animals, relate instinctively to these processes affectively though perhaps in ways that we do not fully understand. "Some" mountains have the agentic capacity to *move us* and our reverberating wonder, attempts to capture that mystery and ensure its continuation, is our role.

Perhaps they have a certain mountain in mind, or a personal mountaintop experience to relate to, but the agentic capacity of mountains becomes more insubstantial in the particulars. These feelings are connected to the mountain—other locales will conjure other feelings and while the feelings are "evoked out of potentiality by the mountain" not all beings will be moved.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, Swimme and Berry argue the emotions do not originate in human subjectivity, nor are they an inherent property of the mountain, but rather formed in relationship, the "mutual evocation of the mountain, animal, world."²⁶⁹ So why this mountain? Any mountain? Which "sentient" beings? Does all material have agentic capacities or just particular materials? What are the conditions of possibility that allow one to be awed by a particular mountain? Swimme and Berry do not expand but there are some clues to implicit positioning of the human in relationship to nonhuman others as they continue:

the capacity within human awareness to hear and respond to the spontaneities of the universe was deeply appreciated by primal peoples of every continent. In order to approach their genius we need to recognize in the vast diversity of their cultural expressions an insistence on establishing a close relationship with the psychic depths of the universe. Their aim was a life in resonant participation with the

²⁶⁸ Swimme and Berry, 41.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

rhythms of reality. For this reason the drum became their primary instrument. The drum was part of the sacred techniques for orchestrating the unity of the human universe dance. The drumbeat and, more broadly, the songs, chants, and dances of our ancestors expressed the visions and dreams awakened in them by the spirit work, by those dimensions of nature beyond the phenomenal world, but integral with materiality—the wild dimension of the universe . . . Tonight on every continent humans will look into the edge of the Milky Way, the band of stars our ancestors compared to a road, a pathway to heaven, a flowing river of milk. Formed by the seemingly insignificant ripples in the birth of the universe, this milky band has been activating its stars with its own fluctuating waves for ten billion years, and when we stare at it, we stare back at our own generative matrix. New ripples in the fabric of space-time, we humans ponder those primal ripples that called us into being. The vibrations and fluctuations in the universe are the music that drew forth the galaxies and stars and their power of weaving elements into life. Not to hear such music? If autism or deafness had interrupted the music at any time in this fifteen-billion-year event, the symphony would have suddenly gone silent.²⁷⁰ Our human responsibility as one voice among so many throughout the universe is to develop our capacities to listen as incessantly as the hovering hydrogen atoms, as profoundly as our primal ancestors and their faithful descendant's in today's indigenous peoples. The adventure of the universe depends upon our capacity to listen. Humans tonight will watch the Milky Way galaxy not only with eyes, but also with radio telescopes, satellites, and computer-guided optical telescopes, with minds trained by the intricate theories of the composition, structure, and dynamic evolution of matter. Though we wait as faithfully as the ancient Inuit who stared eye-to-eye with a blue-black whale, we will not see a galactic eye blinking back at us. Though we may be as dedicated to the wild spirit of the night sky, no eye of the universe will appear from behind a cloud. Nor do we need such an experience to realize what that ancient hunter came to realize. For after such long centuries of inquiry, we find that the universe developed over fifteen billion years, and that the eye that searches the Milky Way galaxy is itself an eye shaped by the Milky Way. The mind that searches for contact with the Milky Way is the very mind of the Milky Way galaxy in search of its inner depths.²⁷¹

Here, humans are inherently drawn to these sacred mysteries, the same mystery that makes up our very being, and we should strive to listen to the reverberations of the universe—mysteries that have always captivated us. Swimme and Berry appeal to “primal” humans, their

²⁷⁰ It is unclear what they mean in this strange throw-away sentence—perhaps that human “frailty” cannot disrupt the epic refrain? This discomfort with sensory and neurological difference, with ill and disabled bodies, I will discuss in chapter six is part of the reason religion and ecology avoids talking about ecological devastation. What Alison Kafer calls “compulsory ablebodiedness” is characteristic of the field making it difficult to further conversation on intimacies with ill and damaged landscapes, creatures, and bodies.

²⁷¹ Swimme and Berry, 42-45.

“descendants” in contemporary indigenous peoples, and their fascination with the workings of the material world as the best examples to follow for this attunement. While much of *Universe Story* feels under cited, with their appeal to the primal, mystery, and humans celebrating sacred mysteries I was, again, expecting a gesture to Mircea Eliade here. In chapter one I speculated that Eliade’s ambivalence about whether or not the natural world *itself* can be sacred rather than only a manifestation of the sacred might render his conception of sacrality less helpful for efforts to sacralize all material in the universe. But here, contemplating human and nonhuman relation, agentic capacity, and being, Swimme and Berry seem to echo Eliade’s conceptions of sacrality. Manuel Vásquez writes that Eliade believes “modernity has disenchanting reality, dulling our sense for the sacred” thus the “scholar of religion should not be primarily interested in contemporary experiences of the sacred.”²⁷² In order to understand the power of the sacred, Eliade argues, scholars should turn their attentions to “primitive man”:

the man of archaic societies tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to *power*, and in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between *real* and *unreal* or psuedoreal. Thus, it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power.²⁷³

It is important to remember, though, as Vásquez highlights in his critique of Eliade’s work, in “approaching so-called primitive societies, Eliade is not interested in the particularities of the ethnoses. He does not aspire to construct a painstaking ‘thick description’ of the native’s local, ever-changing intersubjective world, as an interpretive ethnographer working in Clifford Geertz’s mold would.” Instead:

²⁷² Vásquez, 101.

²⁷³ Eliade 1959a:13 in Vásquez

Eliade is interested in the ‘primitive man’ as the privileged point of entry in the journey toward the origins of religion . . . Eliade wants to study early peoples because he thinks they provide an open window to the essence of humanity, which in *illo tempore* was inextricably bound up with the sacred . . . What the historian of religion is ultimately after is ‘the original religious matrix’ that grounds our *Dasein*, to use a Heideggerian term. S/he seeks to ‘grasp the permanence of what has been called man’s specific existential situation of ‘being in the world,’ for the experience of the sacred is its correlate. In fact, becoming aware of his own mode of being and assuming his presence in the world together constitute a ‘religious experience.’²⁷⁴

Through pursuing what Vásquez calls his “religious ontology,” Eliade “leads away from history, materiality, and praxis” toward transcendent “divine archetypes.”²⁷⁵ Thus Eliade, Russell McCutcheon argues, “sets up an implicit distinction between the study of religious aspects of human life and the study of that which is expressed in these varied forms, the study of the sacred conceived as an ahistorical agent that operates outside and through the natural world.”²⁷⁶ Reading Eliade alongside the more cosmic iterations of new cosmology, like Swimme and Berry’s *Universe Story*, leads me to believe that these authors, like Eliade, might be sensitive to the dizzying array of material in our universe that humans throughout history have deemed sacred, but they are less interested in encountering materiality on its own terms. If they are pointing toward some essential sacred and archetypal human, attuned toward more abstract, ahistorical, and transcendent conceptions of materiality, the question becomes—can this sacred be accessed through damaged environments? What is our role as humans in devastated landscapes, to ignore our present entanglements and celebrate healthier environments? Should we invest in them in hopes that the awe and wonder new cosmology advocates transcends histories of fear, abandonment, and vulnerability in this particular locale? Perhaps these sacrifice zones must also be sacrificed to the essential sacred?

²⁷⁴ Vásquez, 101-102.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁷⁶ McCutcheon, (1997:13)

While Berry and Swimme acknowledge the agentic capacity of some material to affect us through our feelings of awe, wonder, and reverence, their agency seems confined to these movements. To truly recognize the agency of nonhuman others, however, would also require recognizing their ability to surprise and repel us, their ambivalence to our existence, and their recalcitrance to our desires. New cosmology appeals to the language of sacrality to afford nonhuman material higher status in our collective conscious. It is not mere inert matter but integral in relationship to all the other marvelous parts of the universe including everything that makes up who we are as humans. In its reliance on more transcendent conceptions of sacrality, new cosmology is left without the tools to encounter and address the particulars on location, historicity, and socio-cultural resonance. However, as I will unfold in the next chapter, it is the particulars of encounter that determine how we affect and are affected by our environments and all the beings that dwell within them.

So why hold onto sacrality at all? Why not dismiss this tangle as too loaded for contemporary ecological concerns? As is also the case in their use of “kinship,” I contend that new cosmology authors have a much more intriguing concept in the works than they realize. If we hold onto *sacred* as emotional investment and an accompanying kinship ethic while still allowing for the complexities of environmental degradation, it opens up religion and ecology to an array of fascinating inquiries. What if we claim the Gulf Coast and all its inhabitants, some damaged, deformed, ill, and mutated, with unsettling pasts and complicated futures as sacred? Rather than arguing it was once sacred and could be again or potentially made sacred through salvific hopes, what might be possible through arguing it is sacred as is— a landscape filled with beloveds that matter? What work is being done/needs to be done to keep the coast as our ultimate concern? Can we speak about the Gulf as a place of power not in its purity, but as it is, was, and will be with deep wounds and deep love?

While new cosmology discourse offers a twist to discussions of space and place in its curious orientation toward cosmic spatiality, I find work in sacred space helpful for making the case that the uses of the language of sacrality in new cosmology are themselves political acts, engendered through ritual and emotion, often at the expense of particular bodies, locales, histories, and communities. Work in religious studies on “the contested category of the sacred,” David Chidester and Edward Linenthal argue, generally falls within two “broad lines of definition . . . one substantial, one situational.”²⁷⁷ Substantial definitions of the sacred, like those employed in “Rudolph Otto’s ‘holy,’ Gerardus van der Leeuw’s ‘power,’ or Mircea Eliade’s ‘real,’” they claim are attempts to “replicate an insider’s evocation of certain experiential qualities that can be associated with the sacred” described affectively as “uncanny,” “awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance.”²⁷⁸ Van der Leeuw, they argue, “attributed sole, transcendent, and ultimate agency to sacred power” maintaining the sacred “positioned itself in the world.”²⁷⁹ In contrast, situational analysis, they summarize, traces back to Émile Durkheim and locates “the sacred at the nexus of human practices and social projects” insisting that “nothing is inherently sacred.”²⁸⁰ These perspectives, including Arnold van Gennep, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jonathan Z. Smith, regard the sacred as an “adjectival or verbal form, a sign of difference that can be assigned to virtually anything,” what van Gennep calls the “pivoting of the sacred,” “through the human labor of consecration.”²⁸¹ The sacred is

²⁷⁷ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, “Introduction,” in *American Sacred Space*, edited by David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

²⁷⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, 5.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

thus the “by-product of this work of sacralization.”²⁸² Reengaging conceptions of the sacred, Kim Knott writes, with “social and cultural constructionist approaches from anthropology and sociology,” Smith provocatively argues, “‘human beings are not placed, they bring place into being,’ and they do this—at least in the case of sacred places—through ritual. Ritual, that creative process whereby people make a meaningful world that they can inhabit, ‘is not . . . a response to ‘the sacred’; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual.’”²⁸³

The division between the two perspectives is most contested, Chidester and Linenthal claim, when regarding sacred space. Eliade, again, maintains that the sacred “erupted, manifested, or appeared in certain places, causing them to become powerful centers of meaningful worlds.”²⁸⁴ In contrast, Smith demonstrates how “place is sacralized as the result of the cultural labor of ritual, in specific historical situations involving the hard work of attention, memory, design, construction, and control of place.”²⁸⁵ Regardless of where one’s position falls between the “poetics and the politics of sacred space,” and work in new cosmology seems to dabble in both, Chidester and Linenthal argue that within theory on sacred space “construction and contestation has always been a subtext, even in attempts to work out a substantial, essentialist definition of the sacred.”²⁸⁶ Even Van der Leeuw, they claim, while cultivating a romantic poetics of sacred space in his enthusiasm for “natural sacred sites, the forests and caverns, rocks and mountains, waterfalls and springs” seemed to recognize “the very category

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Kim Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” *Religion Compass* 2.6 (2008): 1105-1106.

²⁸⁴ Chidester and Linenthal, 5-6.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 6.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 6.

‘nature’ was a nineteenth-century invention.”²⁸⁷ They argue that Van der Leeuw understood “every establishment of sacred place was a conquest of space” in that embattled “selection, orientation,” and limitation are involved in claiming something as sacred.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, in his work on the sanctity of homes functioning through reinforced boundaries, Van der Leeuw raises the “possibility that a politics of exclusion might be an integral part of the making of sacred space,” in that boundaries determine who is inside and outside of sacred space.²⁸⁹ For Van der Leeuw the most sacred places were far removed from human access and, resonant with new cosmology arguments that humans lost their orientation in the cosmos and long for new narratives, the “most authentic religious experience in relation to sacred space was homesickness.”²⁹⁰

Explicitly recognizing, however, “the politics of position and property, exclusion and exile” inherent within conceptions of the sacred, Chidester, Linenthal, and Knott argue, opens up new opportunities for understanding how the sacred is “produced and reproduced” in America. One, “we can identify sacred space as ritual space” that might “enact a myth, signal a transition, reinforce political authority, or express emotion” through spatial practice.²⁹¹ These spatial practices are performed “in conscious tension with the way things are normally perceived to be in the ordinary world” with ritual acts of “worship, sacrifice, prayer, meditation, pilgrimage” and ceremony working to consecrate these spaces as sacred by “producing the distinctive quality and

²⁸⁷ Chidester and Linenthal, 6.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

character of sacred space.”²⁹² The human body and its ritualized disciplines, they argue, are crucial for the production of sacred space. Our bodies, in “gestures and rhythms, its speaking, eating, and excreting, situate embodied practices in place.”²⁹³ Furthermore, in conversation with Veikko Anttonen, Knott argues that the interactions of mind, body, space, and place are fundamental to the production of *sacred* as a limit or “category boundary,” working even on a “preconceptual level” to produce “cognitive categorization and its cultural applications of the notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ and third space between them, the boundary.”²⁹⁴ “The boundaries between body, territory and beyond,” Knott writes, “become culturally dependent cognitive markers” for determining which entities, places, spaces, and communities have value.

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Significantly, once we recognize that embodied practices can consecrate, Chidester and Linenthal contend, we understand “they can also desecrate a sacred space. Throughout the history of religions, the production of sacred space has depended upon control over purity” with the management and controlling of bodily functions, habits, and movements “required for the production and maintenance of sacred space.”²⁹⁶ While different religions and cultures have different perspectives on purity and defilement, Chidester and Linenthal argue that “rigorous discipline of the body” in the concerns of purity is prevalent in American religious perspectives.²⁹⁷ For example, they gesture toward American theologian Jonathan Edwards who

²⁹² Chidester and Linenthal, 10.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” 1106.

²⁹⁵ Knott, 1106.

²⁹⁶ Chidester and Linenthal, 11.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

declared, “‘this world is all over dirty. Everywhere it is covered with that which tends to defile the feet of the traveler.’”²⁹⁸ From Edward’s perspective, they write, “body and soul had to be defended from defilement” and “the body itself was a microcosm of the defiling world. ‘The inside of the body of man,’ Edwards held, ‘is full of filthiness, contains his bowels that are full of dung, which represents the corruption and filthiness that the heart of man is naturally full of.’ In a world so thoroughly defiled, almost nothing can be done to establish purity. It cannot be constructed through ritual but must depend upon an unmerited grace. Nevertheless, American heirs of Jonathan Edwards have persisted in observing various ritualized practices for exercise control over the body in the interest of establishing purity in a defiling world.”²⁹⁹

Two, Chidester and Linenthal contended “sacred space is significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world.”³⁰⁰ Sacred space serves as a means for “grounding classifications and orientations in reality, giving particular force to the meaningful focus gained through these aspects of a worldview.”³⁰¹ As significant space, sacred space asks what it means to be human by focusing on “classification of persons, carving out a place for a human identity that can be distinguished from superhuman persons, perhaps to be worshiped, and those classified as subhuman who can be excluded, manipulated, dominated, degraded, or sacrificed.”³⁰² To understand these spaces and their ontological resonances

²⁹⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, 11.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 12.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

“considerable attention will have to be paid to the interpretive labors” invested in making these spaces significant.³⁰³ For the sacralization of “natural” environments in American history, American Indian religious practice, “the spiritual politics of modern environmentalists,”³⁰⁴ and “religious interpretation of land and landscape,” what Catherine Albanese calls “nature religion,” defines an “open set of interpretive strategies for investing the natural environment with sacred significance.”³⁰⁵ It is important to remember, though, that “all this interpretive industry” should convince us to recognize that *nature* is always a cultural product.³⁰⁶ While nineteenth century “romantic naturalism transferred a sacred web of sentiment from God to nature” thus tying natural spaces to emotions and rituals “formerly reserved for a majestic God,”³⁰⁷ it did so only by obscuring the “economic production, packaging, and presentation of natural environments in America” and the military conquests on First Nations lands and peoples that guaranteed access to these spaces.³⁰⁸ Furthermore, the wilderness spaces that remain in the U.S., spaces one could

³⁰³ Chidester and Linenthal, 11.

³⁰⁴ Working through the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson, Evan Berry’s *Devoted To Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* makes a detailed case that American environmentalism is deeply rooted in an “explicitly Christian understanding of salvation . . . redemption, and spiritual progress.” (5) If the contemporary environmental movement “grew in religious soil,” Berry asks, “how can the modern movement be called secular?” (4) While ecotheological works, like those from Thomas Berry and Mary Evelyn Tucker, more readily acknowledge Christian resources in their ecotheory, it would be interesting to see if these themes are similarly traceable, perhaps even dependent upon these Christian conceptions, in the work of those claiming secular affinities (Wilson, Barlow, Goodenough.) I will work closely with Evan Berry’s text in chapter four.

³⁰⁵ Chidester and Linenthal, 13.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Past Oral Ideal of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964,) 46.

³⁰⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, 13.

claim as sacred in their separation from humans, are still thoroughly cultural productions of space through the political gymnastics required to reserve them as protected American investments with recorded profits.³⁰⁹

Three, Chidester and Linenthal insist on recognizing sacred space as fundamentally contested space. While poetic perspectives like Eliade's "view sacred space as simply 'given' or 'revealed,'" it is inevitably "entangled with the entrepreneurial, the social, the political, and other 'profane' forces," that take part in setting sacred space apart.³¹⁰ Where space is located, what and whom is located within it, what and whom is protected, all these questions are essential to its existence as sacred but these questions also "open or foreclose possible futures" by determining narratives that give shape to public memory and public sentiment, as in the case of monuments, memorials, shrines, etc.³¹¹ Environmental movements are no strangers to the contested character of sacred space. Chidester and Linenthal gesture to the work of radical environmentalists whose "dramatic rituals of resistance, from civil disobedience to industrial sabotage, in defense of what they have perceived as a sacred natural order" mobilize the tools they outline including, "innovative myths, rituals, and forms of communal organization."³¹² Environmental activism shows "how sacred space is perceived as sacred precisely because it is always in danger of desecration."³¹³

³⁰⁹ Chidester and Linenthal, 13.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

What is obvious from all this scholarship on the sacred is that “sacred” is overripe with meaning. Sacred is shaped by legacies of construction that undoubtedly seep into our contemporary usage. While new cosmology authors are not explicit about whom they draw from while invoking the sacred, their usage is nevertheless in conversation with this scholarship. Along these lines, it would be a productive exercise for new cosmology authors, and for religion and ecology as a subdiscipline, to think more about the politics of the sacred by asking if their implicit conceptions of “sacred” require investments in particular boundaries and which places, spaces, and peoples are kept outside these boundaries. For those invested in Chidester and Linenthal call “poetic” conceptions of the sacred like Eliade’s, if they regard nonhuman others as inherently sacred and affectively experience their resonating power and significance, does environmental decline impact nature’s power? Will there come a time when we no longer have ideal natural spaces to gesture toward to anchor this power? Politically, if these authors believe nature is made sacred through cultural labors then how does new cosmology participate in the work of sacralization? Which rituals do they employ to control this sacralization?³¹⁴ If new cosmology wants to reconceptualize the sacred, what conceptions must they explicitly resist? Which emotions, bodies, and habitats should we use, or conversely ignore, to anchor this worldview? What cultural tools do we use to produce this new sacrality? I will return to purity and defilement in the next chapter, but it is important to ask ourselves about these persistent divisions and how we police the embodied boundaries consciously and unconsciously. If we argue that interactions of mind, body, space, and place are fundamental to the production of the sacred, then how do we see the results of environmental racism and degradation impacting these

³¹⁴ It might be an interesting aside to read the habitual showing of *The Journey of the Universe* film along with accompanying lectures, sometimes with ecumenical spiritual exercises, at every American Academy of Religion annual meeting as sacralizing rituals—possibly why criticisms of them seem to be met with such hostility.

interactions? This legacy of abuse and abandonment in the Gulf region shapes bodies and landscapes, experiences and relationships thus would it not also impact the interactions that produce the sacred? Finally, has the conscious and unconscious refusal to cultivate the sacred within environmental decline determined possible futures for portions of the planet? Might insistence on cultivating the sacred within environmental destruction open possible futures for devastated landscapes?

Silt Traces

Nuanced environmental theory on the Gulf must negotiate brutal inheritances: sedimented histories of racial injustice, “disposability as structural violence,”³¹⁵ and legacies of toxic exposure. These constellations makeup the everyday affective worlds along the Gulf coast— the murky, mucky, frustrating work left after the spectacles have passed out of so many attention spans. On Grand Isle, Leanne Sarco points to an economic/affective investment in the birds over the crabs, but there’s also something particularly jarring about oil slick birds with their dripping wings stuck at grotesque angles that captures the affective compulsion of the spectacular versus the quotidian. Publicly attending to the birds while offstage ordering the disposal of live crabs was the most expedient way to return to business-as-usual for BP but the “death of the disregarded”³¹⁶ still reverberates— so many crab bodies, so many floating black bodies in New Orleans. How do these persistent exclusions, abandonments, exposures, and trauma leave traces in bodies, communities, landscapes? Do these histories affect us like our biophilic resonances? How might future encounters be influenced by these vulnerabilities? In

³¹⁵ Marez, x.

³¹⁶ Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren, “Unloved Others: Death of the Disregarded in the Time of Extinctions,” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011) 4.

these complex economies, hopes that teaching sacred cosmologies would result in compassion for our nonhuman genetic kin seem naïve but resistance to challenging the political limitations of sacred natures discourse leaves us at an impasse. In the next two chapters, I pick-at our discomfort with devastation by asking, what if the geographical wounds Belden Lane romances in our opening epigraph were less hyperbolic and more actual material and psychic wounds? How might we speak to persistent wounds of place that include: attachments to toxic homes, affinity with damaged creatures and eroding coastlines, longing for places and spaces washed away by the floods, vulnerability to toxic risks, chemical sensitivities, and post-traumatic stress? While we consider affinity and attachment with/to nonhuman others, how might we also witness to the politics of geography, recovery, and environmental impact? In the next chapter, I model the methodological alliances that will be necessary for religion and ecology to begin theorizing this chaotic jumble of historical and pressing injustices, hurting bodies and minds, tired communities and depleted resources.

Chapter Three Disastrous Intimacies

“There’s nothing left of Buras now or the rest of lower Plaquemines Parish. It was crowded with collapsed homes and upside-down schoolhouses and buildings speared through by flying telephone poles. Shrimp boats lie wrapped around the legs of fallen water towers in roadways crowded with unmoored barges and dead cows. That’s what happens when a Category 4 hurricane arrives with 125-mile-per-hour winds and a twenty-foot surge tide and no barrier islands or marshes to slow it down. As the storm continued it crashed into New Orleans and the coast of Mississippi, images of its destruction were now seared into our national consciousness: the Superdome and I-10 overpass, the Convention Center and the 17th Street canal levee, hungry looters, starving pets, and cadavers left on sidewalks or wrapped in sheets by the dozens in hospital chapels. And local, state, and federal rescue efforts failed to respond adequately—or not at all. One storm, long foreseen in all its details, laid bare more of our deepest fault lines as a nation- fault lines of poverty, race, health care, national security, the environment, and energy.”
Mike Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell*³¹⁷

“Hurricanes are Satan’s gumbo, environmental gumbo, gumbo with toxic flavors—Swamp New Orleans is a filthy bathtub.” Jerry W. Ward, Jr., *The Katrina Papers*³¹⁸

Disasters like Katrina, Rita, and BP lend a particularly strange resonance to conceptions of *intimacy*. Purely in spatial terms, whether it be through adjusting to living with strangers in shelters, trying to get a feel for new neighborhoods and homes, sorting through the wreckage for one’s belongings and treasures, or walking familiar paths altered by erosion, pollution, and debris, disasters dislocate familiarity and bring foreign objects and bodies into close proximity. Intimacy as part of human relational life is similarly impacted by disaster as humans mourn the loss of or disconnection from lovers, family, friends, and neighbors, as they care for physically and mentally ill loved ones in the aftermath, and through dealing with the stresses recovery, relocation, and rebuilding bring into relationships. Finally, in terms of familiarity with one’s own body, disasters like these invite unsettling changes into our daily embodiments. Dealing with the

³¹⁷ Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell*, 340-341.

³¹⁸ Ward, Jr. *The Katrina Papers*, 16.

emotional trauma of superstorms and their aftermath, healing from wounds physically and emotionally, negotiating toxic exposures and what the future might bring, disasters can make us particularly *disfamiliar* with the bodies we once thought we knew, the homes we were familiar with, the other bodies we love/d while simultaneously bringing us into intimate relation with some truly frightening material. For approaches in religion and ecology that are affectively grounded in connection and encourage deepening intimacy with nonhuman others, these realities stir up a distressing stew of questions. How do we relate to human and nonhuman others within ecological systems that are incredibly damaged? What does intimacy in these environments look and feel like? *Should* religion and ecology continue to encourage deepening affinities and attachments within devastated landscapes?

Troubling both the assumed “human” and the “relationship” in new cosmology onto-ethical ideals for human/nonhuman relationships, I argue that this scholarship’s conception of the human is more discrete, impervious, and rational than realities on the Gulf afford. Understanding complex life in devastated landscapes, I contend, requires an ontology without sharp divisions and an affective attunement that puzzles through our unsettling intimacies with others. To do this will require resources that will enable us to think about what an orientation toward life that digs into quotidian relations in a gravely damaged environment might entail. Employing material feminisms and feminist genealogies of affect theory, in this chapter I discuss the co-constitutive materiality of the organic and inorganic residents that exist in this devastated landscape as well as the affective economies that bind them together as communities in crisis.³¹⁹ While scholarship in religion and ecology is rich in emotional language, historically appealing to the power of emotional investment as locus for green movements/theology within religious communities, there has yet to be engagement with growing scholarship in affect theory that digs into

³¹⁹ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies, *Social Text* 79, no. 22 (2004): 119.

embodiment, everyday sensation, and the social construction of emotion. Thus, integrating affect theory in this project serves not only to challenge some of the assumptions within religion and ecology about the affective structure of affinity and attachment but also as a constructive exercise to demonstrate what affect theory has to offer the interdisciplinary commitments of the subdiscipline. Furthermore, since humans experience the planet as embodied, sensing creatures, I contend that work in religion and ecology that considers space, place, and emotional relationships with “nature” must take these embodied realities into account and not all embodiments are represented equally by scholarship. Consequently, I rely primarily on work in material feminisms and feminist genealogies of affect theory to insist that the *kinds* of bodies we have and the cultural legacies they bear matter. Here, I will question what we mean by “religious emotions” and if emotions like awe, wonder, and reverence are as universal or rationally chosen as new cosmology contends. By way of scaffolding for the chapter: first, puzzling through what it means to be human post-disaster I consider how the ontologies of what some scholars are calling the “nonhuman turn” offer a very different vision to new cosmology by contending that we are always already a body vulnerable to that which is toxic. Second, I draw from affect theory to understand what emotions do: what cultural conditions make certain feelings possible or not possible, how emotions bind particular bodies together and against others, and how affective spaces, through the production of felt difference, teach us what to value and desire.

Material Feminisms

“With Katrina, there was a question of responsibility, and blame. New Orleans is associated in the public imagination with the enjoyment of sex, unhealthy food, drinking. It was somehow like the country was saying to the city, ‘Let’s look at your life decisions. What did you expect when you were wearing that sexy dress?’” Eve Troeh for NPR³²⁰

³²⁰ Thomas Beller, “Don’t Call It Katrina,” *The New Yorker* May 29th, 2015
<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/dont-call-it-katrina>

“I drive around and try to figure out those Byzantine markings and symbols that the cops and the National Guards spray-painted on all the houses around here, cryptic communications that tell the story of who or what was or wasn’t inside the house when the floodwater rose to the ceiling. In some cases, there’s no interpretation needed. There’s one I pass on St. Roch Avenue in the 8th Ward at least once a week. It says: ‘1 dead in attic.’

That certainly sums up the situation. No mystery there. It’s spray painted there on the front of the house and it probably will remain spray-painted there for weeks, months, maybe years, a perpetual reminder of the untimely passing of a citizen, a resident, a New Orleanian.

One of us ...

I wonder who eventually came and took 1 Dead in Attic away. Who knows? Hell, with the way things run around here—I wonder if anyone has come to take 1 Dead in Attic away. And who claimed him or her? Who grieved over 1 Dead in Attic and who buried 1 Dead in Attic? Was there anyone with him or her at the end of what was the last thing they said to each other? How did 1 Dead in Attic spend the last weekend in August of the year 2005? What were their plans? Maybe dinner at Mandich on St. Claude? Maybe a Labor Day family reunion in City Park—one of those raucous picnics where everyone wears matching T-shirts to mark the occasion and they rent a DJ and a SpaceWalk and a couple of guys actually get there the night before to secure a good, shady spot?

I wonder if I ever met 1 Dead in Attic. Maybe in the course of my job or maybe at a Saints game or maybe we one stood next to each other at a Mardi Gras parade or maybe we once flipped each other off in a traffic jam.

1 Dead in Attic could have been my mail carrier, a waitress at my favorite restaurant or the guy who burglarized my house a couple years ago. Who knows?

My wife is right. I’ve got to quit just randomly driving around. This can’t be helping anything. But I can’t stop.”

Chris Rose, “1 Dead in Attic,” *The Times-Picayune*³²¹

Enveloped within what some scholars are calling the “non-human turn,”³²² material feminisms and affect theory negotiate frustrations with the representational theory of linguistic methodologies in the 1970s-1990s.³²³ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman argue that the linguistic

³²¹ Chris Rose, “1 Dead in Attic,” *The Times-Picayune*, August 20th, 2010, https://www.nola.com/rose/index.ssf/2005/11/1_dead_in_attic.html#incart_opinion

³²² My preference is “more-than-human turn” as a reminder that we cannot help but be human.

³²³ Material feminists resist the linguistic focus in the work of Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Judith Butler and, especially for Irigaray, Foucault, and Deleuze, argue for recuperating this scholarship through materialist

turn's "complex analyses of the interconnections between power, knowledge, subjectivity, and language" was incredibly productive for feminist scholarship allowing us "to understand how gender has been articulated with other volatile markings, such as class, race, and sexuality, within cultural systems of difference that function like a language."³²⁴ Deconstructing the gendered dichotomies that "ground Western thought: culture/nature, mind/body, subject/object, rational/emotional," etc., postmodern linguistic theory, particularly in its feminist forms, "exposed the pernicious logic that casts woman as subordinated, inferior, a mirror of the same, or all but invisible."³²⁵ However, a growing conversation among feminist theorists of the body, the sciences, and the environment³²⁶ argue there are troubling liabilities within linguistic projects. Particularly problematic is that while "postmoderns claim to reject all dichotomies, there is one dichotomy that they appear to embrace almost without question: language/reality" by insisting that the "real/material is entirely constituted by language."³²⁷ Resisting the "epistemology of modernism" that is "grounded in objective access to a real/natural world," linguistic theory, material feminists claim, was uncomfortable with concepts of "the real" or "the material" and insisted "what we call the real is a product of language and has its reality only in language."³²⁸

readings as well as seeking out overlooked genealogies in these archives: for example, tracing influences from Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Charles Darwin.

³²⁴ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," in *Material Feminisms* Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 2.

³²⁵ Alaimo and Hekman, 2.

³²⁶ Including Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth Wilson, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, Rosi Braidotti, Mel Chen, Nancy Tuana, Jane Bennett, Susan Bordo, Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman.

³²⁷ Alaimo and Hekman, 2.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

Despite the importance of “discursive critique and rearticulation for feminist scholarship and feminist politics,” this discursive realm is “nearly always constituted as to foreclose attention to lived, material bodies and evolving corporeal practices” making it difficult to cultivate scholarship that rethinks materiality, “the very ‘stuff’ of bodies and natures.”³²⁹ Some linguistic theory, Susan Bordo argues, functions best “at the expense of attention to the body’s material locatedness in history, practice, and culture.”³³⁰ Furthermore, “this overly narrow focus on power as a discourse, in turn, severely limits our capacity to explore and confront the multiple physical ways (beyond symbolic violence) in which power impinges on the bodies of women,” people of color, queer communities, and nonhuman others.³³¹ “Our materiality,” Bordo writes, “(which includes history, race, gender, and so forth, but also the biology and evolutionary history of our bodies, and our dependence on the natural environment) impinges on us—shapes, constrains, and empowers us—both as thinkers and knowers, and also as ‘practical,’ fleshy bodies.”³³²

Focusing on materiality is understandably contentious for feminism, since western thought historically relegated women to the maligned domain of “irrational” nonhuman nature. Resisting persistent cultural Cartesianism, some feminists, like Monique Wittig and Gayle Rubin, advocate that feminist critique should retreat from notions of “nature” that make it treacherous (misogyny, “essentialism, biological determinism, homophobia, and racism”) in favor of language and culture.³³³ However retreating from these discussions only “serves to

³²⁹ Ibid., 3-6.

³³⁰ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38.

³³¹ Vasquez, 151.

³³² Susan Bordo, “Bringing Body to Theory,” in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, Donna Welton ed. 84-97 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 91.

³³³ Alaimo and Hekman, 12.

calcify nature as a solid ground for heterosexist infrastructure.”³³⁴ Furthermore, the exclusive focus on “representations, ideology, and discourse” has made it difficult for feminist theory to engage with the sciences in any “innovative, productive, or affirming way” pushing environmental feminisms to the margins and leaving feminists struggling to respond to massive ecological problems like climate change, species erasure, and environmental disasters.³³⁵

Central to this methodology, and most compelling for future work in religion and ecology, are material feminism’s innovative approaches to agency and ethics. In response to the question, do all mountains have agentic capacity, material feminists would respond in the affirmative as well as include all the material, human and nonhuman, existing on the planet. Material feminists redefine our understanding of the “relationships among the natural, the human, and the nonhuman” by developing theories that insist nonhuman nature is “more than a passive social construct but is, rather, an agentic force,” what Jane Bennett terms *vital materiality*, “the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things.”³³⁶ Vital materialisms regard nonhuman others as “bona fide agents . . . actors alongside and within us”³³⁷ that interact with and change the “other elements in the mix, including the human.”³³⁸ For this scholarship, “nature ‘punches back’ at humans and the machines they construct to explore it in ways that we cannot predict.”³³⁹ Understanding nonhuman others as vital agents requires, these

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), vii-ix.

³³⁷ Jane Bennett, “A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 47.

³³⁸ Alaimo and Hekman, 7.

³³⁹ Alaimo and Hekman, 7.

scholars contend, rethinking what it means to be a human in the mix. I will expand more on some of these conceptions later in the chapter but three of these interactionist ontologies are particularly helpful. Susan Hekman argues that modernist ontologies assumed a “fixed reality about which we seek absolute knowledge” and that humans can have “unmediated knowledge of an objective world.”³⁴⁰ Consequently, postmodern linguistic theorists are leery of discussing ontology in favor of epistemology, demonstrating how our knowledge production is shaped by language. Material feminists, and other material theorists, Hekman contends, return to ontology by arguing yes, our “knowledge is always mediated by concepts, and, in many cases, technology as well” but she insists these concepts and theories also have material consequences.³⁴¹ “There is a world out there,” Hekman argues, “that shapes and constrains the consequences of the concepts we employ to understand it,” and ourselves.³⁴²

Hekman draws from the work of contemporary philosopher of science, Andrew Pickering, who brings “the material world back into the equation of science” by arguing “the world is filled with agency; it is continually doing things that bear on us.”³⁴³ Attempting to develop a “performative’ image of science, in which science is regarded as a field of powers, capacities, and performances, situated in machinic captures of material agency,” Pickering resists normative representational conceptions of science.³⁴⁴ These approaches position science as “an

³⁴⁰ Susan Hekman, “Constructing the Ballast: An Ontology for Feminism,” in *Material Feminisms* Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 109.

³⁴¹ Susan Hekman, “Constructing the Ballast,” 109.

³⁴² Hekman, 109.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁴⁴ Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

activity that seeks to represent nature, to produce knowledge that maps, mirrors, or corresponds to how the world really is” and are, thus, plagued by a “set of fears about the adequacy of scientific representations that constitute the familiar philosophical problematics of realism and objectivity.”³⁴⁵ While work since the 1970s, particularly on the sociology of scientific knowledge and reflexive science studies, troubles this model (and cultural studies has already somewhat embraced nonrepresentational theory) it continues to shape our contemporary understandings of science.³⁴⁶ But, Pickering contends, there are other ways to think about science—one can start from the idea that “the world is filled not, in the first instance, with facts and observations, but with *agency*. The world, I want to say, is continually *doing things*, things that bear upon us not as observation statements upon disembodied intellects but as forces upon material beings . . . much of everyday life, I would say, has this character of coping with material agency, agency that comes at us from outside the human realm and that cannot be reduced to anything within that realm.”³⁴⁷ Within this material agency, Pickering situates the human thusly: “scientists are human agents in a field of material agency which they struggle to capture in machines. Further, human and material agency are reciprocally and emergently intertwined in this struggle. Their contours emerge in the temporality of practice and are definitional of and sustain one another. Existing culture constitutes the surface of emergence for the intentional structure of scientific practice and such practice consists in the reciprocal tuning of human and material agency, tuning that can itself reconfigure human intentions.”³⁴⁸ This onto-theory he characterizes as *the mangle*,

³⁴⁵ Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice*, 5.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴⁸ Pickering, 21.

resonant in some ways with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage, and it is an impure mixing up of everything together, "the human and the nonhuman, the material and the discursive," that produces unpredictable results.³⁴⁹ "Human and material agency," he writes, are reciprocally and emergently intertwined . . . their contours emerge in the temporality of practice and are definitional of and sustain one another."³⁵⁰ The "mangle," he writes, highlights that the "contours" themselves of "material and social agency are mangled in practice."³⁵¹ Human intention, practice, machines, nonhuman material, philosophies of science, conceptions of nature, all are "emergently intertwined."³⁵² What Pickering calls his 'mangle realism' is grounded in the very understanding that "how the material world is leaks into and infects our representations of it in a nontrivial and consequential fashion."³⁵³

A second vital concept of co-constitutive materiality is Nancy Tuana's *viscous porosity*. In "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina," Tuana thinks about the city of New Orleans in the wake of Katrina in a way that embraces "an ontology that *rematerializes the social and takes seriously the agency of the natural*."³⁵⁴ Viscous porosity, Tuana argues, is an interactionist ontology that emphasizes "*emergent interplay*" and the "in-between of the complex interrelations from which phenomena emerge."³⁵⁵ Kin to Pickering's "dance of agency" in mangled realism

³⁴⁹ Hekman, 96.

³⁵⁰ Pickering, 21.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁵⁴ Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina," in *Material Feminisms* Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 188.

³⁵⁵ Tuana, 189.

and Donna Haraway's "material-semiotic," Tuana's ontology seen through "the eye of Katrina reveals no hard-and-fast divide between natural and social; rather they are seamlessly swept together in its counter-clockwise rotation."³⁵⁶ Katrina only came into being, she remarks, through a "concatenation of phenomena— low pressure areas, warm ocean waters, and perhaps swirling in that classic cyclone pattern are the phenomena of deforestation and industrialization" but the problems of Katrina are not so easily separated into "natural" or "human-induced."³⁵⁷ "Viscosity" she employs to convey there is no "sharp ontological divide" between "human and environment . . . social practices and natural phenomena."³⁵⁸ While distinctions can be made, boundaries between human and nonhuman other, material and culture, science and philosophy, are mercurial and we have overlooked sites of "resistance and opposition."³⁵⁹ Resisting the persistent Edenic myth of "passive indigenous peoples who simply lived in but did not transform 'nature,'" Tuana argues that the people who lived in what became New Orleans actively shaped its land but it always pressed back through "swampy land bred" illnesses and low-land flooding.³⁶⁰ Historically, humans have further shaped it through the desires and abandonments I have outlined. Thus, humans may have thought they subdued the landscape through technology but if Katrina teaches us anything it is that these interconnections have agency and it "behooves us to remember," the dance between humans and material that makes living below sea level possible.³⁶¹ Regarding the "toxic soup" Katrina left behind, Tuana employs "porosity" to convey

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 192.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 193.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 194.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Tuana, 196-198.

that this “dance of agency between human and nonhuman agents also happens at a more intimate level” as the “boundaries between our flesh and the flesh of the world we are of and in” are porous.³⁶² “While porosity is what allows us to flourish— as we breath in the oxygen we need to survive and metabolize the nutrients out of which our flesh emerges—this porosity often does not discriminate against that which can kill us. We cannot survive without water and food, but their viscous porosity often binds itself to strange and toxic bedfellows.”³⁶³ As environmental justice advocates on the coast continue to protest, toxic wastes are a long-standing concern for the Gulf coast and her communities. These toxins settle in bodies, disproportionately and with materialized racial bias, belying “any effort to identify a ‘natural divide between nature/culture.’”³⁶⁴

One final helpful articulation of relational ontologies, Stacy Alaimo explores the “interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures” by figuring human corporeality as *trans-corporeality*.³⁶⁵ In Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, the “human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world.”³⁶⁶ Again resonant with Deleuze and Guattari, Pickering’s mangle, and Tuana’s viscous porosity, Alaimo’s vision of the human underscores the *trans* to indicate “movement across different sites” opening up a “mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman

³⁶² Ibid.,198.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 201.

³⁶⁵ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

³⁶⁶ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors.”³⁶⁷ Thinking across bodies, human and nonhuman, Alaimo hopes “may catalyze the recognition that the environment, which is too often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions.”³⁶⁸ Alaimo suggests we situate our inquiries “within the many interfaces between human bodies and the larger environment” considering the ethical and political possibilities that unfurl when our “conceptions of the human self are profoundly altered by the recognition that ‘the environment’ is not located elsewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves.”³⁶⁹ Like Pickering and Tuana, Alaimo argues that these shifts are both material and discursive as this understanding of the “substance of one’s self as interconnected with the wider environment marks a profound shift in subjectivity. As the material self cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial; what was once the ostensibly bounded human subject finds herself in a swirling landscape of uncertainty where practices and actions that were once not even remotely ethical or political matters suddenly become the very stuff of the crises at hand . . . humans are the very stuff of the material, emergent world.”³⁷⁰

These three conceptions of co-constitutive materiality, of intertwined ontoepistemologies, are the kinds of approaches needed that can effectively grasp all the working elements of environmental and social degradation along the Gulf coast. They demonstrate the unavoidable porosity of bodies and the need to reshape environmental thought around these vulnerabilities.

³⁶⁷ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

Pulling these conversations together, the conceptions of power and discourse of the linguistic turn and the focus on the body and nonhuman nature of the material, allows material feminism the ability to question the social construction of the sciences via asking how scientific knowledge is produced, upon whose bodies it is built, what histories it illuminates and erases, and finally what sorts of work it allows us to do through coalition building. Thus, Tuana argues that relational ontologies are inherently “ethical” ontologies. Because our understandings of human and nonhuman boundaries are mangled, viscous, and transcorporeal, impossible to separate and ponder in tidy boxes, material feminists argue that our ethical conceptions similarly need rethinking.

For example, Alaimo and Hekman argue that material ethics requires we “compare the very real material consequences of ethical positions and draw conclusions from those comparisons. We can, for example argue that the material consequences of one ethics is more conducive to human and nonhuman flourishing than that of another.”³⁷¹ Furthermore, material feminisms insist that ethics must be “centered on the material consequences” of our theory.³⁷² Approaching environmental issues from this perspective requires wading in uncertainty which may be uncomfortable waters for many environmental scholars, including new cosmology perspectives, that hope for tidier narratives and more assured futures. Reconceptualizing the human as a transcorporeal subject forces us to “relinquish mastery” as we find ourselves “inextricably part of the flux and flow of the world that others would presume to master” affecting a rather “disconcerting sense of being immersed within incalculable, interconnected material agencies that erode even our most sophisticated modes of understanding.”³⁷³ What

³⁷¹ Alaimo and Hekman, 7.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 17.

material feminisms offer, however, is a shift from “ethical principles to ethical practices” which “unfold in time and take place in particular contexts” allowing for incorporating the “needs, the significance, and the liveliness of the more-than-human world.”³⁷⁴ A focus on ethical practices, as opposed to ethical principles, unsettles the need for environmental discourses to “extend themselves over and above material realities,” like superstorms and environmental racism, offering opportunities for taking on “multiple material consequences.”³⁷⁵

While chaotic, a little unsteady, uncomfortably vulnerable, these methodologies offer such tremendous possibility for religion and ecology to rethink relationships between humans and nonhuman others. Complicating new cosmology’s tentative steps into agency and embodiment, and echoing Lisa Sideris’s critique of new cosmology’s dependence on science to offer the *really real* expert knowledge of the world, material feminisms would caution our approaches to science. Material feminisms ask, what are the political implications of championing sacralized sciences? Instead of marveling that some mountains seem to possess agentic capacity, what are the material and discursive conditions that turn us toward particular nonhumans over others? Which bodies, stories, places, and communities are obscured, ignored, and erased through the creation of the new narrative? Why does new cosmology make the choices that it makes and include the human-nonhuman relationships that it does? Furthermore, why *does it not* include some relationships, particularly relationships in and with damaged environments, as part of its religious ecotheory? The human that experiences nonhuman others in new cosmology scholarship seems implicitly to come to encounters blissfully neutral, free from historical influences or contemporary political entanglements, and exercises control over all

³⁷⁴ Alaimo and Hekman, 8.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

encounters. Yes, the human is moved by awe and wonder, but not moved too much as “nature” is afforded only those affective registers and “the human” only those responses. New cosmology scholarship does not allow these affective engagements to get too unruly. In devastated landscapes nonhuman others affect us in more ways than these orderly allowances. What happens when we begin to acknowledge the weight of past experiences and habits that we carry with us into encounter? I will address these questions further in chapters four and five.

Cultural Emotions

“This wasn’t the way America was supposed to be . . . Many people in the United States genuinely believe—with a fervor that puts religious fanatics to shame—that nobody else in the world can do anything better than America. But the failure of government at all levels in responding to the hurricane disaster rehashes a much older story about the United States, one that has been steadily and deliberately noisily drowned or whited out of mainstream discourse. It is the story of race, class, poverty, and studied incompetence . . . for the rest of us, blacks in the United States serve as the proverbial canary in a coal mine. Those images on TV should, therefore, be a lesson for Africans and other people of African ancestry all over the world. Whether you are in peril in Darfur, Sudan, Ruhengeri, Rwanda, or New Orleans, saving your black behind isn’t a priority for the American government, founded on a doctrine of white supremacy.” Vukoni Lupa-Lasaga, “Katrina Unmasks the Real America,” for *The Monitor*³⁷⁶

“Fuck you, you fucking fucks.

I don’t give a damn what the hell you Yankees/Texans do, do it in your own yard, and shut the fuck up. We don’t care what you do, and we don’t want your damned PVC sided beige square houses uglying up our town. Go home, and quit looking at my home as simply a chance to line your wallets.

I’m so glad all you Chicagoans have figured out exactly how to fix New Orleans. Look at your own nasty city and explain why you can’t deal with the snow other than to throw tons of salt on the road, and why you can’t buy a beer for under \$5. Fuck you, you fucking fucks.

What about you fucks that don’t want to rebuild NOLA because we’re below sea level. Well, fuckheads, then we shouldn’t have rebuilt that cesspool Chicago after the fire, that Sodom San Francisco after the earthquakes, Miami after endless hurricanes, or New York because it’s a magnet for terrorists.

³⁷⁶ Ukoni Lupa-Lasaga, “Katrina Unmasks the Real America,” *The Monitor* (Kampala, Uganda), September 9th, 2005.

And fuck Kansas, Iowa, and your fucking tornados.

Fuck you, San Antonio. You aren't getting our Saints. When I get to the Alamo, I'm taking a piss on it. You probably go to funerals and hit on the widow. Classless fucks.

Fuck you Houston and Atlanta. No matter how many of our residents you steal, how many of our events you pilfer, you still ain't got no culture. One of our neighborhoods has more character than all of your pathetic cookie-cutter suburbs laid end to end. Fuck you, fuck you all.

Fuck you Tom Benson. I hate you on so fucking many levels, but the main one is this: they aren't your Saints, they're ours. The NEW FUCKING ORLEANS Saints. All you had to do was say that you were coming back. But you didn't. You had to fuck around to try to get more money. Fuck you, you greedy bastardo. Don't think we haven't noticed that you have phased out all of the merchandise that has the state of Louisiana on it. Don't think we haven't noticed how hard it is to get some Saints merchandise that actually says "New Orleans" on it. Fuck you, Fuck San Antonio, Fuck your whole fucking family. And if you and Rita think that anybody is going to patronize your car dealerships, then you got another thing coming, fuckface.

Fuck you New York. You lose a neighborhood and get scads of federal aid. We lose an entire FUCKING COAST, and the freespending W administration finally decides to become fiscally responsible. And fuck you all for taunting the New Orleans Saints fans, who have to deal with playing a home game in the Meadowlands. Fuck you, you classless motherfuckers. New Orleans donates a fire engine to the FDNY after 9/11, and you give us shit. Fuck you, fuck your town, fuck your residents, fuck your politicians. You. All. Suck." Ashley Morris, "Fuck you, you fucking fucks," *Ashley Morris: the blog*³⁷⁷

Opening our ontological inquiry to co-constitutive natures and transcorporeal movement requires recognizing we are not only materially open to our complex environments but susceptible to being emotionally pivoted, affected by human and nonhuman others. Affect theory, building on the more-than-linguistic turn in cultural criticism, can be very loosely defined as inquiry into bodily capacities to affect and be affected. It is impossible, however, to offer readers in religion and ecology a more substantial definition that would also definitively characterize all the work within this umbrella for a number of reasons. First, affect's theorization is in process within many disciplinary approaches, some that are in conversation but nevertheless

³⁷⁷ Ashley Morris, "Fuck You, Fuck You, You Fucking Fucks," *Ashley Morris: The Blog*. November 27th, 2005.

http://ashleymorris.typepad.com/ashley_morris_the_blog/2005/11/fuck_you_you_fu.html

have their differences including philosophy, cultural studies, psychology and psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology and geography, neurosciences and science studies, gender, queer, and critical race theories, and most recently religious studies.³⁷⁸

Second, there is much contention within this scholarship on whether or not to draw strong divisions between affect and emotion. Donovan Schaefer's *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* helpfully addresses this disagreement by tracing a dual genealogy for contemporary affect theory tied to two seminal texts, Brian Massumi's 1995 essay "The Autonomy of Affect," and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*.³⁷⁹ Massumi's text crystallizes "a particular intellectual lineage—from Spinoza to Nietzsche to Deleuze to contemporary neuroscience" via Baruch Spinoza's sense of affects as "a multitude of forces that are the plural, heterogeneous materials of subjectivity. Deleuze characterizes this as the ethological approach, in which bodies are understood as a compendium of crisscrossing lines of force."³⁸⁰ For Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, Schaefer writes, "affect dislocates the anthropocentric perspective, opening up onto a multiplicity of animal ways of being organized around the variety of 'natures' making up the bodies of different organisms. The ethological approach explores the variety of animal life streams by mapping our affective makeup as heterogeneous networks, rather than undifferentiated subjects."³⁸¹ Massumi uses

³⁷⁸ Conversations in religion and affect were initially encouraged by the scholarship of M. Gail Hamner and the American Academy of Religion group Religion, Affect, and Emotion founded by Hamner and Donovan Schaefer but also in productive discussion I would include work on emotion, sensation, and embodiment in the scholarship of Amy Hollywood, Virginia Burrus, and Ann Pellegrini, among others.

³⁷⁹ There are other ways to organize these trajectories or orientations within affect theory, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader*, for example, traces eight particular, though often overlapping, approaches.

³⁸⁰ Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power*, 24-25.

³⁸¹ Schaefer, 24-25.

terms like *compulsion*, and *intensity* but insists that affect and emotion are distinct as “conscious awareness is structurally incongruent with the overwhelming intensity of affect in this plenum of intensity.”³⁸² For Massumi, Schaefer writes, the “*autonomy of affect*: its escape from structures of capture and control, its formal indiscernibility to conscious awareness” makes affect “ontologically incompatible with the structuring grid of personal experience.”³⁸³ For Deleuzian, or “subphenomenological” affect theorists, like Massumi, Eric Shouse, and Erin Manning, feelings are “personal and biographical” and emotions are “socially expressed feelings” characterizing what is “stable . . . structured . . . and detectable” about social life, those captures that affects slip beyond.³⁸⁴ The other strand, Schaefer writes, traces from psychologist Silvan Tomkin’s theory of “*affects* as an ensemble of psychological engines— as emotions that rise to the level of the personal, even if they are not reducible to language.”³⁸⁵ This model, what Schaefer calls “*phenomenological affects*” draws from phenomenological traditions in philosophy and approaches affects as “woven into the textures of experience, hovering around, rather than beneath, the line of ‘conscious’ awareness” of named emotions “(shame, happiness, fear, anger, etc.) and the as-yet-unnamed emotions of embodied affective palettes.”³⁸⁶ For Tomkins, affect theory “diagrams a complex and transitory landscape, in which language and embodied histories interface with evolutionary, affective, and cognitive structures—the shifting

³⁸² Ibid., 26.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 26; 60.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

material repertoire of embodied life.”³⁸⁷ Thus, for Sedgwick, Frank, and others reading Tomkins like Teresa Brennan, Elspeth Probyn, Lauren Berlant, and Kathleen Stewart, the way we feel “has a complex, heterogeneous history” and affects are “something that rises into embodied spheres of awareness.”³⁸⁸ Sedgwick, Schaefer writes, “insisted on bringing to the fore Tomkin’s sophisticated sense of the plasticity of affects, the possibility that emotions could be reshaped and redistributed through the embodied histories of individual bodies: ‘Affects can be, and are,’ she reminds us, ‘attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy.’”³⁸⁹

Third, my attempts at wading into this fascinating but intricate constellation of projects will be one of the first maneuvering affect theory and religion and ecology into conversation. I will not claim that my approach to feeling, emotion, and affects is definitive nor even the most effective for ecotheory. Currently there is significant excitement, understandably with their emphasis on pre-or extra-linguistic affective flows, about the possibilities Spinoza, Deleuze, and Massumi’s work offer to ecotheory and animal studies.³⁹⁰ Concerned, though, with the lack of attention paid to the intersections of religion and ecology with marginalized bodies, I find myself persistently drawn to scholarship orienting affect studies within ongoing work on race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability.³⁹¹ The scholarship I read and champion in this project is, I argue,

³⁸⁷ Schaefer, 30.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁹⁰ Significantly, work from Catherine Keller, Laurel Kearns, Luke Higgins, and Whitney Bauman.

³⁹¹ As I mentioned with material feminisms, there are ways of reading Spinoza and Deleuze with attunement toward marginalized bodies—Rosi Braidotti, Ben Anderson, Sara

the most effective for thinking through natureculture complexities because it starts from the inside out, beginning with the feelings of marginalized embodied daily life and moving to their theorization. These approaches, particularly the work of Sara Ahmed, Mel Y. Chen, Ann Cvetkovich, and Avery F. Gordon, are less rigid about divisions between affect and emotion and conceptualize affects as part of “the cultural politics of everyday life.”³⁹² “I tend to use *affect* in a generic sense,” Cvetkovich writes, “rather than in the more specific Deleuzian sense, as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason) but with a wary recognition that this is like trying to talk about *sex* before *sexuality*.”³⁹³ Cvetkovich also uses,

feeling as a generic term that does some of the same work: naming the undifferentiated ‘stuff’ of feeling; spanning the distinctions between emotion and affect central to some theories; acknowledging the somatic or sensory nature of feelings as experiences that aren’t just cognitive concepts or constructions. I favor *feeling* in part because it is

Ahmed, and Whitney Bauman are salient examples. But I find that the secondary scholarship mining similar genealogies in Deleuzian affect and materialist theories (like new materialism, speculative realism, and object oriented ontologies) sometimes theorizes the virtual, the posthuman, the autonomy of objects, and affects’ autonomy from the social as convenient avenues for talking about materialist politics without wading into discussions of race, gender, class, and ability or what I would argue are the actual daily implications of this theoretical work. Furthermore, by characterizing these scholarly interests as “new turns,” particularly in how this work is taken up in the blogosphere/public scholarship, some of this commentary avoids addressing its debt to feminist and critical race theories. In a 2015 AAR panel I contributed to addressing ecology and New Materialism, a female commentator asked a male presenter to address some of the critiques of object-oriented ontologies coming from feminist and Chicana theorists and he was quick to respond frustratingly that “new” scholarship like OOO cannot yet be expected to coherently address issues like sexism and racism. For more productive commentary see Severin Fowles’, “The Perfect Subject, (Postcolonial Object Studies)” *Journal of Material Culture* 21.1 (2016) and Anthony Paul Smith’s “On the Use and Abuse of Objects for the Environmental Humanities: Recent Books on Object-Oriented Ontologies and Ecotheory,” <https://itself.blog/2017/07/06/on-the-use-and-abuse-of-objects-for-the-environmental-humanities-recent-books-in-object-oriented-ontology-and-ecotheory/>.

³⁹² Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

³⁹³ Cvetkovich, 4.

intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences. It also has a vernacular quality that lends itself to exploring feelings as something we come to know through experience and popular usage and that indicates, perhaps only intuitively but nonetheless significantly, a conception of mind and body as integrated. Public Feelings take seriously questions like ‘How do I feel?’ and ‘How does capitalism feel?’ as starting points for something that might be a theory but could also be a description, an investigation, or a process. Terms such as *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* are more like keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition.

Drawing from these perspectives by using affects as a point of departure, our work in religion and ecology might ask, what do encounters with nonhuman others *feel* like? Why do we desire, or not desire, connection? When we move in certain environments how might we describe what these spaces and places feel like? Why do some encounters resonate as positive while others we might begin to characterize as negative, ambivalent, or repulsive? How do we come to desire, or not desire, connection with/to places and creatures we have never physically encountered? For new cosmology scholarship, orientations and attachments are very important but their largest stumbling blocks regarding feelings and emotions is their insistence on ahistorical perspectives and neutral politics. They imagine a feeling human subject without any of the cultural differences and specificities that might shape that subject. They are chiefly concerned with cultivating an orienting narrative that will readdress common ontological inquiries (who are we? where do we come from? what is our purpose?) and encourage kin attachments to creatures and habitats. But thus far this orientation toward some nonhuman others functions by ignoring, in its lack of context, that it comes only at the expense of many disregarded others. How/why does new cosmology affectively orient toward some bodies and landscapes and away from others? For the remainder of the chapter I will consider these questions primarily in conversation with Sara Ahmed’s affective work on place, space, race, and orientation. Ahmed’s scholarship is particularly helpful here because she works at the intersections of feminist, queer, and critical race theories to argue that emotions are cultural

practices. Ahmed agrees with new cosmology that affective language, particularly via habitual repetition, is social power that can shape identities and alliances but, importantly, she contends that there are always political implications. Affects join some bodies and communities together while separating from others. Ahmed's work can help us begin to think about how racial and environmental histories in the American south continue to shape affective orientations.

Encounters and Impressions

In "Collective Feelings, Or the Impressions Left by Others," Sara Ahmed begins with similar questions, "how do emotions work to secure collectives through the way in which they read the bodies of others? How do emotions work to align some subjects with some others and against other others?"³⁹⁴ Responsively, Ahmed argues that affects are embodied but also social and transpersonal. "Emotions," she writes, "play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies. Such an argument challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals and that they come from within and *then* move outwards toward others. It suggests that emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without', but that they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects."³⁹⁵ Affects, she argues, are primarily relational and "materialization takes place through the 'mediation' of affect," forming the skin of bodies and the skin of collectives.³⁹⁶ Emotions work "to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside," she argues, and "this separation takes place through the very movement engendered by responding to others and

³⁹⁴ Sara Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left By Others," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21.2 (2004), 25.

³⁹⁵ Ahmed, "Collective Feelings," 25.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

objects. Rather than locating emotion in the individual or the social, we can see that emotionality—as a responsiveness to and openness towards the worlds of others— involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, and the affective with the mediated.”³⁹⁷ For example, she gestures to the function of skin, the surface that paradoxically connects and separates us from one another, where skin “appears to contain us” but also where others “*impress* upon us.”³⁹⁸ “I have an impression of others,” she writes,

but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me and impress upon me. Indeed, we can think about impressions as the marks left by others, in which the others might leave their mark insofar as they have already left . . . The skin may in this way record past impressions, past encounters with others, who are others insofar as they have already made an impression. Hence the very impression of the skin surface is itself an effect of impressions . . . sense perception and emotion take place in what I would call *the contact zone of impressions*; they involve how bodies are ‘impressed upon’ by objects and others.³⁹⁹

Ahmed’s conception of “contact” goes beyond pure tactile encounter to also include the *perception* of others that may or may not physically touch us as contact “involves the subject as well as histories that come before the subject.”⁴⁰⁰

Thus, affects carry socio-historical resonances. Drawing from a lineage that includes Deleuze, Spinoza, and what she writes is Descartes’ surprising perception that feelings “take the ‘shape’ of the contact we have with objects,” Ahmed argues that the “perception of others as ‘causing’ an emotional response is not simply my perception, but involves a form of ‘contact’ between myself and others, which is shaped by longer histories of contact.”⁴⁰¹ Ahmed’s reads

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 28.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 29.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰⁰ Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 31.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

racism as one “particular form of intercorporeal encounter” that “depends on histories of reading that come, as it were, ‘before’ an encounter between subject and another takes place.”⁴⁰² For example, in the “moment of contact” between a “white racist subject who encounters a racial other” and experiences an “intensity of emotions (fear, hate, disgust, pain),” this “‘moment of contact’ is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it reshapes the bodies in the contact zone of encounter. These histories have already impressed upon the surface of the bodies at the same time as they create new impressions.”⁴⁰³ In this way affects are performative as they “repeat past associations” while “generating their object.”⁴⁰⁴ Hate, for example, “may generate the other as the object of hate insofar as it repeats associations that already read the bodies of others as being hateful. Indeed, the loop of the performative works powerfully: in reading the other as being hateful, the subject is filled up with hate, as a sign of the truth of the reading.”⁴⁰⁵ I will return to these ideas at the end of the chapter to think about how fear and hate, in responses to the Gulf coast after Katrina, function to shape these communities and geographies as repugnant and disposable.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰⁵ Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 32.

Affective Economies

Ahmed argues that while “emotional responses to others involve the alignment of subjects with and against other others,”⁴⁰⁶ emotions do not “positively inhabit any-body as well as any-thing, meaning that ‘the subject’ is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin or destination.”⁴⁰⁷ These, what she terms, *affective economies*, “need to be seen as social and material as well as psychic,” where objects, nonhuman others, environments, and communities are caught up and intertwined within the “circulation of signs of affect” that shape the “materialization of collective bodies.”⁴⁰⁸ Within “affective economies,” she writes, “emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.”⁴⁰⁹ Our histories, Ahmed writes, “are bound up with attachments precisely insofar as it is a question of *what sticks*, of what connections are lived as the most intense or intimate, as being closer to the skin.”⁴¹⁰ As a stirring demonstration of affects’ sticky associations, the viscous combination of bodies, materials, and emotions, Ahmed draws this passage from Audre Lorde’s 1984 *Sister Outsider*:

The AA subway train to Harlem. I clutch my mother’s sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, Christmas-heavy. The wet smell of winter clothes, the train’s lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snow pants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us—probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she’s looking, so I pull my

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁰⁷ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text*, 79 22.2 (2004), 121.

⁴⁰⁸ Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 121.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁴¹⁰ Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 33.

snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train. Born and bred a New York City child, I quickly slide over to make room for my mother to sit down. No word has been spoken. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I have done. I look at the side of my snow pants secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.⁴¹¹

“In this encounter,” Ahmed writes, “Audre Lorde ends with emotion; she ends with ‘the hate’ . . .

What passes is not spoken; it is not a transparent form of communication. The sense that something is wrong is communicated, not through words, or even sounds that are voiced, but through the body of another, ‘her nose holes and eyes huge’. The encounter is played out *on* the body, and is played out *with* the emotions. This bodily encounter, while ending with ‘the hate’, also ends with the reconstitution of bodily space. The bodies that come together, that almost touch and co-mingle, slide away from each other, becoming relived in their apartness.”⁴¹² The white woman’s disgust and Lorde’s confusion shape the resonance of the space conveying what is and is not appropriate, what is and is not acceptable, in the eyes of white culture. Their bodies “move apart” and allow for the “redefinition of social as well as bodily integrity” with the emotion of hate aligning “the particular white body with the bodily form of the community—the emotion functions to substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination in the body of a particular other who comes to stand for and stand in for, the other as such.”⁴¹³ In other words, “the hate encounter aligns not only the ‘I’ with the ‘we’ (the white body, the white nation), but

⁴¹¹ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider Essays & Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 147-148.

⁴¹² Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 33.

⁴¹³ Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 33.

the ‘you’ with the ‘them’ (the black body, Black people).⁴¹⁴ In the narrative, Lorde’s “*misperception*” of the cause of the woman’s embodied disgust “creates an object. The object—the roach—comes to stand for, or stand in for, the cause of ‘the hate’. The roach crawls up between them; the roach, as the carrier of dirt, divides the two bodies, forcing them to move apart.”⁴¹⁵ Audre also recoils but realizes it is she, herself, that is “the ‘it’ that stands between the possibility of their clothes touching. She becomes the roach—the impossible and phobic object—that threatens to crawl from one to the other.”⁴¹⁶ The circulation of affects in the moving train (disgust, hate, confusion, and fear) “brings others and objects into existence; hate slides between different signs and objects whose existence is bound up with the negation of its travel. So Audre becomes the roach that is imagined as the cause of the hate . . . It is not simply that any body is hated: particular histories are re-opened in each encounter, such that some bodies are already read as more hateful than other bodies,” and what sticks remains, an amalgamation of disgust, cockroaches, and racist impressions of and upon black bodies.⁴¹⁷ Keeping Ahmed’s work on affective impressions, economies, encounters and events in mind, I will return again to histories of black bodies regarded as animal others at the end of this chapter. But Ahmed’s reading of what is happening in this train space clearly demonstrates what, in her later work, she calls “the drama of contingency,” that affects rise to the surface in relation, being-with and directed-toward others within what she terms “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds”⁴¹⁸ Events, Ahmed argues, encounters between our bodies and

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 22.

the bodies of others like the tense amalgamation of black and white bodies on the train, “have backgrounds,” backgrounds that explain “the conditions of emergence” for what plays out in these encounters.⁴¹⁹

Affective Mapping

The social movement of affects in Ahmed’s scholarship helps us understand not only the importance of feelings and emotions in the surfacing of bodies and collectives, I/we in intimate and perhaps agitating proximity with you/them, but how space, place, environments, and objects are similarly affectively charged. In her text *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed performs feminist, queer, and critical race readings of classic works in phenomenology and spatial theory, scholarship from Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Henri Lefebvre. Here, Ahmed offers a queer phenomenological reading of “orientation” that is helpful for understanding that affinities and attachments, while often assumed to be rational choices (or at least in the case of new cosmology choices made in line with our ancestral proclivities) carry situated and complex affective social investments. Paying particular attention to the “orientation” in sexual orientation, and the “orient” in orientalism, Ahmed considers how “spatial orientations (relations to proximity and distance) are shaped by other social orientations, such as gender and class, that affect ‘what’ comes into view, but also are not simply given, as they are effects of the repetition of actions over time.”⁴²⁰ Furthermore, she argues, compulsory heterosexuality and racism “‘orientates’ bodies in specific

⁴¹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 38.

⁴²⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 23.

ways,” where “different orientations, different ways of directing one’s desire, means inhabiting different worlds.”⁴²¹

“The starting point for orientation,” Ahmed writes, “is the point from which the world unfolds: the ‘here’ of the body and the ‘where’ of its dwelling. Orientations, then, are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places.”⁴²² Reading Merleau-Ponty, Ahmed writes the “body provides us with a perspective,” but the:

‘here’ of the body does not simply refer to the body, but to ‘where’ the body dwells. The ‘here’ of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings: the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression; just think of goose bumps, textures on the skin surface, as body traces of the coldness in the air. Bodies may become oriented in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected. In turn, given the history of such responses, which accumulate as impressions on the skin, bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling.⁴²³

Inhabiting spaces, becoming familiar, “involves orientation devices,” Ahmed continues, “ways of extending bodies into spaces that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space” but if “orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails. Or we could say that some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others.”⁴²⁴ We know from the work of Nigel Thrift, Edward Soja, and Cindi Katz that space is not a neutral container but is “dynamic and lived” and through attending to “orientation,” we can recognize

⁴²¹ Ibid., 22-68.

⁴²² Ibid., 8.

⁴²³ Ibid., 9.

⁴²⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 11.

that space is dynamic via the body being “directed in some ways more than others.”⁴²⁵ What comes to be regarded as “normative” ways to inhabit bodies and worlds are an “effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, *which puts some objects and not others in reach.*”⁴²⁶ It is not simply that bodies “have a direction, or that they follow directions,” Ahmed argues, rather, “in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies *in turn* acquire their shape. Bodies are ‘directed,’ and they take the shape of this direction.”⁴²⁷

When we follow directions, Ahmed writes, we seem to “arrive, as if by magic” so that the “work of arrival is forgotten in the very feeling that the arrival is magic” but “the work involves following directions” and we will “arrive when we have followed them properly: bad readings just won’t get us there.”⁴²⁸ However, “following a line is not disinterested,” she writes, “to follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the ‘line’ one takes does not stray apart from the line of one’s life as the very shape of how one moves through time and space.”⁴²⁹ Following directions, following lines to arrival, also takes social investment. “Such investments,” Ahmed argues, “‘promise’ return (if we follow this line, then ‘this’ or ‘that’ will follow), which might sustain the very will to keep going. Through such investments in the promise of return, subjects *reproduce the lines that they follow.*”⁴³⁰ What comes to matter, what

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 12-15

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁴³⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 70.

garners and rewards value, are those objects, bodies, and behaviors that invest in and reproduce these lines. For example, Ahmed considers sexuality in terms of “‘having an orientation, which itself is understood as being ‘directed’ in one way or another . . . sexual desire orientates the subject toward some others (and by implication not other others) by establishing a line or direction” so that the “direction one takes makes some others available as objects to be desired.”⁴³¹ We could view sexuality where “being directed toward the same sex or the other sex” is traveling along different lines.”⁴³² However, because “heterosexuality as an orientation toward ‘the other sex’” is regarded as normative, bodies are required to “follow a straight line whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct, and honest” that reward and value those bodies following that line and regard bodies with homosexual desires as aberrant deviations from the straight line.⁴³³ Adrienne Rich’s work on compulsory heterosexuality is helpful here, Ahmed argues, because it demonstrates that a “set of institutional practices” require “men and women to be heterosexual” so one is required to become straight, to participate in the “fantasy of a natural orientation . . . that organizes worlds around the form of the heterosexual couple, as if it were from this ‘point’ that the world unfolds.”⁴³⁴ These “orientations are binding,” she writes, “as they bind objects together.”⁴³⁵

Following the heterosexual family line, “subjects are *required* to ‘tend toward’ some objects and not others as a condition of familial as well as social love”⁴³⁶ and these objects: the

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid., 70-71.

⁴³⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 88.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 86-90.

opposite sex, heterosexual reproduction, familial inheritance, particular approaches to happiness, love, and care, styles, “capacities, aspirations, techniques,” and the materials that facilitate and reward this way of being, are infused with affective power as a social good.⁴³⁷ Heterosexuality is an “effect of how objects gather to clear a ground, how objects are arranged to create a background” where repeated actions over time, investment in these lines of being, make this line normative—just how things are, a “given.”⁴³⁸ We can see that the “‘tending toward’ certain objects and not others . . . produces what we would call ‘straight tendencies’,” Ahmed writes, “a way of acting in the world that presumes the heterosexual couple as a social gift” allowing the “straight body, and the heterosexual couple, to extend into space” affectively shaping spaces, bodies, and objects in ways that others are not allowed.⁴³⁹ For example, Ahmed gestures to Gill Valentine who writes, “heterosexual desires congeal over time to produce the appearance that the street is normally a heterosexual space” so homosexual ways of being seem out of place, deviations from the straight line, improper, threatening, and made to *feel* unsafe for other ways of being.⁴⁴⁰

Like compulsory heterosexuality, whiteness functions similarly to diminish some bodies’ capacity to move within and reach beyond these lines of social investment. Ahmed, reading Frantz Fanon’s scholarship describing “the lived experience of being the object of the hostile white gaze,” writes that Fanon’s work demonstrates how histories of colonialism render

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 90-91.

⁴⁴⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 92.

whiteness as background.⁴⁴¹ Racism “‘stops’ black bodies inhabiting space by extending through objects and others; the familiarity of the ‘white world,’ as a world we know implicitly, ‘disorients’ black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things— reduced as they are to things among things.”⁴⁴² This “disorientation affected by racism diminishes capacities for action” for “if the world is made white, then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness.”⁴⁴³ Racist histories shape the surfaces of bodies and collectives, orienting them in specific directions and “such forms of orientation are crucial to how bodies inhabit space, and to the racialization of bodily as well as social space.”⁴⁴⁴ Bodies, Ahmed writes, remember these histories even if we attempt to forget them so in a way, “race does become a social as well as bodily given, or what we *receive* from others as an inheritance of this history.”⁴⁴⁵ To be inheritors of whiteness is to “become invested in the line of whiteness: it is both to participate in it and to transform the body into a ‘part’ of it, as if each body is another ‘point’ that accumulates to extend the line. Whiteness becomes a social inheritance; in receiving whiteness as a gift, white bodies—or those bodies that can be recognized as white bodies—come to ‘possess’ whiteness *as if it were a shared attribute*.”⁴⁴⁶ This inheritance, that is both embodied and historical, is “‘always already’ there, *before our arrival* . . . a world shaped by colonial histories, which affect

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 125.

not simply how maps are drawn, but the kinds of orientations we have towards objects and others.”⁴⁴⁷

In her phenomenological reading of race, Ahmed argues that “spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them,” via our bodily habits, in particular she underscores whiteness as a “bad habit,” tendencies that we inherit that “allow some bodies to take up space by restricting the mobility of others.”⁴⁴⁸ Like compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed and Linda Alcoff suggest “race might be understood as a matter of the ‘behind,’” with race functioning as the concealed backdrop for “social action and the promise of social mobility.”⁴⁴⁹ Whiteness as background goes “unnoticed” in encounters with objects, goods, spaces, places, and others that whiteness assumes are an extension of its skins/way of being.⁴⁵⁰ White bodies “do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated ‘toward’ it, and this ‘not’ is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are orientated around” shaping both spaces and the bodies that inhabit them.⁴⁵¹ Furthermore, whiteness as an institution affectively produces collective and public spaces as white norms. For example, Ahmed and Nirmal Puwar describe the strange out-of-placeness nonwhite bodies feel in academic spaces: “black feminists walk into the room and I notice that they were not there before, as a retrospective reoccupation of a space that I already inhabited. I look around and reencounter the sea of whiteness. Whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or for those who get so used to its inhabitance that they learn not to see it,

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

even when they are not it.”⁴⁵² Spaces, Ahmed presses, “are oriented ‘around’ whiteness,” the “institutionalization of a certain ‘likeness,’ which makes nonwhite bodies uncomfortable and feel exposed, visible, and different when they take up this space.”⁴⁵³ Like compulsory heterosexuality, while whiteness functions as unrecognized background its reproduction requires work, lines of investment, repetitions “made over time,” that shape spaces and encounters.⁴⁵⁴

Returning to Fanon’s phenomenology of black bodies, Fanon positions whiteness as a “bodily form of privilege: the ability to move through the world without losing one’s way. To be black or not white in ‘the white world’ is to turn back toward oneself, to become an object, which means not only not being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extensions of others.”⁴⁵⁵ If white bodies are the assumed universal, “if to be human is to be white, then to be not white is to inhabit the negative: it is to be ‘not.’”⁴⁵⁶ Ahmed reads the “experiences of a black man in a white world” as “the loss of orientation, as the body becomes an object alongside others. The experience is one of nausea, and the crisis of losing one’s place in the world, as a loss of something that one has yet to be given.”⁴⁵⁷ Fanon’s phenomenology, Ahmed writes, “could be described in terms of the bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty, and blockage, or perhaps even in terms of the despair of the utterance ‘I cannot.’”⁴⁵⁸ “For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social,” Ahmed writes:

⁴⁵² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 133.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 138-139.

⁴⁵⁷ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 139.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing? Each question, when asked, is a kind of *stopping device*: you are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires you to be stopped. A phenomenology of ‘being stopped’ might take us in a different direction than one that begins with motility, with a body that ‘can do’ by flowing into space. To stop involves many meanings: to cease, to end, and also to cut off, to arrest, to check, to prevent, to block, to obstruct, or to close. Black activism has shown us how policing involves a differential economy of stopping: some bodies more than others are ‘stopped’ by being the object of the policeman’s address. The ‘hey you’ is not here addressed to the body that can inherit the ego ideal of an organization, or who can be recruited to follow a given life, but to the body that cannot be recruited, to the body that is ‘out of place’ in this place. In other words, the ‘unrecruitable’ body must still be ‘recruited’ into this place, in part through the very repetition of the action of ‘being stopped’ as a mode of address . . . Stopping is therefore a political economy that is distributed unevenly between others, and it is also an affective economy that leaves its impressions, affecting the bodies that are subject to its address.⁴⁵⁹

By habitually investing in a neutral affective subject, one that needs not wrestle with exposure, violence, disorientation, and restriction in their affinities and attachments, new cosmology champions the white subject as universal.⁴⁶⁰ Through their insistence on a single narrative, a body unshaped by difference, and normative affective encounters/relationships with nonhuman others, new cosmology ignores differences in experience and encounter that do not fit into its vision and therefore continually reinvest in: whiteness as an institution, objects and desires only available to white bodies, and spaces/places/encounters that whiteness deems valuable. The urgent teachings of the Black Lives Matter movement, a social movement focusing on the prevalence of state-sanctioned anti-black violence, demonstrate that stopping as a technology of racism affirms and reproduces whiteness as an institution by materially and affectively shaping all spaces as improper objects for black bodies. Black bodies are not safe from institutional violence as children or adults, in their homes, schools, or social gatherings,

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁶⁰ The white, male, able-bodied, and heterosexual subject.

parks or neighborhoods, legally armed or unarmed. Black bodies in all places are subject to stopping leaving no home for black bodies. While white bodies can ignore these realities and move unawares through space and toward objects of desire, black bodies must remain hyperaware of these continual restrictions in the hopes, often blighted, of safety. As the affective encounter between young Audre and the white woman on the train demonstrates, the white woman assumes all the space on the train is within her reach, appropriately her space, while Audre comes to understand through the circulations of affects within this intimate space that her body is expected to remain restricted—not too close to whiteness, preferably not near at all. While new cosmology authors argue humans grapple with alienation in the “natural” world without a single reorienting narrative, they have not considered how this narrative they have constructed further alienates black bodies through solidifying whiteness and its freedoms as the unrecognized background of new cosmology’s vision. Whiteness as background for environmental theory is, of course, not unique to new cosmology environmentalism but the continuation of inherited legacies. In the next chapter, I will explore how whiteness as background is worked into the very fabric of American religious environmentalism to prepare for developing ways to resist habituating these same affective habits.

Before moving to think further about affective relationships with nonhuman others, it is important to understand what work in affect theory, particularly Sara Ahmed’s scholarship, teaches us about affinity and attachment. In summary, affects arise in encounters with one another and these encounters are preceded by particular histories that we both embody and promulgate through our habitual movements. Affinities and attachments are neither neutral nor ahistorical as our bodies inherit lines of social investment that determine how we are able to move (or not move) through the world, which places/spaces/bodies/environments we can and should care for and about, what futures are possible. Describing these lines of social investment

in the context of geography and environmental psychology, Jonathan Flatley calls our “range of intentions, beliefs, desires, moods, and affective attachments” that we carry and shape our social environments— *affective mapping*.⁴⁶¹ “These emotional valences,” Flatley writes, cohere to geographical spaces whether they are experienced personally or not.⁴⁶² For example, Flatley describes living in Detroit and getting the sense that:

some people in the suburbs who have not crossed over the city limits for years carry around with them a map on which Detroit is a large, hazily defined space, but a space clearly marked by some mixture of fear, anxiety, sorrow, and nostalgia. They avoid Detroit not because of poor urban planning or a lack of landmarks but because of the emotions they have associated with the city space of Detroit . . . For in all likelihood the person from the suburbs of whom I write is white, and Detroit is largely African American, and this split is of course overwritten by a class divide, so emotions about Detroit as a space are, for these suburban residents, inevitably also emotions about class and ‘race’ and racism.⁴⁶³

Of course, Ahmed would argue whiteness as background affectively shapes all spaces/places, not just Detroit or the Gulf Coast, but it is important to follow these lines of social investment, examine how we are oriented toward and against others, to trace this affective mapping, in order to better understand why environmental scholarship has affinities-with and attachments-to certain environments and not others, certain bodies but not others. Working in cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg calls these structures of affective investment *mattering maps*, an organization of affects that “makes possible certain objects of investment (what we can care about) and certain modes of investment (how we can care about such things)” determining not only our investments but “the very practices of investment.”⁴⁶⁴ Mattering maps, Grossberg

⁴⁶¹ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 77.

⁴⁶² Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 78.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Supp-Montgomerie, “Affect and the Study of Religion,” 339.

writes, “define not only what sites (practices, effects, structures) matter but how they matter. And they construct a lived coherence for those enclosed within their spaces.”⁴⁶⁵ These formations of affiliation: lines of investment, affective mapping, mattering maps, Grossberg argues, are cultural apparatuses that “actualize specific configurations of belonging;” affective articulations that “actualize value, enabling it to be effective in the lived world.”⁴⁶⁶ As Ahmed saliently illustrates with heterosexuality and whiteness as background, lines of investment function as “apparatuses of other-ing” that both unite and divide us by determining the inside and the outside, us and them.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 84.

⁴⁶⁶ Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 199.

⁴⁶⁷ Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, 200.

Chapter Four Affecting Environmental Imaginaries

“After my initial journeys back home, following Katrina, I stay away for a long time, though my grandmother asked again and again to make the trip. *I know I can’t live there anymore*, she’d say. *I just want to see it one more time*. For three years I kept putting her off—saying *one day*—so that, at ninety-two she could at least hold onto the hope of getting there. I never considered the consequences of this tactic, how it might haunt me later. When I started going back more often, it was because I had to, and by then it was too late. It occurs to me now that I had been waiting, foolishly, for the recovery to be complete. I had wanted to show her the place she’d spent her life without the narrative of destruction still inscribed on the landscape.” Natasha Trethewey, *Beyond Katrina: Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*⁴⁶⁸

“The fisheries closures continue expanding. Now totaling 88,522 square miles. About 37 percent of the Gulf’s federal waters. Federal waters begin three miles from shore, but most states waters are also closed. More than half the Gulf remains open to fishing, but buyers are canceling orders. ‘I’ve had guys saying, ‘If it’s from the Gulf, we don’t want it,’” says a New York City seafood distributor. The celebrity chef says, “People are really wondering if we’re getting safe fish.’ In Chicago and elsewhere, restaurants display signs declaring, ‘Our Seafood Is Not From the Gulf of Mexico.’ ‘They believe it’s toxic,’ a New York chef says. ‘So let me be clear,’ says the president of the United States. ‘Seafood from the Gulf today is safe to eat.’ The New Orleans sales rep who ships fish nationwide says, ‘They’re not ordering anything. Not a one. They know we’re not selling tainted fish. But their customers? No way. They don’t want seafood from Louisiana at all.’” Carl Safina, *A Sea in Flames*⁴⁶⁹

In the previous chapter I traced how compulsory heterosexuality/whiteness are the backgrounds that determine normative ways of being by facilitating space for some bodies but not others, allowing some objects to be desired but not others. However, these are not the only affective lines of investment we negotiate. Religious thought and practice function similarly. In order to understand new cosmology’s affective investments, it is necessary to understand the mattering map of American environmental thought that new cosmologists have inherited and pass on. These investments, I argue, shape which places, spaces, bodies, and communities

⁴⁶⁸ Natasha Trethewey, *Beyond Katrina: Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 91.

⁴⁶⁹ Safina, *A Sea in Flames*, 125.

matter, which affinities and attachments seem possible. By examining how fear shapes devastated landscapes, in this chapter I draw material feminisms, affect theory, and religion and ecology into productive conversation to argue that advocating for awe, wonder, and reverence as the ideal affective relationships humans should have with nonhuman others is ignorant of both the functions of affect and the histories of inherited racist oppression and environmental injustice that shape these landscapes, bodies, and encounters.

While he does not utilize the language of affect theory nor speak at length about race, I read Evan Berry's text *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* to be positioning the whiteness of our inherited American Protestant environmental imaginary as a similarly concealed background. First, I will outline some of Berry's arguments then discuss what his work reveals about the affective legacies new cosmology inherits and reproduces. Berry argues that "American environmentalism was grounded in a vision that linked nature with spiritual redemption," a "particular approach to human flourishing" that attempted to address the increasing exploitation of nonhuman nature yet also "recapitulated the racist and sexist ideologies prevalent in turn-of-the-century Protestant America."⁴⁷⁰ Furthermore, Berry contends that our inherited "mentalities that characterize the environmental imagination have not been radically overturned by the articulation of a coherent scientific frame for ecological issues," despite the tendency of scholarship to frame environmental theory in the 19th and 20th centuries, and its developing fascinations with evolution, ecology, and outdoor recreation, as increasingly secular.⁴⁷¹ American environmentalism is better understood, Berry contends, as a "synthesis of religious ideas and scientific knowledge," a fusion of Progressive era Protestant,

⁴⁷⁰ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 20-21.

⁴⁷¹ Berry, 12.

transcendentalist, and romantic conceptions of nonhuman nature as a potent wellspring for redemptive experiences nurtured through “social practices intended to reconnect individuals with the forces of nature as a means to moral improvement and spiritual renewal.”⁴⁷²

Precursors to modern environmental movements, Progressive Era conservation and nature organizations like the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and the Boy Scouts of America, functioned as conduits “for metaphysical and soteriological ideas about the natural world.”⁴⁷³ Anxious about social concerns like urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, and influenced by the “romantic insistence on the spiritual benefits of outdoor recreation,”⁴⁷⁴ they “sought to address social ills by yoking the spiritual power of nature,” in the hopes that increased exposure to outdoor spaces through healthful recreation⁴⁷⁵ and public planning/landscape architecture⁴⁷⁶ could “cure the moral decay brought about by the pressures of urban life.”⁴⁷⁷ The nation’s “religious vernacular,” Berry writes, also “borrowed on the redemptive capacity of nature,” with a “push toward more muscular expressions of Christian faith” practiced through camp meetings and outdoor revivals.⁴⁷⁸ “Championed by Evangelical circuit preachers like Billy Sunday” this vision of Christianity “asserted that America needed Christian discipline and a Protestant work ethic in order to rise to the challenge of

⁴⁷² Berry, 61-62.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁷⁵ Including the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Boy Scouts of America, the League of Woodcraft Indians, and the Camp Fire Girls.

⁴⁷⁶ For example, City Beautiful, the Fresh Air Fund, Playground Association of America.

⁴⁷⁷ Berry, 65.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

modernization.”⁴⁷⁹ Although optimism about the “redemptive power of industriousness” has always been a “central tenet of American religious life,” masculine/muscular forms of Christianity at the time paid “special attention to the relationship between the individual and society,” arguing “the Christian faith could and should be harnessed to effectively manage business and social affairs in the face of mounting social pressure,” particularly the “perceived decline” of a “predominantly agrarian economy.”⁴⁸⁰ These organizations, particularly those with a youth-focus, championed their ability to provide “wholesome, character building activities,” that would “establish lasting institutional structures that engendered the same kinds of wholesome character traits as had (the perhaps mythical) life on the farm.”⁴⁸¹ These groups laid the groundwork, Berry contends, for the “social structures that shape middle-class American ideas about childhood (youth sports leagues, playgrounds, summer camp, etc.)” and drew “heavily on ideas about the salvific capacities of nature.”⁴⁸²

As celebrations of agrarian life morphed “into a post-frontier vernacular in which uninhabited landscapes, rather than farms, were identified as the source of moral vitality,” wilderness replaced nature as the “heart of recreational enterprise” and social ideal.⁴⁸³ Nature had been “the intellectual apparatus by which Emerson’s generation and understood the transcendental organization of the cosmos,” Berry writes,

⁴⁷⁹ Berry, 65.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-66.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁸² The orientation of these youth organizations, Berry highlights, “was conditioned by uniquely Christian theological concerns, even where they made allusions to Native American traditions and engaged in racialized appropriations of American Indian culture.” (69)

⁴⁸³ Berry, 70-71.

but by the time John Muir and John Burroughs had become preeminent American authors concerned with the preservation of natural beauty, the wilderness ideal had moved to the forefront of the American environmental imagination. Wilderness, for this generation of thinkers and writers, was not primarily an ecological category, as it would become during subsequent decades. It emerged first as a spatial category necessary to the quest for spiritual purity in nature: ‘wilderness coalesced first as a social ideal, not the environmental ideal that distinguishes it today . . . During the decades that the national parks system was built up, neither managers nor bureaucrats made much of an effort to ‘define what it meant to maintain natural conditions.’ Even as advocates began to agitate for more rigorous schemes to protect wilderness areas, the very idea of wilderness remained an abstract philosophical concept independent of rigorous scientific scrutiny.’⁴⁸⁴

“Wilderness” captured the “realm of the natural world that embodied radical alterity and afforded transcendental experience” focusing more on the “soteriological benefits of nature than on the intrinsic value of plants, animals, and ecosystemic functioning.”⁴⁸⁵ This “decidedly anthropocentric” conception of wilderness as a social ideal “oriented a cultic sensibility about nature,” emphasizing the “*total absence* of metropolitan influence,” a necessary counter to “the psychic and moral disruptions of ‘mechanization.’”⁴⁸⁶ Journeys to wilderness, “like the multiweek outings organized by the Sierra Club, Mountaineers Club, and Appalachian Trail club,” promised to “strip away ‘the veneer of civilization. The rough, hard country, the constant nearness of nature, the full dependency on yourself and your meager resources . . . force upon you a new feeling which you cannot have elsewhere.’”⁴⁸⁷ Wilderness as an ideal, in “retrospective admiration for frontier experience,” captured many of the “basic virtues cherished in particular by Americans,” such as “self-sufficiency, ingenuity, camaraderie, and fortitude.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Berry, 71-72.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

It is this “fusion of agrarian sentimentalism, romantic naturalism, and Progressive conservationism,” Berry argues, that “is the true genesis of the environmental movement.”⁴⁸⁹

“As the wilderness ideal took shape,” Berry writes, “there were robust debates among its exponents,” like Muir, Robert Marshall, and Aldo Leopold, “about whether wilderness was to be appreciated for its utility or for its aesthetic and spiritual qualities (and whether these qualities were themselves a kind of utility.)”⁴⁹⁰ These voices were influential in increasing American understanding that their environment was becoming rapidly degraded. Muir, Marshall, and Leopold argued that to push back “against the mechanism and reductionism of scientific forestry” they needed to “put the professionalism and effective techniques of scientific conservation to a higher purpose, toward the protection of those landscapes by which Americans could continue to cultivate the ‘spirit of the wilderness.’”⁴⁹¹ While wilderness preservationists were committed to resisting the refrain that American resources, in the form of forests and wildlife, were inexhaustible, the movement’s luminaries also shared an “unambiguous commitment to the spiritual significance of their cause” describing their love of nature as a “spiritual vocation and linked measures to protect outdoor recreation in an economy of spiritual goods.”⁴⁹² “Nature spirituality has no more celebrated figure than John Muir,” Berry writes, and while “environmental historians still struggle to classify and describe Muir’s religious views, labeling his asystematic writings as ‘secular pantheism,’ ‘transcendentalism,’ and ‘post-Protestant,’” Berry sees Muir’s reverence of wilderness more in line with his theological

⁴⁸⁹ Berry, 76.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 78.

contemporaries.⁴⁹³ Muir’s “unique brand of mystical ecospirituality,” Berry writes, utilized Christianity as a “springboard” toward harmonizing “theological ethics with a post-Darwinian view of the position of human beings in the natural order” threads that will later be taken up by Lynn White and the new cosmology movement.⁴⁹⁴ Berry reads “Muir’s assertion that wildness was the fundamental source and site for human redemption,” as drawing directly from Christian soteriology, creating a “theological vision in which people in modern societies were afforded—by the grace of God’s creative magnanimity—natural temples in which to redeem their depraved natures. The prophetic message of repentance was straightforwardly transformed into a preservationist morality: ‘his writings never lost their message of repentance from the sins of over-civilization, baptism in wilderness, and ejection of the money-changers from the mountain temples.’”⁴⁹⁵ Muir, and other preservationists of the period leading up to the Second World War, directed humans to know the wilderness and come to love it as they loved it. Spiritual rhetoric coupled with wilderness preservation permeated the American spiritual imagination through “foresters, policy makers, local activists, journalists, preachers, and professors eagerly” discussing how the “nation ought to think about, enjoy, and protect the natural environment,” for its “salvific potential,” offer of moral cleansing, and ability to “repair the damages of a life of urban industrial alienation.”⁴⁹⁶

Attachment to these particular conceptions of the value and potential of nonhuman nature solidified through affinities with particular materials, those natural formations and places that

⁴⁹³ Berry, 79.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

resonated with the grandeur of a salvific narrative. Twentieth century nature writers, drawing from and reshaping a “theology of immanence” (divine dwelling or manifestation in the material world) reconceived mountains and forests, “once monstrosities of the medieval Christian imagination,”⁴⁹⁷ as “objects of affection and wonder.”⁴⁹⁸ “Far from being spaces of bewitchment, mountains and forests became key symbols of beauty, healthfulness, and power in American environmental thought” and a “robust system of national parks” formed around the “protection of mountain landscapes” as reserves for “untrammled nature for the pleasure of the nation.”⁴⁹⁹ Publications devoted to nature proclaimed mountains and alpine forests as “sacred, transformative spaces” that were imbued with “their own intrinsic power⁵⁰⁰ to affect the lives of humans wandering among them” if humans kept an “open heart and an open mind” toward “absorbing” their profound benefits.”⁵⁰¹ Rhetoric about “the primal impulse of the human spirit to journey among mountain wilderness” was prevalent within nature enthusiast writings, as well as the what we might now call affective conviction that the deeper meanings hidden within these sacred sites “was sometimes too profound for verbal expression.”⁵⁰² Through 1920’s and ‘30s car culture affinity for these places, and attachment to these encounters as personal and social good,

⁴⁹⁷ Berry gestures to the scholarship of Marjorie Hope Nicolson in a longer discussion of whether or not the shift in symbolic meaning, from unpeopled landscapes as source of fear to “sublime beauty and spiritual inspiration,” signifies a substantial historical break. For more see Berry, *Devoted to Nature* 103-119.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁰⁰ Interestingly, Berry notes here that “nature worshippers rarely expressed twinges of anxiety about their pantheist leanings.” (121)

⁵⁰¹ Berry, 120-121.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 126-127.

became ubiquitous for middle class Americans who were able to drive to and through these landscapes.⁵⁰³ This nurtured spirit of wanderlust, cultivated desires for particular experiences with nonhuman others as manifestations of the good life (social, spiritual, and healthful goods), solidified this “imagined purity of undeveloped landscapes” in our geographic imagination, recapitulating Genesis narratives in which “natural splendor is shattered by moral rupture and followed by a desire to return to the primordial order.”⁵⁰⁴

The irony, as Berry articulates, is that “establishing uninhabited landscapes” as the center of the American environmental imaginary was only possible via white settlers “displacing native communities and economies with successive waves of development.”⁵⁰⁵ This material displacement was “deeply tied to racialized ideas about the ecological Indian and the noble savage, ideas that obscure the real impact of white settlement.”⁵⁰⁶ Ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant and environmental historians Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo point out that while formulating wilderness as an ideal, wilderness advocates like Muir and Samuel Bowles denigrated the natives they encountered on the land as part of this process of “whitening the wilderness.”⁵⁰⁷ In his best-selling 1868 *The Parks and Mountains of Colorado: A summer Vacation in the Switzerland of America*, Bowles justified Indian displacement writing, “we know they are not our equals . . . we know that our right to the soil, as a race capable of its superior improvement, is above theirs . . .

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Berry, 146.

⁵⁰⁷ Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, “Imagining nature and Erasing Race and Class: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness,” *Environmental History* 6.4 (2001): 541-560.

let us act directly and openly our faith . . . Let us say [to the Indian] . . . you are our ward, our child, the victim of our destiny, ours to displace, ours to protect.”⁵⁰⁸ “At the same time that parks and wilderness were being reconstructed as white and pure for the benefit of white tourists,” Merchant writes, “Indians were being characterized as dark and dirty.”⁵⁰⁹ In his *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), Muir “wrote disparagingly of the Indians he encountered there, equating Indians with unclean animals that did not belong in the wilderness.”⁵¹⁰ Encountering a “band of Indians from Mono collecting acorns on their way to Yosemite,”⁵¹¹ Muir writes, “they were wrapped in blankets made of the skins of sage-rabbits. The dirt on some of their faces seemed old enough and thick enough to have a geological significance . . . How glad I was to get away from the gray, grim crowd and see them vanish down the trail!”⁵¹² While configuring national parks as “Edens containing beautiful scenery, rivers, animals, flowering trees, and carpets of wildflowers,” Muir⁵¹³ and others, “continually contrasted Indians with wilderness,

⁵⁰⁸ Quoted in Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.

⁵⁰⁹ Carolyn Merchant, “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History,” *Environmental History* 8.3 (2003): 380-394

⁵¹⁰ Merchant, 382.

⁵¹¹ Merchant, 382.

⁵¹² John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1987,) 205-218.

⁵¹³ Merchant writes that in his excursions to Alaska, Muir reflects more moderate views of the native peoples he encounters but still remarks he prefers the “clean wilderness” to Indian encampments. Furthermore, while preparing his journals for publication Muir chose not to alter his impressions of native groups. While in later writings he seemed to appreciate native closeness to the land, Muir never became an advocate for native people. One argument to be made is that Muir is just a product of the time period but for fruitful discussion, Merchant contrasts his position with other environmental writers of the period who did become activists on the behalf of displaced peoples. For more see: Helen Hunt Jackson’s *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government’s Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (1881) and Mary Austin’s *The Land of Little Rain* (1903). Muir expresses similar views about blacks in

writing of them as polar opposites to the pristine lands.”⁵¹⁴ Writing on encountering a native woman, Muir remarks, “her dress was calico rags, far from clean. In every way she seemed sadly unlike Nature’s neat well-dressed animals, though living like them on the bounty of the wilderness. Strange that mankind alone is dirty. Had she been clad in fur or cloth woven of grass or shreddy bark, she might then have seemed a rightful part of the wilderness; like a good wolf at least, or bear.”⁵¹⁵ Whether tying them to the land as animals or separating them from awe-inducing wilderness as too savage, the “myth of pristine wilderness,” DeLuca and Demo write, “is founded on the erasure of the humanity, presence, and history of Native Americans.”⁵¹⁶

This vision of American environmentalism revolving around pristine unpeopled landscapes “was publicly enshrined in the 1964 Wilderness Act,” as environmental dogma that expressed hopes to return the land to its ““original conditions—as witnessed by the first white settlers.””⁵¹⁷ Berry concludes his text by arguing the Christian roots of American environmentalism, those lasting arguments “that individuals can and should be brought into conformity with an immutable, beneficent natural order” found within a conception of nature as “fundamentally good and the reciprocal idea that human beings are inherently ecologically destructive,” continue to run deep within contemporary environmental thought. What resonated

“Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf,” (1867) and Merchant contrasts these writings with relative contemporary Henry David Thoreau’s resistance to slavery in (1849) “Civil Disobedience,” (1845) “Slavery in Massachusetts,” and (1859) “A Plea for Captain John Brown,” and not too distant Zora Neal Hurston’s depiction of black community’s negotiations with the environment in Florida in (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

⁵¹⁴ Merchant, 382.

⁵¹⁵ Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 58-59.

⁵¹⁶ DeLuca and Demo, 554.

⁵¹⁷ Berry, “Devoted to Nature,” 147.

in the Progressive Era as affectively powerful and beneficial about “nature,” is echoed wholeheartedly by new cosmology texts. Attachment to particular portions of nonhuman nature as powerful, possessing the ability to strike us with awe and wonder as well as the power to reshape our habits if we are really paying attention, is a feature of early environmentalism as well as the center of new cosmology thought. Furthermore, we can also see that new cosmology’s reliance on sacralized science to provide the kinship links between humans and nonhuman others it argues were uncoupled by religious belief is not without precedent but a continuation of the ideas that germinated the environmental movement. “Insofar as these ideas have dominated American public discourse about the environment,” Berry writes, “theological tradition has set a boundary condition for the environmental imagination.”⁵¹⁸ The dependence on conceptions of nature as removed, ideal, “set apart from humanity” has “impoverished our capacity to think about ecosystems as communities inhabited by people.”⁵¹⁹

Our impoverishment, though, is much deeper than Berry conveys. Drawing from what I outlined in the previous chapter, it is clear that our dependence on the ontologically compartmentalized conception of human/nonhuman others in American Protestant environmentalism makes it incredibly difficult to address the blurring necessitated by environmental disaster and degradation—how nature is recalcitrant to our desires and can, even when we do not desire shaping, shape us materially and affectively. Furthermore, our inherited environmental imaginary serves as a troubling line of affective investment that makes possible the recognition and preservation of only particular environmental objects: unpeopled landscapes, ideal environments, and those creatures/environments with certain affective payoffs. The mattering map of American Protestant environmentalism invests in and facilitates upwardly

⁵¹⁸ Berry, 182.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

mobile access to particular conceptions of “nature,” wilderness spaces and their nonhuman inhabitants, as moral and spiritual goods that can redeem our depravity and reset us via spiritual reconnection. For contemporary environmental thinkers, these inheritances affectively shape what objects we continue to gravitate toward as well as the “appropriate” ways we should relate to and experience them—a persuasive example of this legacy motivates new cosmology’s interest in grandiose spaces, those with transcendent potential to invoke awe/wonder/reverence. Our habitual gravitation to these particular habitats and nonhuman others, however, comes at the expense of those bodies and places that are barred from inclusion in this mattering map.

Thinking of our American Protestant environmental imagination as a troubling line of affective investment becomes even more compelling when paired with the perspectives of those who are not inheritors of this line. What Berry actually describes is not the birth of an environmental movement that was caught up in the problematic racial politics of the era, I argue, but the birth of the environmental movement as a line of white investment⁵²⁰ that is foreclosed to the bodies and environmental imaginaries of people of color. In her formative research *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, Carolyn Finney argues that the “lack of comprehensive studies addressing the nature of a black environmental imaginary” hinders our understandings of how African Americans negotiate a “conflicted environmental history and a contemporary environmental experience that appears to ignore them.”⁵²¹ Whiteness as background facilitates American environmentalism with a universal narrative, obscuring that many bodies (female, nonwhite, queer, disabled, immigrant)

⁵²⁰ A white, able-bodied, straight line of investment— in my final chapter I work with perspectives from disability and queer ecologies on resisting white environmentalism.

⁵²¹ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 9-10.

carry alternative environmental histories that shape their encounters and attachments. Finney's work challenges universal narratives arguing we must recognize "our unhealthy relationships with the natural environment are intimately linked to our unhealthy relationships with each other."⁵²²

During the period Berry reads as the birth of contemporary environmental thought, a significant number of events impacting African Americans shaped a very different black environmental imaginary. The Emancipation Proclamation and Homestead Act initially allowed "approximately forty thousand freedmen to receive four hundred thousand acres of abandoned Confederate land" and the 1865 congressional Freedmen's Bureau was formed to "supervise and manage all abandoned and confiscated land in the South and to assign tracts of land to former slaves."⁵²³ In 1866, however, "former white owners of the land, who were pardoned after the war, began to pressure President Andrew Johnson to allow their land to be returned to them," fearful that "black landowners and farmers would start to accumulate wealth and power in the South."⁵²⁴ In response to their requests, in 1866 Congress defeated the portion of the Freedmen's Bureau Act that "gave it the authority to assign land to former slaves, and president Johnson ordered all land titles rescinded. The freedmen were forced off their newly acquired land, and it was returned to former white plantation owners."⁵²⁵ While Muir was giving influential lectures in the 1870s on forest preservation and "revering the 'pristine-ness' of nature," black men and women were continually negotiating their relationships with the landscapes they were once

⁵²² Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 34.

⁵²³ Finney, 36.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

forced to cultivate, owned for a brief moment, and then had torn from them.⁵²⁶ In the 1880s, while Gifford Pinchot and Muir's conservation ideologies influenced President Theodore Roosevelt to take an interest in forestry and eventually sanction the creation of the National Park Service, significant pieces of legislation⁵²⁷ were "enacted to limit both movement and accessibility for African Americans, as well as American Indians, Chinese, and other nonwhite peoples in the United States."⁵²⁸ As American environmentalism was forming its orientation, this legislation coupled with "numerous race-related massacres of African Americans: two hundred in Louisiana in 1868; nine in North Carolina in 1898; and seventy in Colfax, Louisiana in 1873," solidified "nature" as an inappropriate object of desire for black bodies.⁵²⁹

What lies beneath denying African Americans access to land and nature leisure, however, is more insidious than the fear of the social power of black landowners. While "many modern-day mainstream environmental organizations understandably disavow, dismiss, or even deny any connection to the tenets of eugenics that emphasize 'purification' of the human gene pool by discouraging the reproduction of those with objectionable traits," these ideas informed Roosevelt's conception of a "'new nationalism' that 'placed the moral issue and patriotic duty of conservation into the context of a racial conversation.'"⁵³⁰ The "themes of race, sexuality, gender, nation, family, and class have been written into the body of nature in western life sciences since the eighteenth century," and Haraway discusses the positioning of black human

⁵²⁶ Finney, 37.

⁵²⁷ The California Land Claims Act (1851), the Black Codes (1861-65), the Dawes Act (1887), and the Curtis Act (1898).

⁵²⁸ Finney, 37.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ Finney, 39.

bodies, an amalgamation of sex and conquest, as more ape-like: “European culture for centuries questioned the humanity of peoples of color and assimilated them to the monkeys and apes in jokes, medicine, religious art, sexual beliefs, and zoology.”⁵³¹ As part of a long history of white Europeans positioning black bodies as closer to nonhuman nature, this understanding of race was woven within a potent “emerging narrative that defined ‘the Negro’s place in Nature,’” at the “bottom of the evolutionary run while reifying whiteness as closest to God, thereby morally justifying any act of exclusion from the nation-building project that was foremost in the minds of European Americans.”⁵³² Finney sites numerous examples in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of “how blackness and primitivism were constructed and disseminated in scientific, professional, and public venues” including the dehumanization of Saartjie Baartman who was publicly displayed and debased in London between 1810 and 1815 and Ota Benga, a human abducted from the Congo who was forced in 1906 to be on display in a Bronx Zoo primate exhibit as the “evolutionary ‘missing link.’”⁵³³ Eugenics theories during the period that birthed the environmental movement effectively positioned black bodies as objects of nature, part of its wildness not beneficiaries of its salvific potential.

While wilderness conservationists like Leopold and Muir might disavow these racist rhetorics⁵³⁴, if to be fully human means cultivating a particular affective relationship with nonhuman nature (a love and respect for uninhabited wilderness as source and site of redemption from human depravity) and nonwhite bodies were/are systematically barred from desiring and

⁵³¹ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 154.

⁵³² Finney, 39.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁵³⁴ For more on racism and nature advocacy in the early twentieth-century see Donna Haraway’s “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” in *Primate Visions*, 26-59.

cultivating these affinities and attachments, then American Protestant environmentalism functions as an affective economy that only allows white bodies their full humanity through the extension of white bodies into nature spaces and environmental thought. Furthermore, thinking with Ahmed and Fanon, American Protestant environmentalism works as a stopping mechanism that further marks black bodies as “unrecruitable” in the cause of spiritual nature conservation, shaping black bodies as test cases for the depravity of over-civilization rather than full-participants in what our environmental legacy (and new cosmology) regards as nature’s grace.

The stopping mechanisms ingrained within American environmentalism that withhold the natural world as an object of desire from black bodies, restricting their entry/cultivation/affective engagement with nonhuman nature, were not resolved by civil rights legislation but continue to reverberate for contemporary environmental concerns—a legacy that new cosmology writers refuse to acknowledge in their insistence that these affective relationships are desirable, or even possible, for everyone. The Wilderness Act and the Civil Rights Act may have marked “the use of wilderness areas for the public purposes of recreation, scenic viewing, scientific understanding, education, conservation, and historic preservation,” but for which public?⁵³⁵ These histories “have left African Americans at times physically and psychologically exiled from their homeland while still in it,” and when we consider “the role that our public lands play in determining the national characteristics of this ‘homeland’” we can begin to understand that it is “difficult for African Americans to have an ‘uncomplicated union with the natural world.’”⁵³⁶ Furthermore, whiteness as background for American environmentalism makes it easier to ignore how white bodies are shaped by these legacies of dehumanization, particularly the seemingly

⁵³⁵ Finney, 47.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 49.

endless capacity of white bodies to tolerate black pain⁵³⁷ and our continued dedication to forming and celebrating conceptions of nature that refuse to recognize these legacies.

As Lorde, Fanon, and Ahmed detail, emotions do things. The affective habits and the lines of investment they carve are the social momentum that draws bodies and communities together while separating from others. The affective project that positions the “natural” world as salvific potential set-apart from actual human communities and their diverse encounters with nonhuman others, both in the cultivation of American white protestant environmentalism and new cosmology’s ontoethical ideals, is only possible when these theorists and activists continue to ignore which populations, encounters, and bodies were erased to make these narratives possible. Awe, wonder, and reverence for nature not only attempt to describe very complex relationships with others, but they align us with a particular history oriented around a particular environmental imaginary. Our American environmental imaginary is a religious heritage that helps us express these feelings but is also built upon the exclusion of so many people and environments. Our bodies remember these histories even if academia is loathed to acknowledge them. However, if we want to be able to speak to the complexities of our contemporary ecological problems, how ecological degradation and climate change will continue pressing on bodies in predictably unequal ways, we must recognize that these histories of unhealthy relationships with nonhuman nature and human difference are intertwined and timely. Finally, maneuvering material feminisms, affect, and ecotheory into conversation can show us how the mattering maps of white environmentalism make it easier to turn away from those places, spaces, and encounters that are not regarded as valuable, namely toxic concerns, slow violence, damaged environments, poisoned nonhuman kin and the humans that live with and love them. Thinking

⁵³⁷ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

about the affective economies that stick to the Gulf Coast after disaster, which connections are lived as the most intense, intimate, and close to the skin, concluding this chapter I push religion and ecology to move beyond our attachments to only exploring awe and reverence by sitting with the affective politics of fear that shape imaginaries and encounters in devastated landscapes. Focusing on emotions outside the comfort zone of new cosmology's intimacies demonstrates how much the specificities of location, culture, embodiment, and location shape our emotional connections with human and nonhuman others and how ill-equipped new cosmology's onto-ethics are to address these entanglements.

Toxic Inheritance

“You welcome me to the trash heap. Everything has become surreal. You have made me the trashman’s helper. You have made me wear a heavy surgical mask to cover my hands with heavy duty rubber gloves. I look like an out-of-work actor reader to audition for a minor role in a science fiction film. The work is too much for me alone. My friend Dave Brinks lends his strength to cut stinking, soggy carpet and haul it to the curb. He is giving me assistance and courage. I cannot let Dave see me cry. No tears will stream down my face. They will just have to drip into my stomach. He wants me not to open the refrigerator. We do not want to see what might be inside. We do not want to inhale the stink. We bind the refrigerator with yards of duct tape and angle it out to the sidewalk. Books that dampness and mold have rendered beyond salvation are tossed into large trash bags along with shoes and other items of clothing. Although my more than two hundred LP albums are ruined, I cannot bear to expel them. Not yet. Eventually the lost and damaged contents of 1928 Gentilly Boulevard must go. I don’t have a digital camera. Flooding has made my 35mm as useless as my PC. Much of the lost and the damaged—can I sell that phrase as the title for a new soap opera series—will sit and wait for the flood insurance adjustor to come. Dave has gone, and I have the freedom to cry. I opt not to. Let the tears remain in my guts. Use the energy it takes to cry to strengthen your effort to write. Yes, Hurricane Katrina violated my house. But that violation was minimal when I recall that many people who lived in various sectors of the greater New Orleans area no longer have homes. I have been blessed. Because you are in exile, at a distance from your relatives and friends and from what remains of the unique cultural gumbos of New Orleans, those social and spiritual foods that nourished you, you must write.”
 Jerry W. Ward, Jr. *The Katrina Papers*⁵³⁸

⁵³⁸ Ward Jr., *The Katrina Papers*, 36.

Katrina, Rita, and the BP spill are events with particular backgrounds where embodied affects ferment within vital encounters. The work I have outlined in chapters three and four illuminates some of the sociocultural background that is already there (stewing, pressing, sticking) when disasters happen, and unsettling intimacies unfold. This scholarship helps us understand how affects are born from embodied encounters with one another and that they orient us, align some others with and against other others, within the messiness of the social. Recognizing fear as an emotion that is associated with the region,⁵³⁹ concluding this chapter I consider environmental disaster, material complexity, and affective power together while focusing on the lived experiences of those bodies, creatures, and environments that fail to inherit the benefits of white environmental imaginaries.

Returning to Ahmed's model of emotion as affective economy, Ahmed challenges the notion that fear has an object.⁵⁴⁰ For example, Ahmed writes a common refrain contrasts anxiety as the "'tense anticipation of a threatening but vague event,' or a feeling of 'uneasy suspense,' while fear is described as an emotional reaction 'to a threat that is identifiable.'"⁵⁴¹ But fear, she contends, is really "linked to the 'passing by' of the object."⁵⁴² Fear works as an economy of proximity where we fear coming in close contact with objects of fear and these objects become even more fearsome when fear ceases to be contained within any one object. Ahmed demonstrates this slippage through her reading of a curious passage from an Aryan Nations website positioning white nationalism as acts of love:

⁵³⁹ Fear is a salient example for this context that can be explored in much more depth in the future, but it is also only one example. Related conversations could explore more fully disgust, apathy, and shame.

⁵⁴⁰ Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 124.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

the depths of Love are rooted and very deep in a real white nationalist's soul and spirit, no form of 'hate' could even begin to compare. At least not a hate motivated by ungrounded reasoning. It is not hate that makes the average white man look upon a mixed race couple with a scowl on his face and loathing in his heart. It is not hate that makes the white housewife throw down the daily newspaper in repulsion and anger after reading of yet another child molester or rapist sentenced by corrupt courts to a couple of years in prison or on parole. It is not hate that makes the white workingman curse about the latest boatload of aliens dumped on our shores to be given job preference over the white citizen who built this land. It is not hate that brings rage into the heart of a white Christian farmer when he reads of" Ahmed argues it positions a subject, "(the white nationalist, the average white man, the white housewife, the white working man, the white citizen, and the white Christian farmer when he reads of billions loaned or given away as 'aid' to foreigners when he can't get the smallest break from an unmerciful government to save his failing farm. No, it's not hate. It is love.⁵⁴³

We see here, again, how "emotions circulate between bodies and signs" to align the "bodies of individual subjects and the body of the nation," with and against "imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject."⁵⁴⁴ Reading this passage, as well as Fanon and Lorde's work, Ahmed highlights how through the mobilization of affects like hate and fear, the "fantasy" of the "ordinary white subject" comes into being.⁵⁴⁵ What is ordinary, normative, the good, is what is "already under threat by imagined others."⁵⁴⁶ These figures described, "the mixed-racial couple, the child molester, the rapist, aliens, and foreigners," come to "embody the threat of loss: lost jobs, lost money, lost land."⁵⁴⁷ These figures become objects of fear when they "signify the danger of impurity," the violation of "pure bodies," and such bodies "can only be imagined as

⁵⁴³ Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 117.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

pure by the perpetual restaging of this fantasy of violation.”⁵⁴⁸ Fear, here, “responds to that which is approaching rather than already here. It is the futurity of fear, which makes it possible that the object of fear, rather than arriving, might pass us by.”⁵⁴⁹ Fear “both envelops the bodies that feel it, as well as constructs those bodies as enveloped, as contained by it, as if it comes from outside and moves inward.”⁵⁵⁰ In the encounters Fanon and Lorde describe, fear works to differentiate between white and black bodies by opening up “past histories that stick to the present” and “allow the white body to be constructed as apart from the black body” reestablishing “distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface.”⁵⁵¹ Past histories of association that position black bodies within the white environmental imaginary as aggressively animal, corruptible, unrecruitable, unsaved, sticks to black bodies attributing them with “emotional value, in this case, as being fearsome.”⁵⁵² Black bodies become “even more threatening,” Ahmed writes, “if he passes by; his proximity is imagined then as the possibility of future injury. As such, the economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others, a containment whose ‘success’ relies on its failure, as it must keep open the very grounds of fear.”⁵⁵³ Fear does not, Ahmed concludes, “involve the defense of borders that already exist; rather, fear makes those borders, by establishing objects from which the subject, in fearing, can stand apart.”⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ahmed, 126.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁵² Ibid., 127.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 128.

It is important to understand the function of fear in order to understand affective intimacies in the American south especially after these disasters. Fear coupled with disgust swirls within this theme of “invasion” to shape the bodies and environments of devastated landscapes.⁵⁵⁵ In his article “Legitimizing Neglect,” Hemant Shah tracks how conservative news media, commentators, and leaders positioned residents of New Orleans after the storm as threats to white bodies, communities, and the nation.⁵⁵⁶ While I have outlined the true complexity of the environmental history of the Louisiana coast as well as the compounding environmental injustices impacting the area of New Orleans (all the reasons humans were left behind, stranded, and forced to fend for themselves without food, water, and shelter) journalists cast white citizenry as rationally perplexed by Katrina’s aftermath.⁵⁵⁷ According to some journalists, “Blacks were putting themselves, their city, and by extension, the global image of the entire nation at risk by their irrational behavior describing survivors as looting, raping, and murdering hordes. In many ways, the news coverage was consistent with the way Whites have viewed non-Whites for millennia: as a threat to ‘our’ society, to ‘our’ world, to ‘our’ way of life, to ‘our’ way of thinking, to modern rationality itself.”⁵⁵⁸ These foreclosed lines of white investment were

⁵⁵⁵ For more on the racialization of “purity” forming within post-Enlightenment subjectivity see Alexis Shotwell (2016) *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Robert Bernasconi (2000) *The Idea of Race*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze ed. (1997) *Race and the Enlightenment*, and Charles Mills (1998) *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*.

⁵⁵⁶ Hemant Shah, “Legitimizing Neglect: Race and Rationality in Conservative News Commentary About Hurricane Katrina,” *Howard Journal of Communications* 20:1 (2009), 1-17.

⁵⁵⁷ Shah comments every news outlet covered events before and after the storm and these themes are present across media platforms, but he focuses on “conservative news media” because “they have assumed an influential position within the U.S. media environment and because there is convergence, particularly since 2000, between conservative media, conservative commentators, and conservative politics to the extent that the Republican Party, conservative think tanks, and right-wing media coordinate their ‘talking points.’” (2)

⁵⁵⁸ Shah, 7.

particularly cruel for the region's environmental concerns because they affectively shape New Orleans residents as animalistic and socially flawed thus unworthy of environmental intervention, protection, and rebuilding. Shah writes New Orleans residents were described as a “‘very different breed’ that was engaging in ‘hardcore, armed, violence’ and ‘making it impossible to save the city.’”⁵⁵⁹ A *Dallas Morning News* article “uncritically reported the views of Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden who said, ‘we do not want to inherit the looting and the foolishness that went on in New Orleans. We do not want to inherit the breed that seeks to prey on other people.’”⁵⁶⁰ Columnist Mark Alexander wrote that, “these loathsome creatures [referring to Black looters] have filled industrial-size garbage bags with clothes and jewels and floated them down the street”⁵⁶¹ and Tunku Varadarajan for the *Wall Street Journal* lamented, “some of those who remained on the scene of the disaster have offered a disconcerting form of civic theater: And as one who has watched this theater, one has recoiled from the actors’ retreat into a primitive state.”⁵⁶² Finally, commentator Rocco DiPippo concluded “given the fact that during the recent crisis there, many of its citizens chose the law of the jungle over the rule of law, it is easy to conclude that the restoration of New Orleans’s social fabric will be an impossible task.”⁵⁶³ These notions of “primitive violence and lawlessness,”⁵⁶⁴ mirror what Finney described as our American racial inheritance that associates blackness with inferior nonhuman animals;

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁶⁰ Shah, 8.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

black bodies as objects of nature's wildness. Furthermore, while side-stepping any of the environmental and political causes of the crisis in New Orleans, conservative commentators enveloped the ordinary, good, rational white subject as constantly at risk of invasion from the threat of black contamination. Working in critical geographies, Rachel Brahinsky, Jade Sasser, and Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, argue our "ways of thinking and experiencing space, nature, and the environment are inextricably linked to race and racialization," or the "ongoing iterative process through which race is defined and applied to people."⁵⁶⁵ The legacies of white Protestant environmentalism are naturalized by positioning bodies of color as "out of place, or unnaturally present," from wilderness spaces to suburban streets, and racial inequalities are naturalized by marking black bodies as innately at home in violent and toxic environments.⁵⁶⁶

While disregarding the socio-historical and environmental conditions that contribute to New Orleans being an ecologically precarious city with a high population of African American citizens in poverty, conservative news media positioned New Orleans residents as a test case for the unrecruitability of black communities in the moral cause of American white futurity. Commentator Tony Sailer wrote, "what you won't hear, except from me, is that 'Let the good times roll' is an especially risky message for African-Americans. The plain fact is that they tend to possess poorer native judgement than members of better-educated groups. Thus, they need stricter moral guidance from society."⁵⁶⁷ Jesse Lee Peterson commented, "when 75 percent of residents had left the city, it was primarily immoral welfare-dependent Blacks that stayed behind

⁵⁶⁵ Rachel Brahinsky, Jade Sasser, and Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, "Race, Space, and Nature: An Introduction and Critique," *Antipode* 46.5 (2014): 1140.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1141.

⁵⁶⁷ Shah, 10.

and waited for government to bail them out.”⁵⁶⁸ Fred Pinkney for the *Arizona Republic* wrote, “the facts are irrefutable. Black Americans in New Orleans proved gullible people duped into social dependency will surely experience social disaster and failure.”⁵⁶⁹ Conservative commentators singled out the black male body, inheritors (they claim) of a long line of irrational and irresponsible behavior from the absence of their black fathers, as particularly responsible for the behaviors (often completely fabricated) they deemed socially corrupt. Pat Buchanan wrote, “no sooner had Katrina passed by and the 17th Street levee broke than hundreds of young men who should have taken charge in helping the aged, the sick and the women with babies to safety took to the streets to shoot, loot and rape.”⁵⁷⁰ Jonah Goldberg for the *National Review* positions black people, regardless of occupation, as predisposed to lawlessness writing, a “sizable majority of blacks—including police—behaved reprehensibly in the aftermath, shooting at rescue workers, raping, killing and, yes looting (though no cannibalism.)”⁵⁷¹ Finally, commentators like Bill O’Reilly positioned the crisis in New Orleans as a warning to all black bodies in America if they did not turn away from their (inherently) irrational ways saying “connect the dots and wise up. Educate yourself, work hard and be honest. If you don’t the odds are you will be desperately standing on a symbolic rooftop someday yourself.”⁵⁷² Through rhetoric like this, conservative talking-points define what it means to be human in ways that echo our American Protestant environmental inheritance as a line of white investment. To be human here, is to be rationally in

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ Shah, 10.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 10.

control of one's emotions and a welcoming recipient of the grace normative American behavior offers as a respite from the depravity of urbanity. This commentary positions black bodies as inhuman, incapable of fulfilling American norms and expectations, their shortcomings unsurprising because this (imagined) behavior is to be expected as animalistic black bodies cannot be trusted to participate accordingly.

These disturbing ontologies further demonstrate how fear as an affective economy repulses the white nation and naturalizes whiteness, regards poor communities of color with disgust as acceptable losses, positions their communities as sacrifice zones, and considers them unworthy of protection from environmental degradation. Following the storm, Shah argues, “conservative commentary often acknowledged that those stuck in the flood-waters of New Orleans were victims of neglect and incompetence in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. But even so, these victims were apparently unworthy of sympathy.”⁵⁷³ David Brooks for the *New York Times* wrote, “most of the ambitious and organized people abandoned inner-city areas of New Orleans long ago,” implying those who “chose” to “remain behind are victims of their own irrational decision-making and behavior.”⁵⁷⁴ Commentator Jon Dougherty insinuated that victims of Hurricane Katrina were hardly victims writing, “not all ‘victims’ wanted to be rescued because they were looting anything and everything they could carry.”⁵⁷⁵ Political leaders like Arizona Sen. John Kyl de-legitimized black survivors by asking, “if people know year after year that natural disasters occur in a particular place and if people continue to build there and want to live there, should they bear the responsibility of buying insurance or should everyone else bear

⁵⁷³ Shah, 11.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the responsibility?”⁵⁷⁶ O’Reilly furthered these sentiments on his show with a clear “racial spin on the topic: ‘The White American taxpayers are saying: ‘How much more do we have to give here?’”⁵⁷⁷ Sen. Rick Santorum suggested instituting “tough penalties” for those who “decide to ride it out,” suggesting their “choice” to remain in hazardous conditions risks the bodies of more rational citizens.⁵⁷⁸ Finally, House Speaker Dennis Hastert recommended leveling the city entirely commenting, “it makes no sense to spend billions of dollars to rebuild a city that’s 7 feet under sea level . . . it looks like a lot of that place could be bulldozed.”⁵⁷⁹

The perception of other humans as “the origin of danger,” the positioning of black bodies as objects of fear, “is shaped by histories of racism” in which the presence of black bodies “is already read as an invasion of bodily territory as well as the territory of the nation.”⁵⁸⁰ Fearing racial invasion like an ever-approaching toxic substance has always been a part of our American racial imaginary but within environmentally depleted portions of the country, this fear mixes with material toxins in peculiar ways. Toxicity becomes a product of racial fear but does not actualize as concern for the realities that toxic materials are unduly burdened upon nonwhite bodies. Exploring racialized toxicity, Mel Chen writes “toxins-toxic figures— populate increasing ranges of environmental, social, and political discourses. Indeed, figures of toxicity have moved well beyond their specific range of biological attribution, leaking out of nominal and literal bounds while retaining their affective ties to vulnerability and repulsion: so an advice

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷⁹ Shah, 12.

⁵⁸⁰ Ahmed, “Collective Feelings,” 31.

columnist might write *Keep a healthy distance from toxic acquaintances*, while a senator up for reelection decries the ‘toxic’ political atmosphere.”⁵⁸¹ “Given its rapidly multiplying meanings,” seeping into discourses on global financial stability, the war on terror, and wellness culture, it is unsurprising that American vulnerability to toxic threats holds “persistent allure.”⁵⁸² While material feminisms reveal all bodies are open to the complications of toxicity, undermining “any effort to identify a ‘natural’ divide between nature/culture,”⁵⁸³ toxins within an affective economy of fear “take on characteristics well beyond their physical properties,” adhering to “ideas of vulnerable sovereignty and xenophobia,” that demands an “elsewhere,” beyond the white body, as the origin of toxic threats.⁵⁸⁴ This fear of toxic exposure marks objects regarded as toxic as “untouchable,” “unengageable,” and “perhaps even disabling.”⁵⁸⁵ Using the mid-2000s panic over lead exposure from toys imported from China as but one example, Chen argues that while the “concrete dangers to living bodies of environmental lead,” are ever more present, “lead as a cultural phenomenon” is not confined to its “material and physiomedical character.”⁵⁸⁶ In the summer of 2007, Chen writes, a “spate of warnings and recalls of preschool toys, pet food, seafood, lunchboxes, and other items began to appear in national and local newspapers and television and radio news.”⁵⁸⁷ These reports, attached to images of the threatening toys being

⁵⁸¹ Mel Chen, “Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections,” 266.

⁵⁸² Chen, 266.

⁵⁸³ Tuana, “Viscous Porosity,” 202.

⁵⁸⁴ Mel Chen, “Racialized Toxins and Sovereign Fantasies,” *Discourse* 29:2-3 (2007), 367-371.

⁵⁸⁵ Chen, “Toxic Animacies,” 266.

⁵⁸⁶ Chen, “Racialized Toxins,” 371.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

played with by white children, singled out “the dangers of lead intoxication as opposed to other toxins,” emphasized the “vulnerability of American children to this toxin,” and pointed to a common threat of origin, China, who is a major supplier of consumer products in the U.S.⁵⁸⁸ This fear of invading lead was not paired with any “medical reports of children’s intoxication by lead content in the indicated toys,” but the “ensemble of images,” Chen argues, “seemed to accelerate the explosive construction of a *master toxicity narrative* about Chinese products in general . . . inanimate pollutants could now ‘invade’ all kinds of consumer products, and other pollutants could always climb aboard” to threaten vulnerable white bodies.⁵⁸⁹ During the same cultural moment, however, the “sustained concerns of environmental justice activists” about the “effect of lead paint on children in impoverished neighborhoods and the greater levels of lead toxicity among black children” were disconnected from the “heightened transnational significance of lead,” receiving only “minor media coverage among U.S. liberal interests.”⁵⁹⁰

Unsurprisingly, while hoping to protect race and nation through cultivating fear, none of these commentators talk about the complexity of ecological health, the impact of our desires and consumptions, or the choices we make as a nation that disregard the poor and their habitual exposure to environmentally hazardous environments. This should be particularly troubling for those of us working in religious ecotheory because this economy of fear coupled with longstanding propensities in religious environmentalism to orient toward ideal environments with particular affective payoffs, makes it increasingly difficult to one, acknowledge how our theory and projects habitually contribute to these economies and two, for us to reorient our

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Chen, “Racialized Toxins,” 369.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

conversations toward the importance of centering environmentally devastated regions, communities of color, ill and disabled bodies in our scholarship.

In truth, toxins leach, making trouble for our scholarship. They seep, ooze, and leak frustratingly beyond their expected boundaries particularly any conception of the human as imperviously in-control of our bodies and environments. In truth, racism shapes our affective orientations. Sifting through the silt, shards of homes, muddy beloved objects, and the waste from five compromised superfund sites post-Katrina, bodies already made vulnerable by poverty and institutionalized racism were implicated together in a “toxic soup” of waste, “prejudgments and symbolic imaginaries” that rendered the very city itself an unsalvageable contaminant.⁵⁹¹ “Toxic bodies,” Stacy Alaimo writes, are a “particularly potent site for examining the ethical space of trans-corporeality” since “all bodies, human and otherwise, are, to greater or lesser degrees, toxic at this point in history.”⁵⁹² Beginning with material, using toxins as our starting point and then following the trail of exposure we come to understand how very weak the lingering divisions between nature/culture prove to be:

the same chemical substance may poison the workers who produce it, the neighborhood in which it is produced, and the plants and animals who end up consuming it . . . the traffic in toxins may, in fact, render it nearly impossible for humans to imagine that their own health and welfare is disconnected from that of the rest of the planet or to imagine that it is possible to protect ‘nature’ by merely creating separate, distinct areas in which ‘it’ is ‘preserved.’ In other words, the ethical space of trans-corporeality is never an elsewhere but is always already here, in whatever compromised, ever-catalyzing form.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ Tuana, “Viscous Porosity,” 199-200.

⁵⁹² Stacy Alaimo, “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 260.

⁵⁹³ Alaimo, 260.

Toxins move transcorporeally despite whatever resistances we might put in their way (nature/culture divisions, conceptions of the sacred, impervious ontologies, racial imaginaries) but the question of exposure remains political, an environmental justice issue with certain bodies more exposed than others. Toxic exposure has always been a concern for Cancer Alley, always a reality for the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast offering a pressing challenge to us in ecotheory to draw out the racist ontologies at work affectively and materially that conceal these continual dangers, the materialized ignorance that presses sticky toxic legacies only upon the flesh of black and brown bodies, and those moments where the background slips a bit and we see what has always had the potential to seep through the purity myths in our scholarship.

All Together Now

“For now, despite two appalling blows, coastal Louisiana is still alive. All signs are that the culture, the economy, the people, the very *soul* of this region, somehow made it up to the attic and through the roof just ahead of the roaring flood water. And that’s where things now stand. But, as a place, as a society, coastal Louisiana is still on that battered roof, hatchets and axes tossed aside, everyone hungry and thirsty and tired and scared, surrounded by perilous flood waters, waiting for the rest of the country to help implement a rescue plan long on the drawing board but never before tried. The fateful moment so many of us knew would eventually come is at last here. Either we are witnessing the death of something truly great in America, or the start of something even better, something new and blessedly permanent. There will be no second chance to save this coast and we can no longer wait till tomorrow to act. Those old luxuries are but rotting corpses left behind on the abandoned, ghostly streets of New Orleans.” Mike Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell*⁵⁹⁴

Habitual affinities/attachments that cultivate an inability to move beyond investing in the privileges of an assumed healthy environment or the white freedom to move within it makes it impossible for new cosmology to generatively address areas like the Gulf Coast that are mired in histories of racist oppression, hateful imaginaries, and environmental destruction. Beginning

⁵⁹⁴ Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell*, 344.

with an object, a feeling, or an event and digging into our complex relationships with these materials, feminist affect theory and material feminisms offer jumping-off points, alternatives to forcing every context and concern to fit within a single ethical narrative. By allowing ethical practices, as opposed to ethical principles, to germinate from material realities, these approaches address the hopes in religion and ecology to move beyond anthropocentrism by extending our concerns to the vital, impactful, presence of nonhuman others but caution that “moving beyond the human” requires facing which humans we solidified and celebrated in the first place as their legacies continue to haunt our work. Most importantly, in conversation with one another, Chen argues that this scholarship offers “alternative means, outside of the strictly political or strictly emotional, to identify cross-affiliations-affinities-among groups as diverse as environmentalists, people with autism, social justice activists, feminists, religious believers in nature’s stewardship, and antiracists, to name just a few” and it refuses “prescriptive closures around the possibility of metamorphosis, imaginative or otherwise.”⁵⁹⁵

With a more porous sense of the human and a less certain sense of our emotional life, what do these relational ontologies free us up to think, collaborate, and imagine? Returning to my question from the beginning of chapter three, *should* religion and ecology continue to encourage affinities and attachments within devastated landscapes? Disasterscapes and their environmental histories reveal that we are always already intimate with human and nonhuman others in so many ways that make us uncomfortable by washing away the “should we” and any lingering patina suggesting these intimacies are always pleasant, benevolent, or transformative. Asking *how* we should encourage kinship intimacies with nonhuman others becomes a much more provocative and ethically rich quandary when we acknowledge that our (dis)regard for

⁵⁹⁵ Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 236.

human/nonhuman others is oriented by legacies of racism and that these kin-creatures and environments carry toxic inheritances that seep into both our bodies and theory. For many scholars in religion and ecology the field serves, in part, as religiopoiesis—crafting a possible civic home for those who feel ethical obligations to care for biodiversity.⁵⁹⁶ Ursula Goodenough, and other new cosmology scholars, view this crafting of religion as a “core activity of humankind,” the cultivation of a “cosmology of origins and destiny” that guides human belief and behaviors.⁵⁹⁷ For Goodenough, through opening ourselves up to metaphors that advocate ecocare in “our traditional religions, those in the poetry and art of past and present times, and those that emerge from our articulation of scientific understandings,” we will form such a “rich tapestry of meaning that we have no choice but to believe in it.”⁵⁹⁸ But scholarship in material feminisms and feminist affect theory reminds us that all making, as Donna Haraway writes, is making-with, sympoiesis, “poesis” to make and “sym” as with or together, as “critters-human and not become-with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthly worlding and unworlding.”⁵⁹⁹ Like our ancestors, we continue to use nonhuman others to make, build, fear, hope, dream but only some of us can claim this making is apolitical. How might religion and ecology make-with disaster and those dispossessed/disregarded by the aftermath?

⁵⁹⁶ Bron Taylor and Lucas F. Johnston, “Trends in Religion and Environmental Politics into the Twenty-First Century,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Politics in the U.S.* ed. Barbara A. McGraw (Madden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 361.

⁵⁹⁷ Ursula Goodenough, “Exploring Resources of Nationalism: Religiopoiesis,” *Zygon* 35.3 (2000), 561.

⁵⁹⁸ Goodenough, “Religiopoiesis,” 566.

⁵⁹⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Duham: Duke University Press, 2016), 97.

For the remainder of this dissertation I work to answer that question by cultivating resources for kinship affinities and attachment that also embrace legacies of abuse, disappointment, and estrangement through refusing histories blissfully detached from embodied inequalities and their affective resonances. This material, particularly scholarship in disability, critical race, and queer studies, offers alternative visions for what it means to love, care for kin, and resist that do not assume a background of racial or environmental purity. The Gulf Coast as a devastated landscape is one place where the background cracks offering opportunities to refuse conducting business as usual in ectheory. Many communities that are mired in complex ecological problems also have long, generative, and inspiring histories of ecological activism germinating from their material conditions. While the coast unequally bears the material consequences of environmental racism, it also produces voices furthering environmental activism. Rethinking kinship ethics in the next two chapters, I craft-with disaster by engaging sources that negotiate environmental loss, estrangement, and desire for abject bodies.

Chapter Five The Shape of This Kinship

Late Summer 2016, it is flooding again in Louisiana. “If you don’t live in or around Louisiana, you may not know that” writes Sean Illing for *Salon*, “cable news has mostly ignored it . . . among other stupidities, Adele’s admission that she can’t dance was deemed more newsworthy than a drowning American state.”⁶⁰⁰ After Hurricane Katrina, after Rita, after the BP oil disaster, perhaps many regard Louisiana as existing in a perpetual state of peril, a lost cause. “In Louisiana,” Illing writes, “there’s a gnawing sense that the national media seems uninterested in *this* disaster . . . the historic floods felt like an afterthought, a throwaway segment sandwiched between Buick commercials.”⁶⁰¹ While media coverage glazed over the destruction, southern and central Louisiana experienced unprecedented flooding, with homes mostly uncovered by flood insurance being utterly destroyed. In Baton Rouge Parish, one of the areas that experienced a significant population spike from dispossessed Hurricane Katrina survivors that were systematically denied return to New Orleans, flooding damaged upwards of 60,000 residences. Illing, and others, described the aerial footage of the devastation as “apocalyptic.”⁶⁰² “Should We Abandon Louisiana?” Zack Kopplin for *Slate Magazine* writes, “in some ways, we already have.”⁶⁰³ Critics will use this as “one more reason to give up on the state. And they’ll use the

⁶⁰⁰ Sean Illing, “Louisiana’s quiet crisis: Cable news and the folly of disaster porn coverage,” *Salon* August 16th, 2016. <http://www.salon.com/2016/08/16/louisianas-quiet-crisis-cable-news-and-the-folly-of-disaster-porn-coverage/>

⁶⁰¹ Illing, “Louisiana’s quiet crisis.”

⁶⁰² Andrew Boyd, “See aerial footage of flooding devastation in Baton Rouge area,” *The Times-Picayune*, August 15th, 2016. http://www.nola.com/weather/index.ssf/2016/08/baton_rouge_flood_aerial_footage.html

⁶⁰³ Zack Kopplin, “Should We Abandon Louisiana? In some ways, we already have,” *Slate Magazine*, August 19th, 2016.

inevitable next disaster too,” but “because we, as a country, have collectively endangered our future by overusing fossil fuels, that doesn’t mean Louisiana has sacrificed its right to exist and its people should leave. Climate change could sink all of our major coastal cities, but Louisiana is being held to a different standard, because we’ve already been hit with so many disasters. We’ve suffered so much that people are tired of hearing about us. In fact, we’ve suffered so much that people outside of Louisiana assume that we want to leave.”⁶⁰⁴

What would it mean for religion and ecology to begin thinking about affinity and attachment here, with those “who have no choice but to inhabit intimately, over the long term, the physical and environmental fallout”⁶⁰⁵ of histories of investments, abandonments, and erasures that makes loving-life along the Gulf Coast a very complex question? What would exploring kinship attachments in devastated landscapes look like? What models can we look to for claiming unloved others as our cared-for kin? Much like their habitual use of “sacred,” new cosmology conversations do not dig into the deep scholarly roots of kinship language, long histories of theorization within anthropology, religious studies, and the social sciences, but nevertheless rely on *kin* and *kinship* to get at the affective stakes, the “deep, driving feelings,”⁶⁰⁶ they feel are at play in both the cultivation and ethical promise of its new orientating narrative. Echoing my contentions with their use of sacrality, I argue that new cosmology has a much more ethically rich concept in *kinship* than it appears to realize. Borrowing from Elizabeth Freeman, “my point is not that we need a new set of terms, but rather, a different sense of what kinship

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2016/08/deadly_flooding_in_louisiana_has_brought_up_old_feelings_for_locals.html

⁶⁰⁴ Kopplin, “Should We Abandon Louisiana?”

⁶⁰⁵ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 53.

⁶⁰⁶ Bron Taylor, “A Green Future for Religion?” 999.

might be.”⁶⁰⁷ If we are all part of one sacred family, connected via evolutionary inheritance and shared destiny, what is our ethical obligation to those that, thus far, never receive invitations to the new cosmology family reunion? What does it mean to love, care for, and desire intimacy with those bodies, creatures, communities, and habitats significantly impacted by environmental degradation? In her most recent work on “multispecies affinities”⁶⁰⁸ and environmental thinking for trouble times, Donna Haraway advocates “making-with” or “staying with the trouble” of environmental degradation in order to resist the “horrors” of the “Anthropocene”—the geological epoch characterized by tremendous human transformation of the planet.⁶⁰⁹ “Neither despair nor hope is tuned to the senses,” she writes, “to mindful matter, to material semiotics, to mortal earthlings in thick copresence”⁶¹⁰ and “we—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response.”⁶¹¹ Becoming-capable, the labor of “shaping,” what she

⁶⁰⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,” in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, eds. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 298.

⁶⁰⁸ Haraway is in conversation with work in multispecies ethnography, particularly the scholarship of Thom van Dooren and Eben Kirksey, that challenges anthropologists (and other scholarship considering ecologies/political economies/cultural studies etc.) to move beyond focusing solely on the human realm in any given research project to incorporate nonhuman others in all work considering human existence. Similar to material feminisms, some trajectories in animal studies, object-oriented ontologies, interspecies/posthumanism work, and often influenced by Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto,” multispecies ethnographies attend to the agencies of nonhuman others arguing they are fundamentally entangled with human lives and bodies in ways that unsettle conceptions like “human,” or “species.” Focusing more on shared lives, multispecies scholarship encourages reshaping ontologies/epistemologies/ethics around our fundamental intimacies with nonhuman others.

⁶⁰⁹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 3.

⁶¹⁰ Haraway, 3.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

terms, “response-abilities,”⁶¹² requires making “kin in lines of inventive connection.”⁶¹³ “*Kin*,”

Haraway writes:

is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate. Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one? What shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?⁶¹⁴

We have seen some of what domesticated conceptions of kinship like those of new cosmology occludes—those places, spaces, and bodies outside its familial confines. To develop response-abilities within religion and ecology, we will similarly need to consider what must but cut and must be tied in order to address uncertain futures. Haraway offers helpful resonances with my questions about the limitations of new cosmology’s universal ethics, those shadowed bodies, communities, and encounters not considered in its affective project, by not accepting claims to/for kinship wholesale. Why this kinship but not that one? Why these kin but not others? Furthermore, what sorts of responsibilities do these lines of investment compel us toward (and away from which others)? Why does new cosmology invest in evolutionary kinship over any other form of kinship? How do we cultivate creative connections that both address the disinherited outliers *and* bleak environmental futures? Before moving in the next chapter toward constructing more radical forms of kinship, I first want to think about some of the habitual kinship conceptions that religion and ecology should sever and others they should cling-to by drawing in discussions from other disciplines that unsettle similar themes. Here, I reiterate new

⁶¹² Haraway, 16.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

cosmology's conception of kinship and how it expects it will be a guiding ethic for planetary care and then I demonstrate the limitations that need to be addressed within this frame in order for kinship to be a vital concept for crisis contexts.

What Must Be Cut

New cosmologists use kinship and its affective resonances (affinity, commonality, intimacy, empathy, concern, care, connection, love) in two ways. First, to describe their transdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and interreligious community of thinkers and activists, what Connie Barlow calls “environmentalists of a spiritual bent,” whose traditions may differ but nevertheless they share a “love of nature” and “green commitment.”⁶¹⁵ And second, to describe their affinities and attachments with and to nonhuman others. First, despite, or for some in-spite, of religious and cultural differences, new cosmology claims the really-real thing that connects humans as kin is our spectacular evolutionary inheritance revealed to us through scientific cosmologies. For example, Loyal Rue writes:

the story of cosmic evolution reveals to us the common origin, nature, and destiny shared by all human beings. It documents our essential kinship as no other story can do. This is no contrived shamanistic legend; this is not a bit of clever tribal tattooing—it is more like the real thing. This story shows us in the deepest possible sense that we are all sisters and brothers— fashioned from the same stellar dust, energized by the same star, nourished by the same planet, endowed with the same genetic code, and threatened by the same evils. This story, more than any other, humbles us before the magnitude and complexity of creation. Like no other story it bewilders us with the improbability of our existence, astonishes us with the interdependence of all things, and makes us feel grateful for the lives we have. And not least of all, it inspires us to express our gratitude to the past by accepting a solemn and collective responsibility for the future.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁵ Connie Barlow, *Green Space, Green Time*, 54.

⁶¹⁶ Loyal Rue, *Everybody's Story: Wising Up to the Epic of Evolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 49.

Here, Rue uses kinship to assert the biological unity of all humans. New cosmology's appeals to the "language of metaphor and myth" to shape science—with its "potential to arouse and direct the emotional regulators of behavior"—serve as a corrective to what it views are culturally and religiously misguided morals that counter green sentiment.⁶¹⁷ Consider "examples taken from ancient wisdom traditions," Rue writes:

the Hebraic tradition emphasizes the majesty and awesome power of God, the creator of the universe and ultimate judge of human righteousness. Almighty God enters into a covenant with Israel, promising viability and prosperity on the condition that Israel obey his commands. Blessings if they do, suffering and hardship if they do not. God's people are made to feel humble and awestruck in the presence of absolute power and authority. They are made to feel grateful for the undeserved bounty from God, and duty-bound to observe his Law. The logic of reciprocity could not be more obvious. The imagery of the story activates the social emotions, creating a deficit state that seeks to repair in obedient service. Similarly, see how the central images of the Christian story are designed to arouse the social emotions. *Affection* is elicited by images of the infant Jesus, mother and child, the caring shepherd; *sympathy* is aroused by the image of a helpless and innocent man suffering on a cross at the hands of merciless authorities; *gratitude* is called forth by the reminder that Jesus' death was a selfless act undertaken of the sake of others; *guilt* is instilled by the insinuation that it is we who deserve the punishments of the cross; *resentment* or *moral outrage* is aroused against those, like Judas, who betray the altruistic Jesus. By such imagery the emotional effectors are set to work in motivating a life of service to Christian virtues.⁶¹⁸

Epic retellings of scientific cosmologies have the same affective power as the evocative Jewish and Christian narratives in their ability to direct ethical behavior, Rue and others claim, through a combination of the best of both science and religion—knowledge that is "authentically real" via science with religions' "rich poetic and mythological language" forming an "integrated story"⁶¹⁹ that taps into our evolutionary need for ethically guiding myths.⁶²⁰ Once we obtain knowledge of

⁶¹⁷ Rue, *Everybody's Story*, 132.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Loyal Rue, *Nature is Enough: Religious Naturalism and the Meaning of Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 93.

⁶²⁰ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 6.

these tremendous kinships and give them their appropriate due via feelings of awe, wonder, and reverence, life-revering practices will follow. Part of the problem with this perspective is “Rue’s fixation with religions as mythic projects” that “effectively ‘trigger’ appropriate feelings and behaviors” without any consideration of religions’ other functions nor the continual socio-cultural production, embodied practices, and normative policing that make them powerful.⁶²¹ Furthermore, Rue’s co-option of science to work as an emotional regulator emphasizes “*human* solidarity and kinship” with a particular ahistorical and apolitical conception of “human” in mind.⁶²² “By no means,” Lisa Sideris writes, “does Rue’s emphasis on diversity in *biological* systems translate into an affirmation of cultural diversity.”⁶²³ If anything, this assertion flattens and homogenizes the notion of “the human” in ways that might threaten an affirmation of cultural diversity.

Furthermore, Sideris points out, “as anyone who has raised a child can attest, people seldom feel gratitude simply because they are instructed that they should, in light of certain facts about their existence.”⁶²⁴ Sideris is skeptical that new cosmology can shape emotions like religions do, but Rue insists evolution is on his side. Rue writes that religious traditions tap into the “millions of years of evolution” that:

have equipped our species with a range of specific emotional systems that were selected for their powers to produce adaptive behaviors. Together, these systems may be seen to constitute a primitive system of morality. Emotional traits operate according to inherent rules—an ‘if-then’ logic—such that if an individual is presented with a stimulus (say, an act of generosity by a conspecific), then he or she will be likely to experience gratitude and will respond accordingly. The emotional toolkit of humans is much debated, but there is something approaching a consensus that it includes sympathy, resentment,

⁶²¹ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 98.

⁶²² Lisa Sideris, 102.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

gratitude, affection, guilt, disgust, anger, jealousy, and various shades of fear (e.g., awe, respect, humility). These are the systems exploited by the ministrations of a religious tradition . . . The power of religious traditions to redirect and regulate the social mobile rests on their ability to manipulate the emotional toolkit by symbolic means. Consider, for example how the image of an innocent man being tortured elicits a sympathetic response, or how images of an infant elicit affectionate responses, or how the bounty of creation elicits gratitude, or how images of heaven and hell inspire hope and fear.⁶²⁵

Shortly I will consider a conversation on religious emotions and the influence of evolutionary biology, and if evolutionary inheritance trumps the sociality of affects as Rue suggests,⁶²⁶ but it is important to note that Rue's reflection on the evolution of religious emotions is completely uncited with no mention of the work of his contemporaries in cognitive science of religion nor anything in affect studies that might support his trajectory. It is clear, though, that this understanding of ethical emotions has no conception of the inherent sociality and historical contingency of affect that I discussed at length in the previous chapter. What is most problematic, I find, is the expectation that all humans ought to align with one narrative and direct their emotional investments accordingly without any recognition of the complexity of emotional life. Yes, many people would feel sympathy for the image of a tortured man but, as Sedgwick, Tomkins, and Ahmed suggest, it depends on who the man appears to be—if he is “counted” as a man who the audience viewing the image deems worthy of sympathy. Or, as Fanon so deftly illustrates, if he is considered a man at all. Affects' peculiar plasticity, its' surprising ability to slip beyond our hopes for encounters revealing influences and desires that are not always expected or we might wish to ignore, means any combination of emotions could be expected. The pain, loss, and degradation of certain bodies is not always felt or recognized as pain and loss by others depending upon the histories of associations and encounters between these bodies.

⁶²⁵ Rue, *Nature is Enough*, 95.

⁶²⁶ In *Everybody's Story*, Rue more definitively argues that “while individual and cultural programming are significant they come far short of trumping the universal layers of organization ordained by the genes.” (90)

If new cosmology kinship cannot embrace the benevolent conceptions of difference that any Kindergartener is taught to socially celebrate (*my, what a diverse world it is*) it seems unwise to expect it to embrace the ramifications of disposability and the complexities of slow violence we see unfolding in the national denial of Louisiana's disaster. Again, seeming to do little to address social injustices, counter to Bron Taylor's hopes that the kinship ethics of new cosmology would likely erode supremacist ideologies, kinship in this sense ignores the other sedimented affective bonds we share, but share in ways that isolate us from others. This affective narrative Rue and others hope will be our ethical guide works best when we pretend we inherit nothing but this evolutionary legacy erasing any embodied differences (race, class, gender, sexuality, ability) that might impact our experiences. Bodies carrying alternative environmental histories, those black, brown, female, and (as I will explore further in chapter seven) queer, and disabled bodies that have not inherited the salvific nature of white American investment, nor the ability to hold this "nature" as an object of desire, or even the ensured safety to experience its pleasures, might understandably bristle at Rue's reverence and gratitude for a narrative of interdependence that so clearly does not reflect their experiences and encounters. If these bodies and communities are still our "sisters and brothers," then how do their experiences, concerns, and hopes become part of our scholarship?

Second, new cosmology writers use the affective language of kinship to describe their connection, or longing for connection, with nonhuman others. For example, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme's perspectives on our "new view of the universe," are that "we now have the wonder, not merely that we are related to and intimate with everything about us, but that we have a cousin relationship with every being in the universe, especially the living beings of the planet Earth. We have not descended to a lower level; they have, as it were, been recognized at a higher level. Both their lives and ours are infinitely expanded by this intimate presence to each

other.”⁶²⁷ Berry and Swimme acknowledge both intimacy and reciprocity within these kinships, an exchange of value that hurts both humans and nonhuman others when humans do not acknowledge these connections. However, while they do recognize both environmental degradation and species erasure as pressing realities,⁶²⁸ new cosmology kinship asserts a biological connection with all life but does not consider any radical notions of intimacy or reciprocity. It does not question if these pressing realities might seep into and alter our conceptions of intimacy and reciprocity themselves. Considering these vulnerabilities however, how our scholarship should meet and address the affective intersections of environmental and social degradation, I contend is the only way to hold onto environmental kinship as a vital concept. Before I move to discuss reshaping our theory around these concerns, I consider some of the stakes involved in reconceptualizing kinship. First, I will address and complicate new cosmology’s appeal to evolutionary affects. Then, I survey kinship studies to look at reservations with and re-articulations of “kinship” in other disciplines that new cosmology habitually does not engage.

One of the reasons new cosmology is able to side-step environmental degradation and its uneven consequences for the poor in its conceptions of kinship is new cosmology’s habitual tendency to equate nature with science. Its focus on “expert” knowledge about the material world over the quotidian realities that continually shape these worlds allows new cosmology to avoid addressing multiplicities of experience and be very selective about who does and does not count as an “expert.” Furthermore, the “scientific mythmakers” of new cosmology “frequently deploy generic and uncritical categories of science” insisting that “modern discoveries in cosmology or

⁶²⁷ Berry and Swimme, *The Universe Story*, 246.

⁶²⁸ Berry and Swimme, 247.

evolutionary biology point to some particular or objective meaning, purpose, or value in the universe or for human life generally”⁶²⁹ while ignoring all critiques of the social construction of scientific knowledge coming from material feminisms, philosophy and history of science, and feminist science and technology studies (STS.)

Since the early eighties, ongoing work in feminist STS (and other philosophies of science) from theorists like Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, Helen Longino, and Karen Barad, offer three general critiques about the production of scientific knowledge that new cosmology authors habitually ignore. First, is the “reminder that science and technology are importantly social,” that what humans claim is *true* or *real* about our material world is only “contingently real” and open to resistance from other scholars and the power politics of funding which carry their own gendered and raced implications.⁶³⁰ “Claims do not just spring from the subject matter into acceptance, via passive scientists, reviews, and editors. Rather, it takes work for them to become important,” funneled through “political, social, legal, ethical” and bureaucratic interests.⁶³¹ Which bodies are allowed to produce this knowledge, which material, communities, ideas, theories are worthy of study, how these “objects” of study should be ethically procured or treated, all continue to be political struggles. Furthermore, as Helen Longino’s work on the role of values in science makes clear, “what a fact is evidence for depends on what background assumptions” we hold socially allowing “people to agree on facts and yet disagree about the conclusion to be drawn from them. At the same time, which background assumptions people choose, and which ones they choose to question, will be

⁶²⁹ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 6.

⁶³⁰ Sergio Sismondo, *An Introduction to Science and Technology Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 60-62.

⁶³¹ Sismondo, *An Introduction*, 61-67.

strongly informed by social values” with the most prevalent suspicions and resistances toward perspectives from those groups already marginally represented in the sciences.⁶³² Haraway’s body of work could, arguably, be described as careful attention to all the ways scientists have “carried with them the marks of their own histories and cultures,”⁶³³ into their fields of study, affinities for creatures, and love-affairs with habitats. However, the science narratives that new cosmologists choose to embrace are not regarded as choices because they never locate their embrace of science within a contested field with numerous voices, perspectives, biases, and desires wrestling with each other for financial, political, and intellectual recognition. New cosmology’s “almost hagiographic devotion” to particular scholars, like E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins, “discourages and deflects critique and critical exchange” and fashions a “vision” of science that makes “selective use of particular scientific claims and discoveries, carefully arranged and narrated so as to support meanings and messages desired by some,” but does not include deep critiques of these scholars either within scientific communities or the humanities.⁶³⁴ Consequently, there is no interrogation of which communities, bodies, and habitats these narratives serve or benefit.

Second, despite assumptions that science reveals the realities of nature, feminist STS argues not only that representations and social realities constructed, but many of the things that scientists study and work with decidedly not “natural.” Sociologist Karin Knorr Cetina reminds us that “nature is not to be found in the laboratory” with the laboratory as a “site of action from which ‘nature’ is as much as possible excluded rather than included.”⁶³⁵ For the most part, Sergio

⁶³² Sismondo, 76.

⁶³³ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 2.

⁶³⁴ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 7-9.

⁶³⁵ Sismondo, 61.

Sismondo points out, “the materials used in scientific laboratories are already partly prepared for that use before they are subjected to laboratory manipulations. Substances are purified, and objects are standardized and even enhanced. Chemical laboratories buy pure reagents, geneticists might use established libraries of DNA, and engineered animal models can be invaluable. Once these objects are in a laboratory, they are manipulated. They are placed in artificial situations, to see how they react” and “the result of these various manipulations is that knowledge derived from laboratories is knowledge about things that are distinctly non-natural. These things are constructed, by hands-on fully material work.”⁶³⁶ Echoing my arguments in chapter one, new cosmology does not regard nature as a social construction, so it pays little attention to the vast divide between “nature,” as a lab-created or theoretical ideal, and nonhuman others struggling for survival in habitats impacted by humans in so many ways. Thus, they see no need to reshape the environmental ethics they claim draw from scientific fact to address a rapidly changing planet.

Third, critiques of scientific knowledge production argue that “science and social order are ‘co-produced.’”⁶³⁷ Networks and genealogies that are assumed to be orderly and stable are, what Sismondo calls a “*heterogeneous construction*” of “isolated parts of the material and social worlds: laboratory equipment, established knowledge, patrons, money, institutions” and where “no one piece of a network can determine the shape of the whole” and “not all of whom may be immediately compatible.”⁶³⁸ But because the scientific and the social are co-produced, where “good” science is shaped by policy concerns, and the criteria for good policy is shaped by what

⁶³⁶ Sismondo, 61-62.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 65.

is determined to be “good science” in a “process of ‘mutual construction,’” feminist STS scholars question perspectives that separate the two or fail to question the underlying desires and motivations of either.⁶³⁹ These realities are not intended to deflect from the agentic capacity of our material world, implying that nature is purely a social construct, rather these reminders illuminate the contingent and heterogeneous qualities of scientific knowledge production—that “science and technology are social, that they are active, and that they do not take nature as it comes.”⁶⁴⁰ New cosmology does not question the desires, values, and ways of being that consecrated science validates, celebrates, and rewards. It does not need to consider: the gendered or raced implications of any of the scientific material they embrace, the complexities of catastrophic events or crisis conditions, or any of the voices wrestling with scientific knowledge production when working with such idealized frames.

Ignoring the cautions of critical science studies and carrying numerous assumptions about the scientific and the social into work that conflates “science and religion” or makes “science *into* a religion” as Sideris argues, the “consecrated science” of new cosmology “is not science that is obviously in the service *of* nature and its goods,”⁶⁴¹ and its use of biophilic kinship functions similarly—support for their ideals about humanity, religion, and science but less helpful for contemporary environmental ethical concerns. As I have addressed, while often unreferenced new cosmology thinkers draw from a conception of biological kinship that extrapolates from Darwin’s life work to emphasize that all life-forms are connected by sharing common ancestry. Bron Taylor identifies this conception of kinship as present in many core

⁶³⁹ Sismondo, 67.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁴¹ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 7.

environmental thinker's work including John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson all anticipating Wilson's eventual biophilia hypothesis theorizing that "our affective, aesthetic, and moral appreciation of nature, and our sense of kinship with other organisms, can be understood as evolutionary outcomes that generally promote environmentally adaptive behaviors."⁶⁴² Berry, Wilson, Rue, Tucker, Grim, Barlow, and Taylor all put quite a bit of stock in the ethical possibilities of this kinship. There "is no obstacle to kinship ethics as a basis for caring about the entire web of life," Taylor writes, an "evolutionary worldview leads quite logically to a commitment to discern and pursue social arrangements that promote flourishing and resilient biocultural systems."⁶⁴³ Tucker uses language like heritage, fraternity, relatedness, ancestry, belonging, "extending our desires and affections for others," and "widening our circle of compassion"⁶⁴⁴ beyond the human but she (and others) does not go much beyond wonder at and or for the scientific knowledge of these evolutionary connections.⁶⁴⁵ The persistence of tremendous diversity, both human and nonhuman, and its benefits seems to be enough of an ethical gesture for many of these authors. However, I find this use of kinship as a nod toward ethical concerns lacking complexity making it difficult to find resonance for devastated landscapes.

⁶⁴² Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 152.

⁶⁴³ Bron Taylor, "Evolution and Kinship Ethics," *Center for Humans and Nature*, web blog post. <https://www.humansandnature.org/evolution-and-kinship-ethics>.

⁶⁴⁴ Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Ethics in an Age of Extinction," (web lecture, *Journey of the Universe: The Unfolding of Life*, Yale University, accessed November, 4th 2018, <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/journey-of-the-universe/tucker-ethics-in-an-age-of-extinction-nYEEYZ>).

⁶⁴⁵ For deeper discussion of the uses of *wonder* in mythopoeic science, see Lisa Sideris, *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World*.

How strong are these biophilic tendencies and do they do all the work that is needed for robust affective kinship ties? We should remain skeptical as numerous voices, including Sideris, Donovan Schaefer, Karen Barad, and Stephen Jay Gould, frequently unsettle easy correlations between evolutionary inheritance and ethical guidance. In his integration of evolutionary biology and affect theory into religious studies in *Religious Affects*, Schaefer allies with Gould and Richard Lewontin to resist claims that evolutionary biology rationally explains bodies and behavior. The “view that ‘natural selection is so powerful,’” Schaefer writes, “and the constraints upon it so few that direct production of adaptation through its operation becomes the primary cause of nearly all organic form, function, and behavior,’ is, at best, a selective reading of Darwin.”⁶⁴⁶ Pluralist approaches to Darwinism, like Gould, Lewontin, and Schaefer’s, position embodied life as “deeply complicated” and assessing everything “according to what is ‘rational’ for a given situation,” or to fit within a narrative of evolutionary legacy “doesn’t get at that complexity.”⁶⁴⁷ Specificities, like history, habitat, culture, and embodied difference all swirl within this complexity to shape our affective lives and relationships.

For example, as Barad, Jane Bennett, and Schaefer illuminate, while natural selection “is and remains a powerful force of evolutionary transformation, it is not the only source.”⁶⁴⁸ Landscapes matter and often in unpredictable ways. “Landscapes,” Schaefer writes, “are rogue agents, actively impressing themselves into the embodied histories of organisms. In Karen Barad’s term, they are *intra-active*—material forces as upstart actants rather than inert background features. Or they are invested with what Jane Bennett calls vital materiality,

⁶⁴⁶ Schaefer, 159.

⁶⁴⁷ Donovan O. Schaefer, Matt Sheedy, Nathan Rein, “‘Trauma Makes You’: An Interview with Donovan O. Schaefer,” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 45 (2016) 48.

⁶⁴⁸ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 160.

nonpersonal agents that nonetheless take an active role in conditioning fields of possibility.”⁶⁴⁹ Furthermore, organisms do not respond to the shifting material forces of landscapes in real time. Instead, “there is play in the system, a lag time in the reorganization of features, as well as the intransigence of existing structures.”⁶⁵⁰ “Rather than sleek, polished, high-functioning machines,” Schaefer contends, “bodies are messy, heterogeneous, and archaic, scrap heaps advertising contraptions of old, broken, fortuitous parts. Evolution leaves remnants, remainders, fixtures jutting out at odd angles” and evolution “as the production of embodied histories is an awkward sedimentation of accidents.”⁶⁵¹ Responding to the “nature-nurture” question from a different perspective, Schaefer argues that affect theory in conversation with evolutionary biology emphasizes that embodied life is always a “hybrid system of quickly changing and slowly changing forces.”⁶⁵² Consequently, while evolutionary biology illuminates how and why humans might feel affiliation with other creatures, religion and ecology should be less certain about how these compulsions play out in real time and more curious about those places, spaces, and events where affinities and attachments do not play out as we hoped. While new cosmology points toward biophilic remnants as evidence for our capacity for kinship compulsion, it has not speculated much about what impact the weight of history or ecological devastation may have on these capacities.

Furthermore, drawing in my conversation with work in affect theory, humans do not come to encounter with nonhuman others blissfully neutral. “Bodies,” Schaefer writes, “are not

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁵⁰ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 162.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Schaefer, Sheedy, Rein, 48.

inert physical objects that choose to enjoy, feel, or experience. They are constituted inside a current of affects pulling them into networks of affectively mediated relationships.”⁶⁵³ Affect theory “corrects the presupposition that we are angels, that we can dictate to our bodies how to feel about our world” and “highlights how animal forces disrupt the abstract prerogative of the reasoning, calculating, talkative subject and attach bodies to complex structures of feeling that cut against not only external appraisal of the right things for bodies to do, places for them to go, ways for them to believe and feel, but the sovereign self’s own assessment of its best course of action.”⁶⁵⁴ Affective economies, Schaefer argues, are “queer economies that are driven by the uneven circulation of pleasures and desires rather than a disembodied *logos*.”⁶⁵⁵ New cosmology hopes for a “clear link between our evolutionary endowments and an environmental ethics,”⁶⁵⁶ but as Ahmed and Schaefer illuminate, affects “do not proceed along straight, clear-cut paths from objects to subjects, but rather circulate within and between bodies and worlds, intersecting at multiple levels and reshaping objects as they swerve.”⁶⁵⁷

I will expand more on the possibilities of queer biophilic intimacies in chapter seven, but it is important to recognize what critiques of evolutionary affinities unsettle. Thinking with encounters in areas marked by environmental injustice and destruction, any lingering biophilic compulsions would meet the push and pull of competing tensions. Affects are not painted onto a blank slate but are vibrant in and through the bodies that encounter them and affect others.

⁶⁵³ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 99.

⁶⁵⁴ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, 100-5.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁵⁶ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 78.

⁶⁵⁷ Schaefer, 170.

Bodies may or may not feel awe or reverence for the nonhuman world based on sedimented histories of power, the unpredictable encroachment of landscape, and the reverberations of environmental racism.⁶⁵⁸ Despite our ethical intentions, it seems difficult for biophilic engagement to work so rationally in these economies. It is also possible biophilic compulsion will morph after disaster when the panic, silt, sludge, fear, vitriol, and flashes of hope all settle into our bodies in unpredictable ways. While religion and ecology should remain skeptical about biophilic tendencies to coalesce rationally into onto-ethical arguments, we might also remain open to the possibility for our biophilic remnants to form surprising intimacies.

In sum, new cosmology writers cultivate an ideal conception of nature, one they argue is the really-real revealed to us through scientific marvels, as set-apart from the material complexities of daily life in environmentally precarious locations like the encroaching complications of pollution, degradation, disaster, and loss. Hence, new cosmology can encourage kinship “intimacy” and “reciprocity” with a nature that its authors may not experience, that many may never experience, in their daily lives. They profess and encourage a love for a nature they claim is true but remains a construction that reflects the needs, interests, desires, and hopes of particular populations at the expense of others. Since it explores intimacy and reciprocity solely within a nature of its own making, ignoring other encounters and imaginaries, new cosmology models for kinship with one another and with nonhuman others cannot map onto intimacies and attachments with and to many bodies and environments in their current conditions like the nationally denied suffering of Gulf Coast communities. If appeals to evolutionary affects function more as thought-experiments than definitive ethical drives, then other constructions of kinship can hold as much value for religion and ecology to think about affinities and attachments

⁶⁵⁸ Think more about Yusoff’s black bodies as geological strata here when the book comes out.

with nonhuman others. I see no reason to rely solely on evolutionary kinships. Uncertain that biophilia works as rationally as new cosmology intends and compelled to regard biophilia more for its speculative potential, I advocate for holding onto the obvious resonance kinship concepts hold for theorists in religion and ecology but encourage less fidelity to evolutionary kinships via opening our use of kinship to the plurality of shapes it takes in other avenues.

Questions like the following demonstrate both the provocative power of kin concepts and the trouble facing us: do creatures and environments negotiating mutations change our conceptions of relatedness or belonging? What does it mean to extend our desires and affections toward incredibly damaged environments? What does compassion for eyeless shrimp, clawless crabs, oily hermits, and displaced Gulf communities really entail? Responses to these questions and the pressing difficulties that meets us in contemporary religious environmental ethics could be numerous from the practical to the speculative but considering kinship both as affective encounter and ethical directive, I argue that focusing on some of the overlooked complexities of kinship models, what might be seen as the murkier elements of intimacy, will help set religion and ecology up to cultivate more potent ideas about kinship.

What Must Be Tied

Kinship, kinship language, and kinship systems, Patrick McConvell argues, is the “bedrock of all human societies that we know,” and of importance to disciplines that study the “matrix into which human children are born” like anthropology, sociology, history, linguistics, and religion.⁶⁵⁹ Noting that the systematic study of kinship has fallen out of favor within his own field of anthropology, McConvell acknowledges how language and kinship remain significant

⁶⁵⁹ Patrick McConvell, *Kinship Systems: Change and Reconstruction* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013), 1.

for cultural studies.⁶⁶⁰ Loosely defined as “the set of possibilities for social relations in any given culture,”⁶⁶¹ kinship in state-centered societies, Elizabeth Freeman writes, “consists of the social policies that recognize some forms of lived relationality” and “demand certain responsibilities between recognized relatives.”⁶⁶² Kinship theory “is the body of knowledge emerging from attempts to abstract the governing principles of relationality” from the “practices of intimacy observed in a given culture.”⁶⁶³ In “kinship’s most conservative meanings and functions,” however, kinship itself is “fundamentally exclusive, depending as it does upon the distinction between those who are kin and those who are not kin.”⁶⁶⁴ For example, Freeman contends, any good study of “gendered and sexualized social life,” should recognize the inherent exclusionary functions of much of the “dominate lexicon of kinship.”⁶⁶⁵ Critiques of kinship studies primarily illuminate, I argue, that human relational life continually exceeds the language and limitations of state and religiously sanctioned intimacies. As just two examples that I will consider in this chapter, any comprehensive theory of kinship must “answer to the paradox that lesbians and gays both inhabit and exceed the matrix of couplehood and reproduction,” as well as the historic and contemporary reverberations of the reality that “captive persons of African descent were wrested from their kinship structures” and “denied access to the kinship systems of the United States and

⁶⁶⁰ McConvell sidesteps the reasons for what he argues is the declining interest in kinship studies, but I would suspect it is less a declining interest and more a diffusion through the detours and critiques of queer, gender, postcolonial, and critical race theories that expand the language of intimacy and the purview of kinship theory beyond anticipated horizons.

⁶⁶¹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,” 295.

⁶⁶² Freeman, “Queer Belongings,” 295.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 297.

other imperial powers.”⁶⁶⁶ Thus *kin* and its affective resonances are corporeally, historically, and politically complex in ways currently unrecognized by religion and ecology.

While it might seem like these discussions are outside the umbrella of religious environmental ethics, wrestling with the criticisms and extensions of kinship theory is important for religion and ecology because these conversations are raising concerns that are pivotal to the ignored contexts I am addressing in this project. For example, religion and ecology’s hopes to nurture kinship with nonhuman others does not respond to the racism shaping encounters between bodies and their environments in the American south. Religion and ecology has not considered what it means to cultivate kinship with and between abject bodies. Drawing from critiques of kinship arguments in other arenas can help us to unsettle our habitual kinship appeals.

Carving a small slice of the lengthy and contentious legacy of kinship studies,⁶⁶⁷ “kinship was foundational for ethnographic study of social structures and cultural practices throughout

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 302.

⁶⁶⁷ For more on the study of/critiques of kinship studies see: Sara Bamford and James Leach, eds. *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Method Reconsidered* (New York: Berghahn, 2009); Elise Berman, “Holding On: Adoption, Kinship Tensions, and Pregnancy in the Marshall Islands,” *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 3 (2014): 578-590; Mary Bouquet, “Family Trees and Their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Method,” *Man* 2, no. 1 (1996): 43-66; Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); James D. Faubion, “Kinship is Dead. Long Live Kinship: A Review Article,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 38, no. 1 (1996): 67-91; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* A. M. Sheridan, trans. (London: Routledge, 1969); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963); *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Dwight Reed, “Kinship Theory: A Paradigm Shift,” *Ethnology* 46, no. 4 (2007): 329-364; Marshall Sahlin, “What Kinship is (Part One),” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. 1 (2011): 2-19; “What Kinship is (Part Two),” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no 2 (2011): 227-242; *What Kinship Is—And Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); David Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Blackwell, 1953).

much of the 20th century,” Robert A. Wilson summarizes, but “conceptualized as distinctively biological, genealogical, or reproductive (or *bio-essentialist*.)”⁶⁶⁸ In a fundamental shift, David Schneider’s 1984 *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* asked “whether kinship itself is in fact a modern Western paradigm,”⁶⁶⁹ by contending kinship studies of the past, even when they expanded beyond consanguineous connections, translated all “putative kinship terminologies via a biological-genealogical-reproductive grid” conceptualizing “kinship bio-essentially in any ethnographic context.”⁶⁷⁰ This narrative, Schneider argues, was an “ethnocentric projection,” imposing a “peculiarly American-European conception of kinship onto other cultures” without questioning if these intimacies challenged or fundamentally resisted Western paradigms.⁶⁷¹ Following Schneider’s critique was what Wilson calls a “dumbfounded lull in work on kinships (especially in North America.)”⁶⁷² More contemporary kinship theory, responding to Schneider’s work and integrating scholarship from Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault, drifts from the language of “*kin* and *kinship*” toward “*relatives* and *relatedness*,” or “relationships of intimacy,” focusing on the “performativity and lived experience of kinship” opening kinship theory to a “novel array of topics—reproductive technologies, chosen families, autoethnography, gay and lesbian intimacy, invented communities, the body and personhood, artificial life, Internet dating, identity politics, disability activism, ethnicity, and adoption practices.”⁶⁷³

⁶⁶⁸ Robert A. Wilson, “Kinship Past, Kinship Present: Bio-Essentialism in the Study of Kinship,” *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 3 (2016): 571.

⁶⁶⁹ Freeman, 300.

⁶⁷⁰ Wilson, “Kinship Past,” 572.

⁶⁷¹ Wilson, 572.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 572-78.

Particularly productive for my concerns is how scholarship in feminist and queer studies⁶⁷⁴ challenges these frameworks by taking up relatedness and the “concept of intimacy both as a subject and as an analytic rubric.”⁶⁷⁵ Some queer and feminist scholars argue kinships’ historical “lack of ‘extendability’ has often meant that sexual minorities are stranded between individualist notions of identity on the one hand and on the other a romanticized notion of

⁶⁷⁴ For more on feminist and queer kinship theory see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” *October* 43 (1987): 197-222; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004); *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); David T. Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Donna Haraway, “Introduction: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations,” in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway 1-6 (New York: Routledge, 2014); “Cyborgs to Companion Species: Reconfiguring Kinship in Technoscience,” in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway 295-320 (New York: Routledge, 2014); “Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations,” in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway 321-342 (New York: Routledge, 2014); Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Christopher Peterson, *Kindred Specters: Mourning, Ethics, and “Social Death”* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Elizabeth Povinelli, “Notes on Gridlock: Genealogy, Intimacy, Sexuality,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 215-38; William Robert, *Revivals of Antigone* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Ann Sitnow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65-81; Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁶⁷⁵ Ara Wilson, “Intimacy: A Useful Category of Transnational Analysis,” in *The Global and The Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*, Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 31.

community” encouraging the position that “any genuinely democratic culture needs to abandon the notion.”⁶⁷⁶ Elizabeth Freeman, however, compellingly argues that sexual and racial minorities should pay attention to kinship as a “process by which small-scale relationships become thinkable, meaningful, and/or the basis for larger social formations” and the possibilities for “non-procreative contributions of the body itself to such a process, are of crucial interest.”⁶⁷⁷ Kinship matters for queer theory, Freeman writes, “in the way that Judith Butler reminds us that ‘bodies matter’”:

- (1) a culture’s repetition of particular practices actually *produces* what seem to be the material facts that supposedly *ground* those practices in the first place, and (2) when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are literally unthinkable and impossible. Heterosexual gender norms therefore ‘make’ kin relations, in that they regulate human behavior toward procreation while appearing to be the result of some primal need to propagate the species. Meanwhile, whatever connections forged by queer gender performances and other embodied behaviors ‘make’ remains unintelligible as kinship.⁶⁷⁸

Linking kinship with queer theory, Freeman suggests three modalities, or queer readings, of kinship that both resist normative limitations and prove useful for thinking intimacies both with abject bodies and the weight of racist histories. The first, considers kinship as embodied practice. The second, thinks about kinship as cultural, rather than just genetic, futurity. And the third, regards kinship as kinetic relationship or continual activity between subjects in relation. First, Freeman contends, thinking of kinship as *embodied practice*, we must recognize it as “resolutely corporeal.” Freeman continues:

its meanings and functions draw from a repertoire of understandings about the body, from a set of strategies oriented around the body’s limitations and possibilities . . . And if kinship is anything at all—if it marks a terrain that cannot be fully subsumed by other

⁶⁷⁶ Freeman, “Queer Belongings,” 297.

⁶⁷⁷ Freeman, 297.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-98.

institutions such as religion, politics, or economics—this terrain lies in its status as a set of representational and practical strategies for accommodating all the possible ways one human being’s body can be vulnerable and hence dependent upon that of another, and for mobilizing all the possible resources one has for taking care of another.⁶⁷⁹

Thinking about kinship as corporeal practice, as things we do with and between bodies, helps us recognize our fundamental vulnerabilities as material beings and “marks out a certain terrain” for studying corporeal dependency.⁶⁸⁰ Queer activists have historically negotiated how American culture obfuscates the reality that kinship often functions as “private, unevenly distributed social security” relieving the government of “the burden of caretaking onto kin as if this caretaking were a natural expression of preexisting biological ties.”⁶⁸¹ Queer intimacies simultaneously exceed heteronormative assumptions about these care roles, illuminate “unequally institutionalized” forms of care, *and* demonstrate that care can come in many different forms beyond “the dominant kinship grid.”⁶⁸²

Second, Freeman argues that kinship as embodied practice not only recognizes modalities of dependence but also functions as a “technique of renewal,” the “process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time.”⁶⁸³ Furthermore, this reading of kinship as technique of renewal illuminates how queer and black communities continue to be denied kinship recognitions. The most “systematized example of kinship as a technique of renewal, of course, is the domestic labor that women are expected to do to transform the raw material of a worker’s wages into what he needs to labor for another day:

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁸⁰ Freeman, 298.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 298- 303.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 298.

a bed, food, clean clothes, etc.”⁶⁸⁴ But kinship also “reproduces the cultural” recreating and recharging “bodies towards ends other than labor, such as play, love, and even violence.”⁶⁸⁵ While Freeman recognizes the vocabulary is yet to be fully explored, “queer life” reproduces the cultural.⁶⁸⁶ Even as “lesbian and gay activism demands that we continue to fight for access to fully institutionalized systems of social reproduction such as churches, hospitals, the military, and so on, queer theory needs,” she writes, “theories of how our renewal happens on a microsocial level. Especially, it needs to continually identify practices of renewal that exceed the state’s major form of ‘recognition’ and collateral entitlements.”⁶⁸⁷ Thinking about kinship as a technique of renewal from the perspectives of queer and black experiences demonstrates both kinship’s inherent relationship to time (the governance of past, present, and future concerns) and the positioning of queer and black bodies outside the normative frameworks of extension and inheritance. “Queer belonging,” Freeman argues, “names more than the longing to *be* and to be *connected*” it also “names the longing to ‘be *long*,’ to endure in corporeal form over time, beyond procreation” encompassing desires to “preserve relationships that will invariably end, but also to have something queer exceed its own time, even to imagine that excess *as* queer in ways that getting married or having children might not be.”⁶⁸⁸ Drawing from Hortense Spillers, Freeman reminds us that the U.S. racial caste system was “coextensive with the denial of kinship rights,” by “destroying indigenous African kin networks,” refusing “any legal standing to the

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Freeman, 298.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 298-99.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 299.

intimate associations that African Americans did form, and turning enslavement into a stigmatic, quasi-biological ‘property’ passed on by the mother.”⁶⁸⁹ Under the slavery system, Freeman writes:

racialization also depended upon kinship in ways that are crucially different from the system of gender. Rather than naturalizing bodies for the marriage market, race slavery destroyed, distorted, and misrecognized indigenous regimes of alliance and descent to produce bodies that, by virtue of seeming without kin, were marketable, and that by virtue of being marketable, seemed bereft of kin. And even while slave owners accomplished this, they justified their actions with another familial discourse, paternalistically claiming that their slaves were children who could not survive without them.⁶⁹⁰

Black people were “dispersed into a kind of horizontal relatedness and hence into ‘certain ethical and sentimental features’ that have both defined and connected African Americans across space and through time.”⁶⁹¹ Given all this, bodies have been central to “conceptualizing the renewal of African American individuals and collectivities beyond the dominant kinship grid.”⁶⁹² A “powerful example,” Freeman highlights, is “Toni Morrison’s sense of historical ‘re-membering,’”⁶⁹³ that takes up this “legacy of bodily stigma unwillingly endowed over time” as “grounds for imagining African American futurity in terms of new corporeal potentialities. The very term ‘re-membering’ suggests that the knitting together of individual bodies that have been ideologically and physically objectified, fragmented, or shattered is linked to the renewal of

⁶⁸⁹ Freeman, 303.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 302.

⁶⁹² Ibid., 303.

⁶⁹³ For more see Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume Books, 1987), and Paul Gilroy, “After the Love has Gone: Biopolitics and Etho-Poetics in the Black Public Sphere,” reprinted in *The Black Public Sphere*, ed. Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 53-80.

collective life. Again, it suggests an embodied but not procreative model of kinship” with powerful resonances.⁶⁹⁴

Third, drawing from Corinne Hayden, Judith Butler, Claire Riley, and Kath Weston’s abiding *Families We Choose* (1991), Freeman suggests thinking of queer kinships as “kinetic” rather than “genetic,” to recognize in lesbian parental care models that birth mothers may gestate but “co-mothers generate.”⁶⁹⁵ Hayden’s phrase “‘kinetic kinship’ resonates with Butler’s eventual call for a theory that could make good on David Schneider’s 1984 statement that kinship consists of ‘doing’ rather than ‘being.’ The crux of the issue for queer theory,” Freeman writes, “might be this: what would it mean to ‘do kinship?’ How could that be separated from hetero-procreation without losing sex, eroticism, and other bodily modes of belonging, exchange, and attachment?”⁶⁹⁶ Thinking of kinship as dynamic, active, practical, as a “set of *acts* that may or may not follow the officially recognized lines of alliance and descent” might speak to a “way of thinking about queer belongings in a temporal as well as a spatial sense: as modes of duration not only *for* otherwise mortal bodies, but *between* bodies separated in time.”⁶⁹⁷

It seems invaluable to think about kinship intimacies⁶⁹⁸ in and with the Gulf Coast in conversation with these kinship critiques since this area has failed to inherit the benefits of

⁶⁹⁴ Freeman, 303.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁸ Ara Wilson offers a compelling preference for intimacy over kinship in intimacies’ ability to slip beyond historical limitations of kinship as well as resonances with nonhuman others: “*Intimacy*, as an unfixed but legible term, works to cover an open-ended array of relations (rather than assuming the couple or family); to avoid assigning identities based on relationship (for example, gay identity based on same-sex practices); and to investigate relationships alongside their categorizations (for example, both experienced family relations and the evaluations of proper kinship.) For anthropology, intimacy joins other efforts to escape the

evolutionary kinships while being abandoned to carry discrimination, dispossession, and erasure. Indeed, the Gulf offers a paradigm for negotiations (queer resistances) with the dominant lexicon of kinship taken-on by queer and black communities. Black and queer communities continue to participate in kinship networks denied to them revealing further how human emotional life always exceeds the dominant language and recognitions of normative kinship. Thinking with a landscape ripe with historical significance, changed by destruction, and facing uncertain futures, we need to conceptualize kinship within devastated landscapes similarly. Kinships along the Gulf exist outside the horizons of normative environmental kinship while exposing normative kinship's inherent limitations.

Paying attention to both historicity and futurity, embodied but not necessarily procreative in the tidiest or conservative sense, to think queer kinship in the Gulf's devastated landscapes is to think outside of normative intimacies in ways that are, that feel, queer in the sense Mel Chen engages where queerness does not "merely indicate embodied sexual contact among subjects identified as gay and lesbian," but rather "social and cultural formations of 'improper affiliation,' so that queerness might well describe an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative."⁶⁹⁹ Affinity and attachment with or to bodies (human and

weighty associations that adhere in concepts of kinship. The ethnographic use of intimacy resonates with the concept of relatedness parlayed by new kinship studies. The use of relatedness 'in opposition to, or alongside, 'kinship' flags an intent to discover, rather than assume, which modes of relatedness given peoples find salient and to displace the biological'/social binary of kinship concepts... For now, intimacy allows analysts to look at relational life—including the feelings and acts that comprise it, in relation to political and economic regimes—in conventional sociological terms and to consider both micro and macro levels, although of course the critical study of intimacy eschews this neat division. The term *intimacy* is intended to resist ideological reifications of family, sexuality, or community—that is, to avoid recreating forms of knowledge that perpetuate global inequality. As a placeholder, intimacy allows critical accounts of colonial empire or capitalist modernity because it is a flexible, provisional reference that emphasized linkages across what are understood to be distinct realms, scales, or bodies." (48)

⁶⁹⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 14.

nonhuman) that are impacted by environmental degradation are not discussed because they are improper affiliations, queer intimacies that trouble more tidy relations. To address these abandoned kin, I argue we must pursue impropriety— improper relations to time, to purity, to disciplinary fidelity, to love. Cultivating impropriety, sitting-with intimate encounters that frustrate seemingly straight-forward conceptions of affinity and attachment, may be biophilic love in and through our evolutionary leftovers for these unloved others left behind.

For Multispecies Flourishing

The evolutionary kinships of new cosmology have radical hopes. In the sense that new cosmology and other conversations in religion and ecology seek to include nonhuman others into normative conceptions of kinship, “official” or shared biogenetics, these kinships seem somewhat persistent in their extension. It is commonplace within the field to acknowledge nonhuman others as evolutionary kin. But in the sense of kinship as corporeal practice in real-time, of kinetic extension for *all* bodies, new cosmology falls into the same problems as other conservative forms of kinship offering few pathways for unloved others. New cosmology intends for evolutionary kinship to function as a corrective but does not do the labor required for this kinship intervention to resonate. To think kinship requires thinking the politics of kinship, or who and or what can claim to be family, and it requires dwelling with the weight of heavy affects sticking to the disinherited that are the fallout from these politics. As Heather Love writes:

a central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence. Oppositional criticism opposes not only existing structures of power but also the very history that gives it meaning. Insofar as the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them (‘We will never forget’). But we are equally bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy (‘We will never go back’). For groups constituted by historical injury, the challenge is to engage with the past without being destroyed by it. Sometimes it seems it would be better to move on— to let, as Marx wrote, the dead bury the dead. But it is the damaging aspects of the past that tend to stay

with us, and the desire to forget may itself be a symptom of haunting. The dead can bury the dead all day long and still not be done.⁷⁰⁰

Here, Love articulates two problems we need to continually wrestle with while hoping to extend kinship beyond its typical borders. First, extension requires recognizing why kinship was and is denied to particular bodies and ways of being in the first place and this subsequently requires not just recognition of the existing structures of power that locate particular bodies and communities outside kin boundaries, but the very histories that gave normative kinships their power. Which desires and intimacies were normalized and rewarded by the process of acknowledging this body but not that one, this history but not these, as kin? Looking toward communities and discourses that position kinship as an ongoing affective process with political implications and material consequences will help us puzzle out our responses. Second, if religion and ecology wants to recognize those historically disregarded within the boundaries of kinship we would need to acknowledge the affective weight of these histories. New cosmology's "elevation of abstract, expert knowledge above our lived experience of the world," Sideris argues, "cuts us off from the strongest source of our felt connection to the more-than-human world. It calls us away from much of what it is to be human: a living, breathing, bodily, earthbound—and ultimately death-bound—creature, surrounded by and enmeshed with other living and dying beings whose own worlds and realities remain somewhat opaque and mysterious to us."⁷⁰¹ It is not just sensorial connection that new cosmology denies, I argue. They primarily absolve themselves of having to reckon with "bad" feelings—all the encounters with nonhuman nature that do not fit into the tidier emotional relations new cosmology celebrates and

⁷⁰⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 1.

⁷⁰¹ Sideris, *Consecrating Science*, 8.

what responsibilities we might have to these communities. The turn to “bad” feelings in contemporary social-political theory, notably the work of Sara Ahmed (2004; 2010), Lauren Berlant (2011), and the embrace of the feminist killjoy figure in feminist theory and the work of Jack Halberstam (2011), Lee Edelman (2005), Ann Cvetkovich (2003; 2012), and anti-social trajectories in queer theory, provide models for religion and ecology to think about the creative possibilities in embracing refusal, disruption, dissatisfaction, indifference, and rage. This scholarship, as my attention to Ahmed demonstrates, disturbs the normative affective orientations that become ideal for privileged cultural positions by illuminating the communities and bodies that are out-of-step with these acceptable affects. Attention to negativity demands recognizing “how the internal experience of affect is mediated by different bodies and subject positions,”⁷⁰² revealing that claims to normative emotions “make certain forms of personhood valuable”⁷⁰³ by rewarding compliance with, or conformity to these affective norms. Ignoring “bad” feelings further stigmatizes these emotions and the communities attached to them, as I’ve outlined, but it also closes us off from the wealth of connection “bad” feelings can unfold. So-called “negative” emotions can be tremendous resources for environmental thought and activism.

Religion and ecology as a whole encourages folding nonhuman others within our sphere of kin concern but offers very few resources for negotiating what it means to care for populations on the edge of extinction, all those dead and buried by the weight of history, bodies and populations facing precarious futures. In short, religion and ecology asks us to care for nonhuman others like kin while ignoring that this kin-love means encountering tremendous trauma, grief, and mourning. Kin care that acknowledges the trouble we find ourselves in, both

⁷⁰² Elizabeth Stephens, “Bad Feelings: An Affective Genealogy of Feminism,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 30, 278.

⁷⁰³ Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 22.

uncertain futures and presents haunted by the ghosts of environmental degradation, will have to engage these feelings as part of our response-abilities. One way to remain with the trouble would be to ask how our scholarship can develop and articulate better understandings of affects like grief, loss, fear, and anguish by weaving environmental degradation and its complex intimacies into part of what we do rather than a spectacular exception. We must learn to “grieve-with,” Haraway writes, to do the “difficult cultural work of reflection and mourning” that would recognize “our dependence on and relationships with those countless others being driven over the edge of extinction.”⁷⁰⁴ Avoiding these emotions means avoiding tremendous environmental trouble. “We are in and of this fabric of undoing,” Haraway writes, “without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think.”⁷⁰⁵ The next two chapters outline what it means to craft-with the ghosts of environmental degradation and to stay-with damaged habitats, communities in pain, and bodies changed by catastrophe. In chapter six, I will cultivate what I call a *kinship of remainders* which resists new cosmology assumptions that one must follow a singular narrative with an orienting awe, wonder, and reverence for the natural world in order to find community or to further green sentiment. It is imperative that scholars refuse to inherit white environmentalism, and I attempt to contribute to this refusal by articulating complex, often deeply painful, emotional relationships with nature that recognize the inherent grief attached to long histories of social injustice. I draw on scholars who do not put environmentalism at the center of their work, like Ann Cvetkovich, Toni Morrison, Natasha Trethewey, Avery Gordon, Jennifer C. James, and Kara Walker, yet I argue they provide better pathways for religion and ecology to give attention to the slow erosions of environmental justice

⁷⁰⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 39.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

and to help articulate an understanding of environmental trauma as historical, embodied, and present. Furthermore, moving from experiences of negation—feeling out of place and uncomfortable at home—toward collective work, these theorists model how powerful counterpublics can form from “negative” affects. Finally, in order to resist the foreclosure of possible futures for devastated environments, in chapter seven I explore *queer eco-crip affinities*—scholarship that illuminates how compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness within religion and ecology shape not just our “cultural constructions of nature, wilderness and the environment”⁷⁰⁶ but the nature of desire itself limiting what sorts of affinities, attachments, and care are proper or even possible, and thus, what ethical futures we might imagine together as oddkin.

⁷⁰⁶ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 130.

Chapter Six Kinship of Reminders

THE OLD VANDALS WERE FLOODS AND BOATS
eroding the banks. The islands that once dotted the bays
have sunk, disappearing into silverfish grit, thinned
into algae and filament now being made
quiet by plumes. Despite ourselves
we are made quiet. The death of the sea
a thing we must lower ourselves into
to imagine. I will stay with you here
inside the sheen of orange that quickly kills,
not like the saltwater slowly starving the freshwater-
marshes and grasses that knit this green-wet
world together. The two breathless gannets
found covered in oil are not unlike you,
at the mercy of a mercy that moves in plumes,
that insists certain fates remain
invisible. What existed before the oil arrived
was delicate and mired, a broom of moonlight
swept through half-choked waves. I trust you
if you wish for what it, too, might have been.

Joanna Klink, excerpt, “Terrebonne Bay,” *Excerpts from a Secret Prophecy*⁷⁰⁷

“When a ghost appears, it is making contact with you; all its forceful if perplexing enunciations are for you. Offer it a hospitable reception we must, but the victorious reckoning with the ghost always requires a partiality to the living. Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone.” Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*⁷⁰⁸

Thus far, I demonstrated how new cosmology’s ontoethical project is an investment in white environmentalism—whiteness as a way of knowing becoming “*the way of understanding our environment*” through habitual investments in the normativity of white encounters with

⁷⁰⁷ Joanna Klink, *Excerpts from a Secret Prophecy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 11.

⁷⁰⁸ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 208.

nature in representation, rhetoric, and affective economies.⁷⁰⁹ Carolyn Finney reminds us that “stories, or narratives, about our ‘natural environment,’” work to inform “our environmental interactions” and shape “the institutions concerned with environmental issues,” but what is missing from many environmental narratives is the multitude of encounters “influenced by race, gender, class, and other aspects of difference that can determine one’s ability to access spaces of power and decision making.”⁷¹⁰ Pivotal for understanding the affective economies of the devastated Gulf landscape, what is glaringly absent within new cosmology’s narrative is an “African American perspective, a nonessentialized black environmental identity that is grounded in the legacy of African American experiences” and “mediated by privilege (both intellectual and material).”⁷¹¹ I outlined how the comprehensive common story that new cosmologists hope will act as an ethical guide for ecological concerns, the affective reorientation they hope will lead us to treat nonhuman others with reverent care as our evolutionary kin, is impervious to concerns evoked by quotidian encounters in environmentally degraded regions by articulating how this narrative is unable to relate to disaster, toxicity, and environmental racism. I have insisted that in order to address suffering and prepare for complex futures, we resist the many privileged singularities engrained within new cosmology perspectives: its championing of a single orienting narrative, its embrace of uncritical forms of science as really-real knowledge, its reliance on “expert” perspectives to trace the true shape of Nature, its investment in one conception of what it means to be human, its cultivation of one normative affective relationship with nonhuman others, and its insistence on one route toward environmental change.

⁷⁰⁹ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 3.

⁷¹⁰ Finney, 3.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

This chapter leans into this resistance through readings of different narratives, altogether different relationships with the nonhuman world, that I argue compel us to fundamentally rethink our conceptions of environmental intimacy. These narratives are shaped by disaster and environmental racism along the Gulf Coast and demonstrate the diverse, rich, ambiguous, painful, and frustrating bonds many humans have with their environments in the South. I argue they model a kinship of remainders—the shaping of affinities and attachments amongst disposable bodies, communities, and habitats through affects other than awe and wonder and beyond the prescriptions of new cosmology that give little attention either to the being-long of the disinherited and disposable or the reverberations of American racial violence. These narratives insist on a historical sense of the land where cultivating kinship with these spaces, places, creatures, and communities requires reckoning with the long histories of abuse and abandonment that continue to shape intimacies in devastated landscapes. Illuminating the realities that marginalized communities “can seldom afford to be single-issue activists”⁷¹² or single-narrative advocates, these stories move beyond kin as tied solely to evolutionary “ancestry or genealogy” and toward cultivating and honoring odd couplings, “ontologically inventive . . . care of kinds-as-assemblages” with kinships that recognize historical and contemporary environmental trauma.⁷¹³ These affinities negotiate representations of the material and affective changes wrought by the trouble we find ourselves in, what Rosi Braidotti reading Foucault and Deleuze might call “creative figurations” or adequate “cartographies” for advanced capitalism.⁷¹⁴ They are kinship figurations that “collect up hopes and fears and show possibilities and dangers”

⁷¹² Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 4.

⁷¹³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 98-103.

⁷¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 163-67.

to “guide us to a more livable place,” one Haraway calls an “elsewhere” in their abilities to move beyond normative inheritance—“keeping the lineages going, even while defamiliarizing their members and turning lines into webs, trees into esplanades, and pedigrees into affinity groups.”⁷¹⁵

To help religion and ecology begin to attune to the realities of environmental trauma, first I will guide “critical intimacy scholarship” or “cultural studies of the politics of intimacy,”⁷¹⁶ on trauma and melancholy into conversation with nascent negotiations with environmental trauma and loss. Then I will closely attend to the work of two artists and scholars that model thinking through the trouble at the intersections of historical and continual anti-black violence⁷¹⁷ and environmental decline along the Gulf Coast. Natasha Trethewey’s (2010) memoir *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* and Kara Walker’s (2007) “rumination” on Hurricane Katrina in her visual essay *After the Deluge*, both explore complex “aesthetics of attachment” voiced by “minoritized subjects,” what Lauren Berlant drawing from Deleuze and Guattari calls “minor intimacies,” as occasions to rethink intimacy in ways that do not just reify the white, enclosed, rational, sovereign subject of new cosmology.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵ Donna Haraway, “Introduction: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations,” in *The Haraway Reader*, Donna Haraway ed. 1-6 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁷¹⁶ Ara Wilson, “Intimacy: A Useful Category of Transnational Analysis,” 33-41.

⁷¹⁷ For more discussion of environmental racism as anti-black violence see: Brentin Mock, “How Environmental Injustice Connects to Police Violence.” *CityLab*. July 21st, 2016 <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/07/how-environmental-injustice-connects-to-police-violence/492053/>; Danya Al-Saleh and Mohammed Rafi Arefin, “Doing Environmental Studies During Times of Racialized Violence.” *EdgeEffects*. December 9th, 2014 <http://edgeeffects.net/environmental-justice-race-violence/>; Lindsay Dillon and Julie Sze, “Police Power and Particulate Matters: Environmental Justice and the Spatialities of In/Securities in U.S. Cities.” *English Language Notes* 54, no. 2 (2016): 13-23.

⁷¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” *Critical Inquiry*, 24, no. 2 (1998): 285-6.

Environmental Mourning

While there is a “surprising lack of discussion around mourning related to environmental loss or dispossession in broader discursive frameworks or public dialogues,”⁷¹⁹ there is increasing interest in the environmental humanities, with glimmers from religion, in unpacking environmental trauma, grief, loss, and mourning.⁷²⁰ These authors interrogate what it means to be passionately immersed in the lives of human and nonhuman others in a time of extinctions⁷²¹

⁷¹⁹ Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, “Introduction: To Mourn Beyond the Human,” in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, eds. 3-26 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017) 5.

⁷²⁰ For more see Hedda Haugen Askland and Matthew Bunn, “Lived Experiences of Environmental Change: Solastalgia, Power, and Place”, *Emotion, Space and Society* 27 (2018): 16-22; Douglas Burton-Christie, “The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration,” *Worldviews* 15 (2011): 29-49; Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, eds. *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017); Suzanne Dallman, Mary Ngo, Paul Laris, and Deborah Thien, “Political Ecology of Emotion and Sacred Space: The Winnemem Wintu Struggles with California Water Policy,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 6 (2013): 33-43; Georgina Drew, “Why Wouldn’t We Cry? Love and Loss Along a River in Decline,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 6 (2013): 25-32; Sarah M. Pike, “Mourning Nature: The Work of Grief in Radical Environmentalism,” *Journal For the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2016): 419-441; *For the Wild: Ritual and Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); “Flying Foxes: Kin, Keystone, Kontaminant,” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): 119-136; “Judas Work: Four Modes of Sorrow,” *Environmental Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2008): 51-66; Beth Seaton, “Siding with the World: Reciprocal Expressions of Human and Nature in An Impending Era of Loneliness,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 6 (2013): 73-80; Wendy S. Shaw and Alastair Bonnett, “Environmental Crisis, Narcissism, and the Work of Grief,” *Cultural Geographies* 23, no. 4 (2016): 565-579; Mick Smith, “Earthly Passion(s): Essays Towards an Emotional Ecology,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 6 (2013): 1-3; Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religions: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss At the Edge of Extinctions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); “Pain of Extinction: The Death of a Culture,” *Cultural Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (2010): 271-289; Kristoffer Whitney, “Tangled Up in Knots: An Emotional Ecology of Field Science,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 6 (2013): 100-107.

⁷²¹ Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): 1-2.

or of particular interest to this dissertation, to what the entangled encounters of becoming-with might *feel* like when confronting the loss of species and habitats. Often this material is sparked by “personal experiences with deep and profound moments of grief for non-human entities and degrading landscapes and ecosystems.”⁷²² Building from Judith Butler’s⁷²³ questions regarding “what, then, may be gained from ‘tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief,’” current work on environmental grief: asks “what counts as a mournable body (and what does not),” it thinks “beyond the human to extend the work of mourning to non-humans to think about other possible futures, other possible mournings,” and it recognizes “our shared vulnerabilities to human and non-human bodies” embracing “our complicity in the death of these other bodies—however painful that process may be.”⁷²⁴

“To mourn is always an expression and fulfillment of kinship,” Sebastian F. Braun writes, “implicit in the practice of mourning” for nonhuman others, he argues, is that:

we relate to our environment through kinship relations. Mourning is a social activity, extended to close friends and relatives. My contention, then, is that people mourn for specific parts of their environments because they feel related to them. Judith Butler wrote that, in mourning, ‘something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are.’ Mourning for the environment, in other words, shows what kinds of kinship relations we create and lose with our environments.⁷²⁵

⁷²² Cunsolo and Landman, “Introduction,” 4.

⁷²³ Particularly in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (2016) Butler (in conversation with Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Susan Sontag) reflects on American public denial of the inherent grief attached to its violent geopolitical entanglements arguing who/what/where we do not grieve tells us just as much about ourselves as exploring who/what/where we do mourn.

⁷²⁴ Cunsolo and Landman, “Introduction,” 2-3.

⁷²⁵ Sebastian F. Braun, “Mourning Ourselves and/as Our Relatives: Environment as Kinship,” in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, eds. 64-91 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017) 64-75.

Though kinship with nonhuman others is “often perceived as metaphorical, a mere cultural invention, a symbolic relation at best,” Braun argues that these relationships are “as real as any other kinship relation.”⁷²⁶ Braun, and others like Michael Jackson and Karen Warren,⁷²⁷ acknowledge that kin relations with nonhuman others do not prevent violence to land or animals yet they can shape more sustainable relationships. For example, Braun resists an overly romanticized trope of harmonious native peoples by gesturing toward the kinship systems with nonhuman others formed by indigenous peoples (Lakota relationships with buffalo in particular) that do not prevent the killing of animals for sustenance but presses that these kinship relations do “impose obligations” such as responsibility for what and how much is “sacrificed,” rituals of thanks for sacrifice that resist detached slaughtering of nonhumans, and mourning for population losses.⁷²⁸ While Braun is skeptical that mourning for the environment would “necessarily indicate a greater respect for life,” mourning “as a social practice,” he argues, reveals that “environmental relations are social relations and, therefore” if “we want to create more positive relations with our environments we cannot do so in isolation from other social relations.”⁷²⁹

Thinking of mourning along with other social relations, mourning nonhuman others as kin comes in different forms. For example, Sarah M. Pike’s work on radical environmental and animal rights activists’ feelings of loss and grief for species and habitat extinction positions grief

⁷²⁶ Braun, 66.

⁷²⁷ For more see, Michael Jackson, *Lifeworlds: Essays in Existential Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

⁷²⁸ Braun, 68-71.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

as both a “central motivating factor in conversion and commitment to activism” for members of these groups but also as forms of resistance through ongoing processes of “remembering the dead and disappearing” as intimates.⁷³⁰ Mourning old growth trees and animal species, these “rites of mourning” function, Pike argues, as “both an expression of deeply felt kinship bonds with others species *and* a significant factor in creating those bonds” by illuminating losses that are ignored and generating fuel for their continued activism through “speaking to their beloved dead, keeping them present.”⁷³¹ As another example, in her essay “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning,” Ashlee Cunsolo describes both her grief for her Inuit colleagues and friends across Canada’s North and their grief for the progressive losses of land and sea ice that is threatening the “basis for their livelihoods, culture, and survival.”⁷³² In conversation, her Inuit colleagues described “the land as a close intimate, a mother figure and spiritual entity capable of response and reciprocity,” and expressed “intense feelings of sadness, disorientation, grief, loss, and lament for a rapidly changing land.”⁷³³ Furthermore, these colleagues also “shared a sense of anticipatory grieving for losses expected to come, but not yet arrived,” lamentation for their beloveds and communities as these conditions “will most likely worsen in severity and impact.”⁷³⁴ These examples demonstrate that feelings of loss related to environmental degradation are complex but, echoing Kay Milton’s work, they also reveal that while our

⁷³⁰ Sarah M. Pike, “Mourning Nature: The Work of Grief in Radical Environmentalism,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2016): 419-20.

⁷³¹ Pike, “Mourning Nature,” 435.

⁷³² Ashlee Cunsolo, “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning,” in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, eds. 169-189 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017) 171-72.

⁷³³ Cunsolo, “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning, 171-72.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

scholarship is not catching up, many humans already *do* cultivate these emotional ties regarding nonhuman others as kin and are actively negotiating how environmental decline is impacting these relationships.

There is much to admire in these nascent explorations of emotional responses to ecological degradation and loss, not least the labor of working through how our time is one of mourning. What is not theorized, however, is the tricky kind of mourning I want to sit with here that is still tied to species and habitat loss and mutation but is truly a mourning for what might have been but never was—a relationship with the land and nonhuman others that is free from oppression, toxicity, and fear. While puzzling through mourning for lost species and habitats is a growing interest, what is not explored is loss and mourning in relation to the racial violence that is endemic to environmental emotions in America—a mourning for the potentiality of the places and communities that is continually stopped by violence and toxic investments.⁷³⁵ Reiterating Carolyn Finney’s arguments, we must:

challenge the universality that denies the differences in our collective experiences of nature in the United States . . . how key moments in U.S. history that in many ways have come to define human/environment interaction in the United States bump up against collective experiences of black people navigating the social, cultural, and psychological minefields of slavery and segregation . . . What is the emotional and psychological ‘trickle down’ effect of the way in which these movements/ideas impacted black people over the long term? How do we challenge, to paraphrase Haraway, a nature that seems innocent of *black* history?”⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵ I find the lack of engagement with the complexities of racism, despite claiming to address loss in indigenous communities, in the most recent publication *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss & Grief* (as well as, echoing Kaitlyn Creasy, the paucity of sources on race in the trendiest discussions of the troubles of the Anthropocene) incredibly concerning. As Haraway’s work reminds on numerous occasions, issues of species are almost always entanglements with race/racism so even though these authors are considering mourning beyond the human, I still question which “humans” and species they will regard as grievable.

⁷³⁶ Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 34.

Dorceta Taylor, Carolyn Merchant, and Kevin DeLuca's scholarship⁷³⁷ reminds us about all the ways nature is violently reinforced as a "'white' space and a white concern" illuminating how "African Americans have historically undergone repeated cultural interrogations regarding their status as humans within the larger society. The legacy of these cultural constructions reveals a thinly veiled contempt for black people that continues to be expressed in intellectual, political, and cultural sites."⁷³⁸ There are "many complexities involved in African American attitudes toward the natural world" including ambiguous feelings connected to the denial of "comparable access to those locations celebrated by nature writers," and negotiations with "oppressive poverty and the threat of physical violence" that "historically worked in tandem to create the sense that nature is off-limits and the purview of a distant culture in a distant landscape."⁷³⁹ Kimberly N. Ruffin writes that often "the force of oppression in the social world has left African Americans so limited as ecological agents that relationships with nonhuman nature becomes unfathomable, undesirable, or impossible."⁷⁴⁰ While conceptualizing and negotiating these relationships is complex, that what is or seems possible is limited conceptually

⁷³⁷ For more see Dorceta F. Taylor, "Blacks and the Environment: Toward an Explanation of the Concern and Action Gap Between Blacks and Whites," *Environment and Behavior* 21.2 (1989) and "American Environmentalism: The Role of Race, Class and Gender in Shaping Activism 1820-1995," *Race, Gender, and Class* 5.1 (1997); Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," *Environmental History* 8.3 (2003); Kevin DeLuca, "The Shadow of Whiteness: The Consequences of Constructions of Nature in Environmental Politics," *Whiteness: The Communications of Social Identity*, T.K. Nakayama and J.N. Martin eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

⁷³⁸ Finney, 16-17

⁷³⁹ Michael J. Beilfuss, "Ironic Pastorals and Beautiful Swamps: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Troubled Landscapes of the American South" *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22.3 (2015) 485-86.

⁷⁴⁰ Kimberly N. Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Literary Traditions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 18.

and materially through violent reinforcement, to deny or ignore that African Americans have always had emotional attachments with American land conveniently sidesteps addressing the continual discriminations that shape these attachments. Finney highlights how universal narratives about our collective experiences of nature ignore both the violence and erasure pressed on black bodies (historical realities for black Americans during the birth of environmentalism and their reverberating legacies for more contemporary events like Katrina) *and* that these same bodies have always had intimate relationships with American landscapes through material and political labor. While “African Americans were barred from contributing to the larger narrative of American progress, what cannot be denied is the physical labor and mental ingenuity of African Americans, both those whose backbreaking work in the fields propelled the nation’s economy forward, and those whose deep-seated belief in civic engagement changed our political and social landscapes.”⁷⁴¹ In truth, “representations and racialization inform the way we approach the ‘business,’ the ‘science,’ and the ‘conservation’ of the natural world,” Finney argues, and they “affect the way these spaces and places are constructed and the institutions that maintain these constructions.”⁷⁴² By excluding black environmental experiences, black environmental imaginaries, either “(implicitly or explicitly), corporate, academic, and environmental institutions” like new cosmology, “legitimate the invisibility” of African Americans “in all spaces that inform, shape, and control the way we know and interact with the environment in the United States.”⁷⁴³ As I have demonstrated, if to be human is to be intimate with nature in only the affective frames of white environmentalism—to feel the appropriate awe,

⁷⁴¹ Finney, 43.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*

wonder, and reverence while ignoring sorrow, anger, fear, loss, and frustration—then new cosmology’s affective prescriptions dangerously weave into and legitimize the environmental histories that dehumanize black Americans.

It is important, however, to recognize that as we consider how environmental trauma impacts the affective orientations of black communities we must resist two racist misdirects. First, is the persistent myth that people of color are not concerned with environmental issues because they are alienated from the environment post-slavery and Jim Crow encounters or that they are only concerned with social equality. Covering two decades of sociological data, Robert Emmet Jones’, “Black Concern for the Environment: Myth Versus Reality” clearly demonstrates how normative media, academia, and policy makers continue to position black communities as unconcerned about the environment despite research that points to this being a complete fabrication.⁷⁴⁴ On the whole, blacks and whites maintain a similar level of interest in environmental concerns with, at times, concerns about different environmental problems.⁷⁴⁵ There is some evidence that “people of color,” Jones writes, “appear to be more concerned about the safety and health effects associated with nuclear power and solid, toxic, and nuclear wastes, whereas whites appear to be more concerned about ozone depletion and global warming,” and with good reason.⁷⁴⁶ Echoing Robert Bullard and Giovanna Di Chiro’s long work in environmental justice, the habitual restriction by myopic environmental policy makers and

⁷⁴⁴ Robert Emmet Jones, “Black Concern for the Environment: Myth Versus Reality,” *Society and Natural Resources* 11, no. 3 (1998): 209-228.

⁷⁴⁵ Interestingly, examining research from the 1970’s-1990s, Jones notes that black concern for environmental issues tends to remain consistent while white concern tends to fluctuate demonstrating more interest around times of crisis and rise in media event (Exxon Valdez disaster, the first Earth Day, the spotted owl controversy) (225).

⁷⁴⁶ Jones, “Black Concern for the Environment,” 224.

theorists to limit “environmental concern” solely to matters of “environmental impacts related to air, water, land, and species other than *Homo sapiens*” tends to ignore the “critical impacts to sociostructural and cultural systems” that people of color facing environmental racism must negotiate. Furthermore, it obscures and erases how these communities often engage in environmental action positioning black Americans as unconcerned about the environment while conveniently side-stepping their environmental concerns through further entrenching problematic nature-culture divides within our theory.⁷⁴⁷ To resist this fallacy we must continually question who gets to decide what is an “environmental concern” while advocating for recognition of racism as a pervasive issue.

Second, particularly worrisome for a project like this one, are the insidious possibilities that discussions of environmental trauma and toxicity can be used to further support arguments championing the unrecruitability of black people in the moral cause of American white futurity. Much like racist talking-points post-Katrina that mark black communities as socially corrupt and thus unworthy of environmental intervention or incapable of articulating environmental concerns, I can see my efforts to further address toxicity and environmental trauma being co-opted to position black and disabled bodies as inhuman, damaged animals, symptoms and victims of the depravity of urbanity in need of “benevolent” paternal intervention.⁷⁴⁸ We must pay attention to how the toxic fall-out from long histories of environmental racism is further used to position bodies of color as fundamentally flawed objects of fear. These traps are so easy to fall into for religion and ecology if we do not keep a pulse on the histories of how “nature” and nature-care have been constructed and normalized particularly within forms of religious environmentalism that refuse to decouple from an ontological reliance on universal narratives

⁷⁴⁷ Jones, 211.

and continue to cultivate an “authentic” encounter between humans and nonhuman others that we must “get-back to.”

One example of how this is already happening in circles that share similar archives is the disturbing lack of critique of the racist and ableist implications in “nature-deficit disorder” theories particularly in their popular culture forms. Drawing from Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis, conversations in ecopsychology, and popular material on attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Richard Louv’s (2005) national bestseller *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* is one of many contemporary discourses (like new cosmology) that position humans as alienated from nature resulting in a number of health and social-ills, and it advocates for returning to a pre-WWII childhood model with more free-range nature encounter.⁷⁴⁹ Nestled within interdisciplinary conversations⁷⁵⁰ about “child-nature relationships and disconnection,” Louv contends that nature-deficit disorder (NDD) is a metaphor rather than medical diagnosis (though the pop culture interest in his work habitually translates it as a diagnosis) but nevertheless argues that contemporary children have “detached from nature and pay a heavy” emotional and material “price” particularly “dulled senses, behavioral difficulties, obesity, stress, declining academic performance, and decreased emotional and physical well-being.”⁷⁵¹ For Louv, NDD “stems from

⁷⁴⁹ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2005).

⁷⁵⁰ For more see Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York: Harper Row, 1965); Louise Chawla, “Cities for Human Development,” in *Growing Up in an Urbanizing World*, Louise Chawla ed. pp. 15-34 (London: Earthscan, 2002); Edith Cobb, *The Ecology of the Imagination in Childhood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Roger Hart, *Children’s Experience of Place: A Developmental Study* (New York: Noble Offset Printers, 1979); P. H. Kahn and S. R. Kellert, *Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁷⁵¹ Elizabeth Dickinson, “The Misdiagnosis: Rethinking ‘Nature-deficit Disorder,’” *Environmental Communication* 7, no. 3 (2013): 2-3.

and is contextualized by ADD/ADHD” and he promotes teaching children science and advocates “nature therapy— ‘nature’s Ritalin’” to reduce ADHD symptoms and other NDD problems.⁷⁵² While the compassionate focus on children’s environments and the interest in play-based therapies are commendable, Elizabeth Dickson argues, in one of the few critiques of NDD, that in the absence of deeper cultural criticism, NDD and other conversations like it is an incredibly problematic environmental discourse. Louv “idealized Muir, Leopold, Roosevelt, Darwin, Thoreau, D. H. Lawrence, Davy Crockett, and Woody Guthrie” and while “these men are admired environmental advocates,” Dickinson writes, “they offer predominately White, male, and Western perspectives. The desire, then, appears to be to return to a ‘normal,’ particularly White, middle-class, male, heterosexual cultural past that obscures race, class, and gender politics.”⁷⁵³ “Human-nature estrangement is exceptionally complex and involves underlying issues of power that result in environmental destruction, classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia,” Dickinson argues, yet this scholarship mainly ignores these issues and largely speaks “for and to affluent white audiences.”⁷⁵⁴ Consequently, Louv and educators “prescribe returning to nature mainly through physical activities, such as hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, and bird watching” but fail to recognize both that “these activities do not automatically create connection, affect, or emotional attachment” and that they “may pose challenges and obscure environmental issues” via the “mindset and assumptions that undergird them.”⁷⁵⁵ For example, as Dickinson and others remind, “spending time in the outdoors in the way Louv and educators

⁷⁵² Dickinson, “The Misdiagnosis,” 3.

⁷⁵³ Dickinson, 8.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

propose typically requires transportation, time, money, consumption, and a particular lifestyle and mindset.”⁷⁵⁶ For “single, financially constrained, and geographically (and often racially) segregated families, taking children outside or traveling to designated nature areas can be difficult.”⁷⁵⁷ Moreover, these activities “frequently require an element of physical and social access; even if one does have the resources, people of color, women,” queers, and “youth may not have the same kind of safety in their access” and by “focusing on certain activities and assumptions, adults ignore deep ecologists, ecofeminists, environmental justice activists, American Indian/Native American advocacy groups, and others who work tirelessly to expose environmental degradation, racism, sexism, and classism.”⁷⁵⁸ Finally, one element overlooked by Dickinson that I will explore more in the last chapter, by ignoring how these activities also pose immense accessibility issues for disabled bodies this discourse positions disabled and ill bodies as an environmental problem, victims or collateral damage within environmental and social degradation, thus resisting any efforts by disabled and ill persons to determine their own relationships to nonhuman others and their own conceptions of embodied differences that may or may not be the result of environmental degradation. Consequently, it is not difficult to see how NDD fuels into the same mindsets that position black youth, particularly ill and disabled youth, as difficult to educate, plagued by attention and discipline problems, easier to incarcerate, easier to ignore in disaster protection and environmental restoration.

Keeping these complications in mind, I argue it is possible to talk about environmental trauma and toxicity without positioning it as detrimentally foundational if we recognize both that ideal reciprocity with the environment is a continually cultivated myth fueled and enjoyed by

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

only particular interests, and the reality that we are all politically entangled and negotiating what it means to live within environmental degradation. One way to stay-with this trouble, therefore, is to resist universal narratives and their role in structural racism by looking toward narratives addressing the complexity of environmental experience. While there is “no monolithic African American environmental experience,” Finney writes, and “it is important not to confuse or conflate the historical need of African Americans to privilege race in order to address major issues (e.g., segregation) with the belief that all African Americans experience day-to-day life in much the same way,” when people responded to Finney’s questions about frustrations with the “practices of environmental organizations” and their involvement, “commonalities in their responses outweighed their differences.”⁷⁵⁹ “While it was tempting, for example, to fall back on the rural/urban dichotomy to frame their responses,” Finney writes:

what became exceedingly clear was that the experience of being black trumped any place-based assertions related to environmental engagement. For many African Americans I spoke with, their economic mobility status was fluid; they may have grown up on a farm, but lived in a city as an adult. They may have raised their kids in a suburb, but retired to a rural area. But no matter where they found themselves, they were always black. And while the meaning of blackness in all of its complexity and real-life manifestations has arguably shifted over time, the collective historical experience of being black in America has not. These similarities in attitudes and perceptions drawn from a collective history and consciousness that is reinforced and remembered through media, textual representation, and experience. ‘The collective experience of pain and hardship, suffering and sacrifice has given African Americans a unique perspective from which our consciousness has been forged.’ In addition, regardless of where one stands in the race debate, the history of white supremacy in the United States and how it has been articulated on the landscape is difficult to dispute, though some charge that ‘historical amnesia’ does make it easier to deny or forget.⁷⁶⁰

It is this collective affective experience, continually reiterated through space, place, and encounter, that environmental movements (including much of religion and ecology) continue to

⁷⁵⁹ Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 98-99.

⁷⁶⁰ Finney, 99.

either treat as “special topics” or outright ignore. Finney’s African American interlocutors describe patterns of behavior within environmental movements that demonstrate resistance to talking about racism, or to “provide continued financial support for diversity programs.”⁷⁶¹

Furthermore, for those that work within environmental organizations (despite a “lot of lip service about diversity,”) they usually find themselves as the sole black person within the group.⁷⁶² “One of the biggest challenges for individuals whose work is considered ‘environmental,’” Finney writes, “is how quickly anything related to African Americans and the environment gets designated as an ‘environmental justice’ concern:

There is usually no discussion about the particulars—just the mere fact that ‘race’ or ‘black people’ are involved usually relegates African American environmental interactions to a particular point on the environment spectrum—environmental justice. In fact, the field of environmental justice has done a stellar job at highlighting the complexity in framing any EJ discussion by drawing attention to three key debates within the EJ literature: whether environmental injustice is cause primarily by racism or capitalism; the value and importance of layperson knowledge vs. ‘expert knowledge’; and the ‘different ways to make the particular legible in reference to the abstract and the abstract accessible with reference to the particular.’ However, my concern is with the assumption that the best framework to understand *any* environmental issue or experience had by African Americans is an environmental justice framework. Is EJ the best way to frame the black environmental experience? Is it the *only* way? What are some of the limitations of always using an EJ framework? Are we ‘shrinking our ledge’? What kinds of questions are we *not* asking as a result of always using EJ?⁷⁶³

One of the limitations of designating any intersection of race and environment as an environmental justice concern, the “kinds of questions we are *not* asking,” is the resulting failure to recognize how the collective experience of race in America unsettles the foundational values, concerns, keywords within environmental theory itself. What is overlooked, particularly by religion and ecology, is how much of our conceptions of *nature, human, relationship, kinship,*

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁶² Ibid., 101.

⁷⁶³ Finney, 108.

intimacy, reciprocity, and love are rooted in the continual negation of black experience in what remains a racist nation. Amnesia about this collective experience within religion and ecology makes it easier to advocate for an uncomplicated kinship with nonhuman others by ignoring voices that disturb these normative emotions. Insisting that all environmental issues are environmental justice issues can help us rethink these habitual terms.

Finney highlights two affective elements within her interviews that I find particularly important to recognize in the context of devastated landscapes. First, what Finney settles on calling “fatigue,” (that is, like any emotion, a combination of other emotions like frustration and anger) or a weariness, exhaustion, and resistance to being the sole black voice, always being positioned as having to represent black voices, habitually having to explain to “white folks” about black experiences, and continually experiencing the erasure and avoidance of black environmental concerns as either not “environmental” nor informed by “expert” knowledge.⁷⁶⁴ Second, is the amalgamation of fear and complex mourning African Americans describe when talking about environmental encounters. “Many African Americans who work with community members felt that many of their constituents were afraid of two things,” Finney relays, “the unknown (primarily wildlife) and white people:

while both wildlife and white people provoke fear in some constituents, the basis for, and the subsequent responses to, these fears are decidedly different. Wildlife is largely an unknown—many urban-dwelling African Americans have never had any real contact with wild animals outside of the zoo or dealings with raccoons or rabbits. Anything they have learned about wildlife they acquired from mass media or books. When visiting an area touted to have ‘wildlife,’ people tend to rely on those more knowledgeable (like park rangers) to guide them through the experience. On the other hand, most African Americans have had lifelong contact with white people. Fears about such contact are based on something that has happened to them, their family, their friends, or someone in their neighborhood. In addition, living with the knowledge of slavery, lynching, and racial profiling has meant that African Americans have had to develop survival skills in order to confront potentially life-threatening situations. They do not need to turn to an expert in order to deal with any given situation; they *are* the experts. While trust is

⁷⁶⁴ Finney, 106-7.

needed to convince someone that they will be protected and secure while experiencing the outdoors, it is arguably more difficult to gain that trust in relation to fears held about white people than it is concerning fears about wild animals.⁷⁶⁵

While white Americans revere the landscapes that environmental movements are particularly fond of, like areas of natural beauty, we should remember that “these places are overlaid with histories seen and unseen; geographies of fear that can make a ‘natural’ place suspect to an African American. The experience is further enhanced by other aspects of difference, including gender, age, sexual orientation, geography, and experience” and the lack of wider recognition of these realities generates feelings of ambivalence, fatigue, and frustration.⁷⁶⁶ “Fear and mistrust” of “forests and other green spaces,” Finney writes, reveal a “fear and mistrust of what these spaces represent in the eyes of a black person hobbled by repressive rules, cultural norms, racist propaganda, and the possibility of death.”⁷⁶⁷ Like the song “Strange Fruit,” made famous by Billie Holiday and Nina Simone demonstrates, the southern tree “becomes a symbol for the violence done to black bodies, manifest as ‘strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees. The significance of this symbol—the tree as a harbinger of death for black people—persists in contemporary culture whether in song, imagery, or as part of the news of the day.”⁷⁶⁸

In “Black Women and the Wilderness,” Evelyn C. White’s (1998) moving experiences in the foothills of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains further describe these complex emotions. Invited to a women’s writing workshop in this picturesque location, White writes, “I wasn’t fully aware of my troubled feelings about nature,” until she experienced the fear of going out and joining the

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁶⁷ Finney, 116.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 119.

other women in nature.⁷⁶⁹ “I wanted to sit outside and listen to the roar of the ocean,” she writes, “but I was afraid. I wanted to walk through the redwoods, but I was afraid. I wanted to glide in a kayak and feel the cool water splash in my face, but I was afraid.”⁷⁷⁰ “For me, the fear is like a heartbeat, always present, while at the same time, intangible, elusive, and difficult to define. So pervasive, so much a part of me, that I hardly knew it was there . . . While the river’s roar gave me a certain comfort and my heart warmed when I gazed at the sun-dappled trees out of a classroom window,” she writes,

I didn’t want to get closer. I was certain that if I ventured outside to admire a meadow or to feel the cool ripples in a stream, I’d be taunted, attacked, raped, maybe even murdered because of the color of my skin. I believe the fear I experience in the outdoors is shared by many African-American women and that it limits the way we move through the world and colors the decisions we make about our lives. For instance, for several years now, I’ve been thinking about moving out of the city to a wooded, vineyard-laden area in Northern California. It is there, among the birds, creeks, and trees that I long to settle down and make a home. Each house-hunting trip I’ve made to the countryside has been fraught with two emotions: elation at the prospect of living closer to nature and a sense of absolute doom about what might befall me in the backwoods. My genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural setting counters my fervent hopes of finding peace in the wilderness. Instead of the solace and comfort I seek, I imagine myself in the country as my forebears were—exposed, vulnerable, and unprotected—a target of cruelty and hate.⁷⁷¹

The fear White describes “was largely informed by a collective history of violence against African Americans at the hands of white people,”⁷⁷² particularly how thoughts of the images of Emmett Till and the deaths of Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Carol Robertson at the Sixteenth Street Church in Birmingham, Alabama left her “speechless and

⁷⁶⁹ Evelyn C. White, “Black Women and the Wilderness,” in *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*, Lorraine Anderson, Scott P Slovic, and John P. O’Grady, eds. 316-320 (New York: Pearson, 1998), 317.

⁷⁷⁰ White, “Black Women and the Wilderness,” 317.

⁷⁷¹ White, 317-18.

⁷⁷² Finney, 118.

paralyzed” with “heart-stopping fear” whenever she visited the outdoors.⁷⁷³ Emmett Till’s death particularly “seemed to be summed up in the prophetic warning of writer Alice Walker, herself a native of rural Georgia: ‘Never be the only one, except, possibly, in your own house.’”⁷⁷⁴ White also conveys a sadness about what she loses in and to these fears, how they determine particular paths for her life despite her frustrations, and she writes about actively engaging these feelings to wrestle out a different relationship with the environment. “I concealed my pained feelings about the outdoors,” she writes, “until I could no longer reconcile my silence with my mandate to my students to face their fears. They found the courage to write openly about incest, poverty, and other ills that had constricted their lives: How could I turn away from my fears about being in nature?”⁷⁷⁵

The re-membering process she describes I read as *doing* environmental kinship by not ignoring these “negative” emotions or the affective power of her cultural memories nor conceding that the natural beauty or her love for the land overpowers this pain. Instead White remains-with these feelings, however painful remaining proves to be, by embracing this history to negotiate her fears and desires. “In an effort to contain my fears,” she writes:

I forced myself to revisit the encounter and to reexamine my childhood wounds from the Birmingham bombing and the lynching of Emmett Till. I touched the terror of my Ibo and Ashanti ancestors as they were dragged from Africa and enslaved on southern plantations. I conjured bloodhounds, burning crosses, and white-robed Klansmen hunting down people who looked just like me. I imagined myself being captured in a swampy backwater, my back ripped open and bloodied by the whip’s lash. I cradled an ancestral mother, broken and keening as her baby was snatched from her arms and sold down the river . . . Determined to reconnect myself to the comfort my African ancestors felt in the rift valleys of Kenya and on the shores of Sierra Leone, I eventually decided to go on a rafting trip. Familiar with my feelings about nature, Judith, a dear friend and workshop founder, offered to be one of my raftmates. With her sturdy, gentle

⁷⁷³ White, 319.

⁷⁷⁴Ibid., 319.

⁷⁷⁵ White, 319.

and wise body as my anchor, I lowered myself into a raft at the bank of the river. As we pushed off into the current, I felt myself make an unsure but authentic shift from my painful past . . . About an hour into the trip, in a magnificently still moment, I looked up into the heavens and heard the voice of black poet Langston Hughes: ‘I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins. I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. My soul has grown deep like the rivers.’ Soaking wet and shivering with emotion, I felt tears welling in my eyes as I stepped out of the raft onto solid ground. Like my African forebears who survived the Middle Passage, I was stronger at journey’s end. Since that voyage, I’ve stayed at country farms, napped on secluded beaches, and taken wilderness treks all in an effort to find peace in the outdoors. No matter where I travel, I will always carry Emmett Till and the four black girls whose deaths affect me so. But comforted by our tribal ancestors—herders, gatherers, and fishers all—I am less fearful, ready to come home.⁷⁷⁶

What White offers us here is a very complex encounter. She knits together the traumas and loses from the past in order to understand her emotions in the present, negotiating with the fear that shapes the course of her future, resisting the sedimented histories of violence that make nature encounters so very terrifying for her by invoking other pasts and possible futures where landscapes carry different affective encounters for black bodies. It is important to recognize that she identifies these traumas as something she “will always carry,” a shouldering of the violence that reverberates. It is not something she *just gets over*. What White works out is a complicated kinship of remainders by wrestling with the weight of inheritance, remembering lost bodies, families, ways of being, and cultivating a tentatively-raw embracing of both the nonhuman and the memories. The kinship of remainders White models is dynamically present via working in and through her affective everyday encounters in her environment as well as resolutely corporeal in her struggle to listen to the historical and present fears her body feels in her desire to take to the water. Sitting with the kinship White offers us, I want to think more about the negotiation of past and present fears, pain, trauma, environmental degradation, and alternative paths to consider

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 320.

environmental agency, care, creativity, and futurity along the Gulf Coast. First, I will look at some resources working through cultural memory and trauma and loss and then Natasha Trethewey and Kara Walker's work that take up these elements in devastated landscapes.

Trauma, Haunting, and Melancholic Kin

Exploring affinities and attachments in devastated landscapes is, unavoidably, an encounter with trauma and loss. How religion and ecology will theoretically negotiate these realities is a pressing open question.⁷⁷⁷ The response-abilities we will need to develop are numerous. For example, as Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands asks, "how does one mourn in the midst of a culture that finds it almost impossible to recognize the value of what has been lost?"⁷⁷⁸ How do we talk about trauma, loss, and feelings of mourning when what has been lost is difficult to articulate? How do we think about environmental trauma experienced by diverse groups of people in different ways? Furthermore, in relation to the contexts I am addressing here, we will need to puzzle out how to encourage recognition of emotional investments like mourning the loss of homes, communities, and histories as environmental concerns particularly when these beloveds are urban, damaged, degraded, toxic, "minor" histories, sacrifice zones, and dispossessed communities.

⁷⁷⁷ There are other ways to read trauma than what I pursue here that are also fruitful for working through environmental loss. In particular, Shelly Rambo's work in theology that uses Cathy Caruth's scholarship and the lens of trauma studies to remain with trauma could be, and I'm sure already has been, helpful for ecotheology. For more see Shelly Rambo *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) and *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Aftermath of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

⁷⁷⁸ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 333.

I find tremendous value for environmental theory in scholarship that defines trauma “culturally rather than clinically,” where trauma “becomes a central category for looking at the intersections of emotional and social processes along with the intersections of memory and history” with a particular focus on how “trauma digs itself in at the level of the everyday.”⁷⁷⁹ Ann Cvetkovich’s work in affect, queer, and cultural studies, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003) and *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), and Avery Gordon’s work in affect and sociology, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997) resist assumptions that “good politics can only emerge from good feelings”⁷⁸⁰ by thinking about how “abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security.)”⁷⁸¹ For the most part, Cvetkovich argues, “sociocultural approaches to trauma have been overshadowed by psychoanalytic and psychiatric discourse,” and “more recently, the development of PTSD as a clinical diagnosis.”⁷⁸² Cvetkovich, and others like Cathy Caruth, Marita Sturken, Mark Seltzer, read trauma “instead as a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequence of historical events.”⁷⁸³ “Defined culturally rather than clinically,” Cvetkovich writes, “trauma studies becomes an interdisciplinary field for exploring the public cultures created around traumatic

⁷⁷⁹ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 18-19.

⁷⁸⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, 3.

⁷⁸¹ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

⁷⁸² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 17.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18.

events. Trauma becomes a central category along with the intersections of memory and history; it gives rise to what Marita Sturken and others have called ‘cultural memory.’”⁷⁸⁴ What has become trauma studies, especially in response to Caruth’s work, points out trauma’s peculiar paradoxes emphasizing that “trauma discourse is important:

precisely because it challenges distinctions between the mental and physical, the psychic and social, and the internal and external as locations or sources of pain. Discourses of trauma serve as a vehicle for sorting through the relation between these categories rather than resolving them in a definition. When trauma becomes too exclusively psychologized or medicalized, its capacity to problematize conceptual schemes, the exploration of which is one of cultural theory’s contributions to trauma studies, is lost.⁷⁸⁵

Cvetkovich writes that she takes a “certain distance from Caruth’s universalizing form of theorizing about trauma” because it tends to both be too abstract and overly focused on “catastrophic event rather than on everyday trauma.”⁷⁸⁶ By “consistently stressing questions of epistemology and trauma as structurally unknowable,” Cvetkovich writes, Caruth⁷⁸⁷ “flattens out the specificities of trauma in a given historical and political context,” and Cvetkovich wants to “remain alert to the historical locations out of which theories of trauma arise.”⁷⁸⁸ Without “rejecting the emphasis that Caruth and others place on trauma’s unrepresentability,” Cvetkovich argues that what she offers is ways to “think about trauma as part of the affective language that

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁸⁷ Cvetkovich remarks that “while Caruth does not always acknowledge the historical origins of her work (and resists historic readings of Freud, for example), her own work is rooted in the texts of Freud and has strong ties to Holocaust Studies . . . Drawing on Freud, she uses the example of the ‘accident’ as a way of describing trauma’s contingency and lack of agency—a model that may not work well for traumatic histories that emerge from systemic contexts . . . instances that might otherwise seem tangential to a discussion of trauma.” (19)

⁷⁸⁸ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 19.

describes life under capitalism.”⁷⁸⁹ “I’m interested in how shock and injury are made socially meaningful,” she writes, “paradigmatic even, within cultural experience. I want to focus on how traumatic events refract outward to produce all kinds of affective responses and not just clinical symptoms. Moreover, in contrast to the individualist approaches of clinical psychology, I’m concerned with trauma as a collective experience that generates collective responses. I am compelled by historical understandings of trauma as a way of describing how we live, and especially how we live affectively.”⁷⁹⁰ Working with the intersections of feminist, critical race, Marxist, and queer theory, “each of which offers contributions to and problems for theories of trauma,” Cvetkovich advocates for a “sense of trauma” that is every day, inherited, part of a “social history of sensation,” and resistant to “pathologizing approaches to trauma” as well as conceptions of trauma as “catastrophic or extreme”:

from feminism comes an interest in bridging the sometimes missing intersections between sexual and national traumas, and the sense of trauma as everyday; from critical race theory, especially African American studies, comes an understanding of trauma as foundational to national histories and passed down through multiple generations; from Marxism comes a dialectical approach to the intersection of lived experience and systemic social structures and to trauma’s place in the social history of sensation; and from queer theory comes a critique of pathologizing approaches to trauma and an archive of examples from lesbian public cultures.⁷⁹¹

Here, Cvetkovich offers a wealth of possibilities for thinking about environmental trauma particularly in her attention to the collective and inherited particularities of trauma. Thinking about pain and loss along the Gulf Coast I am going to focus particularly on her helpful readings

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Cvetkovich, 19-20.

of insidious and collective trauma, queer resistances to the pathologization of trauma, and queer reclamation of traumas' affects.

Cvetkovich argues that feminist interest in the “contested status of sexual trauma,” revealed some of the shortcomings of past conceptions of trauma.⁷⁹² While the experiences of Vietnam War veterans led to the establishment of post-traumatic stress disorder being added in the 1980s to the third edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, sexual trauma seemed “to be in danger of invisibility, especially due to the gendered divide between private and public spheres.”⁷⁹³ Judith Herman’s influential work illuminated that, “not until the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic stress disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life. The real conditions of women’s lives are hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life.”⁷⁹⁴ “The hysteria of women and the combat neurosis of men,” Herman writes, “are one. Recognizing the commonality of affliction may even make it possible at times to transcend the immense Gulf that separates the public sphere of war and politics—the world of men—and the private sphere of domestic life—the world of women.”⁷⁹⁵ Even when it included women’s experiences with trauma, most of the scholarship in the 1990s and much contemporary trauma work (including Herman’s) engages a “search for the core symptoms of PTSD,” an essence to trauma, reflecting the “tendency of clinical psychology to medicalized psychic pain, another exemplary care of which,” Cvetkovich argues, “is the contemporary zeal for pharmacological treatment of

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁹⁴ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 28.

⁷⁹⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 32.

depression.”⁷⁹⁶ Cvetkovich describes her interests in trauma as a rejection first of a “universal model of trauma because it runs the risk of erasing essential differences between traumatic experiences, differences of historical context and geopolitical location as well as the specificities of individual experience that can be lost in a diagnosis that finds the same symptoms everywhere.”⁷⁹⁷ Second, Cvetkovich rejects conceptions of separate spheres by “looking instead to the public dimensions of sexual trauma,” writing with and into the feminist and queer Public Feelings project that thinks about the ongoing impact of identity politics by looking to places where the “public/private divide warrants reconceptualization.”⁷⁹⁸ It is “no longer useful,” she writes, “to presume that sexuality, intimacy, affect, and other categories of experience typically assigned to the private sphere do not also pervade public life.”⁷⁹⁹

Part of the feminist and queer reconceptualization of public life Cvetkovich champions is “the focus on trauma as everyday that unravels definitions of the term.”⁸⁰⁰ She gestures to Laura Brown’s “crucial formulation of ‘insidious’ trauma to describe the everyday experiences of sexism that add to the effects of more punctual traumatic experiences, such as rape, forges connections between trauma and more systemic forms of oppression.”⁸⁰¹ The diagnostic “stipulation that trauma must be ‘an event outside the range of human experience’” Brown argues, “excludes insidious forms of trauma that are all too often persistent and normalized.”⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁶ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 31.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁹⁹ Cvetkovich, 32.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Cvetkovich argues, “insidious or everyday forms of trauma, especially those emerging from systemic forms of oppression, ultimately demand an understanding of trauma that moves beyond medicalized constructions of PTSD.” “The challenge of insidious trauma,” she argues:

or chronic PTSD (although this category may contain it again in the confines of a diagnosis) is that it resists the melodramatic structure of an easily identifiable origin of trauma. Once the causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures, opening up the need to change social structures more broadly rather than just fix individual people. Yet as the links between sexual abuse and sexism show, event trauma can play a prominent role in drawing attention to more insidious forms of trauma . . . experiences that are connected to trauma but may not necessarily themselves be traumatic—such as sex acts, immigration, activism, and caretaking.⁸⁰³

Focusing on insidious or collective forms of trauma, Cvetkovich’s work contends, challenges trauma studies to “participate in the large and interdisciplinary project of producing revisionist and critical counterhistories.”⁸⁰⁴ There are “many forgotten histories that have yet to receive full attention within trauma studies,” she writes, “a necessary agenda for the intersection of trauma studies and American studies is a fuller examination of racialized histories of genocide, colonization, slavery, and migration that are part of the violences of modernity, and whose multigenerational legacies require new vocabularies of trauma.”⁸⁰⁵ Opening up trauma studies to intersections with race and ethnic studies necessitates “investigations of the impact of cultural loss and the suppression of cultural memory in the work of building culture in the present.”⁸⁰⁶ For American contexts, exploring collective trauma requires “tracking how contemporary

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁰⁴ Cvetkovich, 119.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

experiences of racism rest on the foundation of traumatic events such as slavery, lynching, and harassment.”⁸⁰⁷ Influential work that examines the “history of slavery within contemporary culture” as insidious trauma, particularly Cvetkovich recognizes the literature of Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler as well as the essays of Patricia Williams, demands “models that can explain the links between trauma and everyday experiences, the intergenerational transmission from past to present, and the cultural memory of trauma as central to the formation of identities and politics.”⁸⁰⁸ “To return to the traumatic history of slavery and African diaspora as an explanatory context for contemporary racisms and antiracisms is to acknowledge that this history continues to have a legacy in the present,” Cvetkovich writes, “and to grapple also with an equally powerful legacy of its forgetting.”⁸⁰⁹ This “traumatic history,” and its missing archive that is “systematically undocumented given restrictions on literacy for slaves, and governed subsequently by racisms that have suppressed subaltern knowledges,” demands “unusual strategies of representation.”⁸¹⁰ Cvetkovich points directly to the influential work of Avery Gordon on the concept of haunting as one such strategy. Gordon’s haunting as a trauma archive “offers a compelling account of how the past remains simultaneously hidden and present in both material practices and the psyche, in both invisible and visible places.”⁸¹¹

Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* works to “understand modern forms of dispossession, exploitation, repression, and their concrete impacts on the people most affected by them and on

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁸⁰⁹ Cvetkovich, 38.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

our shared conditions of living” by developing “language for identifying hauntings and for writing with the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up.”⁸¹² *Haunting*, Gordon writes, describes how:

that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.⁸¹³

Haunting is “one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life.”⁸¹⁴ It is not the same as being “exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known.”⁸¹⁵ Gordon uses Raymond Williams’ “structure of feeling,” to best describe haunting as an “emergent,” social experience articulating “‘*presence*’ as the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences” those “‘experiences to which the fixed forms do not speak at all, which . . . they do not recognize.’”⁸¹⁶ Sometimes the appearance of the ghost is oblique (“a dead women was not at a conference she was supposed to attend”)⁸¹⁷ and other

⁸¹² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 7-8.

⁸¹³ Gordon, 8.

⁸¹⁴ Gordon, xvi.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

times they grab with their manifestations (“Beloved’s appearance, the breathing presence of this beautiful ghost whose sparse talk is like a series of picture books, bears out this theory of memory as haunting . . . the terrifying intimacies” of antebellum slavery “*waiting for you.*”)⁸¹⁸ Regardless of form, to write about ghosts and to follow where they lead, Gordon argues, “requires attention to what is not seen, but is nonetheless powerfully real; requires attention to what appears dead, but is nonetheless powerfully alive, requires attention to what appears to be in the past, but is nonetheless powerfully present.”⁸¹⁹

Much of Gordon’s text is a lush close reading of Toni Morrison’s unfathomably profound 1985 novel *Beloved* as Morrison’s *Beloved* is, Gordon writes, one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of haunting. Inspired by the 1856 *American Baptist* newspaper story, “A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child,” on Margaret Garner, the fleeing “slave mother, who killed her child rather than see it taken back to slavery,” Morrison’s *Beloved* “remembers” the “anonymous people called slaves . . . these people who don’t know they’re in an era of historical interest. They just know they have to get through the day.”⁸²⁰ A slave woman Sethe, “runs from Kentucky across the frozen Ohio River, giving birth along the way to a daughter named Denver” and spends twenty-eight days outside Cincinnati “with her three other children, her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, and the community before her owners attempt to capture and return her to Sweet Home.”⁸²¹ Faced with this prospect, she attempts to kill all her children and successfully kills one. *Beloved* then sits with the haunted kin that remain

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸²⁰ Gordon, 140.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 139-40.

at 124 Bluestone Road. In *Beloved*, “the ghost enters, all fleshy and real,” (*Beloved. She my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing. I don’t have to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be*)⁸²² “with wants, and a fierce hunger, and she speaks, barely, of course, and in pictures and a coded language. This ghost, *Beloved*, forces a reckoning: she makes those who have contact with her, who love and need her, confront an event in their past that loiters in the present. But *Beloved*, the ghost, is haunted too, and therein lies the challenge Morrison poses.”⁸²³ To follow the ghost where it leads, in Morrison and Gordon’s work, is to attempt to track not only what comes to be unintelligible but the reasons why we cannot coherently speak about these exclusions. *Beloved* spotlights the weight of inheritance, perhaps obscured by generation, but no less a haunting asking “what is too much? What is too much self (pride) when you were not supposed to have one? What is too much to remember when there is yet more? What is too much violence (infanticide) when you are already living with too much violence (slavery)? What is too much to tell, to pass one, when ‘remembering seem[s] unwise (*Beloved* 274), but necessary? The double voice of the ghost will do its work, but it passes itself on as our haunting burden.”⁸²⁴

Beloved, “the ghostly rememory of Sethe’s Medean action,” is the “classic gothic trope of the past haunting the present. She is the literal return of the repressed; the uncanny incarnation of trauma’s trace” in the “physical form of her dead child;” she is a “demonic rememory who

⁸²² Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Random House, 1987), 200.

⁸²³ Gordon, 139.

⁸²⁴ Gordon, 140-41.

enables the ‘disremembering’ of a traumatic past and allows the unspeakable to be spoken.”⁸²⁵ But “the work and the power of the story,” Gordon writes, “lie in giving reasons why the reasons are never quite enough;” why “haunting rather than ‘history’ (or historicism) best captures the constellation of connections that charges any ‘time of the now’ with the debts of the past and the expense of the present, why one woman killed her child and another was haunted by the event.”⁸²⁶ “I started out wanting to write a story about . . . the clipping about Margaret Garner stuck in my head,” Morrison writes, “I had to deal with this nurturing instinct that expressed itself in murder.”⁸²⁷ What the ghost “cannot or will not say,” Morrison’s characters:

fill in with their simultaneously grand and subtle projections; from bits and pieces, fragments and portentous signs, they all make *Beloved* their beloved. *You are mine You are mine You are mine (Beloved, 217)*. Yet, what they see or think they see can never quite grasp what Toni Morrison asks us as readers today to comprehend: that *Beloved* the ghost herself barely possesses a story of loss, which structures the very possibility of enslavement, emancipation, and freedom in which the Reconstructive history of *Beloved* traffics. And thus, *Beloved* the ghost’s double voice speaks not only of Sethe’s dead child but also of an unnamed African girl lost at sea, not yet become an African-American.⁸²⁸

Haunted by “the debts of the past and the expense of the present,” Morrison’s novel is “avowedly fiction; it is not written in the traditional autobiographical voice; it is not sponsored by nor is it testimony vouchsafed by a white authority;” as many of the authorized slave narratives were via filtering through lay abolitionist readers determining who was allowed to bear witness and it “begins in 1873; well after Emancipation . . . But it does retell the story of Margaret Garner . . . claiming its continuous relation to the history (slavery) and form (narrative)

⁸²⁵ Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 46.

⁸²⁶ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 142.

⁸²⁷ Morrison in Clemmons 1987:75.

⁸²⁸ Gordon, 140.

of the origins, in the most general sense, of African American writing in the United States. As is retells one story and in this way summons another, it remembers some of what the slave narrative forgot, creating a palimpsest, a document that has been inscribed several times, where the remnants of earlier, imperfectly erased scripting is still detectable.”⁸²⁹

For Morrison, Gordon writes, this palimpsest of social memory “is not just history, but haunting, not just context, but animated wordliness; not just the hard ground of infrastructural matters, but the shadowy grip of ghostly matters:

the possibility of a collectively animated worldly memory is articulated here in that extraordinary moment in which you—*who never was there* in that real place—can *bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else* . . . You have bumped into somebody else’s memory; you have encountered haunting and the picture of it the ghost imprints. Not only because this memory that is sociality is out there in the world, playing havoc with the normal security historical contexts provides, but because *it will happen again; it will be there for you*. It is *waiting for you*. We were *expected* . . . In order to manage this ‘remembering which seems unwise,’ it will be necessary to broach carefully and cautiously the desires of the ghost itself. The ghost’s desires? Yes, because the ghost is not just the return of the past or the dead. The ghostly matter is that always ‘waiting for you,’ and its motivations, desires, and interventions are remarkable only for being current.⁸³⁰

Furthermore, Morrison’s “resolution of the struggle between Sethe and Beloved helps us to see that haunting as a way of life, or as a method of analysis, or as a type of political consciousness, must be passed on or through.”⁸³¹ Morrison “provides a stunning example” Gordon writes:

of how to hospitably and delicately talk to ghosts and through hauntings, which we must do . . . The ghost not other or alterity as such, ever. It is (like Beloved) pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had . . . A woman walked out of the water thirsty and breathing hard and within the

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 146.

⁸³⁰ Gordon, 166-69.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 182.

gap between more memories than seem tolerable and there being still more, we are reminded of haunting's affliction and its yearning for something that must be done.⁸³²

Resisting “investment in ontologies of disassociation,” histories of denial, erasure, and dispossession, Gordon writes that *Ghostly Matters* was motivated by her “desire to find a method of knowledge production and a way of writing that could represent the damage and the haunting of the historical alternatives and thus richly conjure, describe, narrate, and explain the liens, the costs, the forfeits, and the losses of modern systems of abusive power and their immediacy and worldly significance.”⁸³³ While haunting “is a frightening experience” as it “always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by social violence done in the past or in the present,” haunting, unlike trauma, “is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done.”⁸³⁴ “To be haunted and to write from that location,” like Morrison and Gordon do, is:

to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindness. Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.⁸³⁵

For those of us interested in transformative criticism, Gordon's work on haunting suggests radical political change will come about “only when new forms of subjectivity *and* sociality can be forged by thinking *beyond* the limits of what is already comprehensible” and this is possible only when a “sense of what has been lost or of what we never had can be brought back from

⁸³² Ibid., 182-84.

⁸³³ Ibid., xvii.

⁸³⁴ Gordon, xv-xvi.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 20-22.

exile and articulated fully as a form of longing in *this* world . . . we must seek to revivify our collective capacity to imagine a future radically other to the one ideologically charted out.”⁸³⁶

There is so much for religion and ecology to explore in Gordon and Cvetkovich’s work on trauma and haunting. What is vital, I argue, for understanding the affective economies of devastated landscapes and their marginalization within environmental scholarship is taking heed of Cvetkovich and Gordon’s warnings that transformation is only possible when we embrace the ghosts and welcome their ability to refashion what matters in their illumination of forgotten bodies, places, events, histories, and narratives. New cosmology may not acknowledge the embodied power of past histories, environmental theory as a whole may not recognize ghostly matters in its conceptions of mourning, but the desires for what could have been but never was and the poison of historical violence and its continual iterations that limit what seems possible still seethe here whether they are acknowledged or not. Any environmental theory that hopes for transformation for the Gulf Coast will not find it in longing for a return to what it once was, which was truly a promise for some and horror for others. Nor will we find it in calls to move past all this violence without interrogating how our environmental thought and practice has powerfully fueled these forgettings.

Reckoning with the ghosts that abound along the Gulf Coast, I read poet Natasha Trethewey’s work as a model for environmental scholarship of ways to address ecological decline without side-stepping social and historical pain and erasure. Trethewey provides ways to articulate distress over eroding coastlines without ignoring the traumatic encounters of its inhabitants as well as examples for how to archive all these elements while they are washing away with the tide. Through memoir, personal letters, poetry, and photographs, Trethewey’s

⁸³⁶ Janice Radway, “Foreward,” *Ghostly Matters*, xii.

Beyond Katrina: Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast unsettles problematic narratives of recovery by “engaging in the contest of the public memory of Hurricane Katrina within mainstream representations on a national and local scale.”⁸³⁷ Trethewey particularly resists discourses that only focus on New Orleans or what might be deemed “successful” recovery narratives, by “presenting a more complicated and extensive account of recovery along the Mississippi Gulf Coast—one that will shape our memory of Katrina’s legacy.”⁸³⁸ While Trethewey’s work bears witness to the “complex structures that surround the politics of recovery,”⁸³⁹ as well as what histories of wetland development and increasing economic dependency on casinos has done to the region, *Beyond Katrina* is primarily a narrative about haunted kin. It is about how Trethewey and her beloveds negotiate historical and pressing traumas, erasures, memory, and rememory along a rapidly changing landscape.

Trethewey and her family are connected to North Gulfport, Mississippi, a historically African-American community settled along the Gulf after emancipation that “remained unincorporated until 1994,” and faced the threats of lack of infrastructure for most of its history including frequent flooding and polluted water.⁸⁴⁰ Mirroring the palimpsest of social memory in Morrison and Gordon’s ghostly matters, Trethewey weaves together the memories of her grandparents who have lived to see the incredible changes on the coast along with her and her brother Joe’s childhood memories and more contemporary narratives witnessing to events in a

⁸³⁷ Eloisa Valenzuela-Mendoza, “Bearing Witness to the Dispossessed: Natasha Trethewey’s *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Ten Years After Katrina: Critical Perspectives of the Storm’s Effect on American Culture and Identity*, Mary Ruth Marotte and Glen Jellenik eds, pp. 73-91 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

⁸³⁸ Valenzuela-Mendoza, “Bearing Witness to the Dispossessed,” 73.

⁸³⁹ Valenzuela-Mendoza, 76.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

devastated landscape. “With the destruction of the landscape lies the possibility that this local history will be lost,” is being lost, which “matters because despite desegregation, the fact that North Gulfport remained marginal to the city as a whole until 1994 implies that race and class ruptures continue to be a significant part of the story of the coast, and consequently, part of the story of Hurricane Katrina.”⁸⁴¹ Following the “explosion of casino building, the cost of living dramatically increased, making life more difficult for the working-classes”⁸⁴² and ensuring that some stories of recovery from the storm, narratives of minority communities’ attachments to this coastline, are lost, subverted, and exiled.

After Katrina, caring for exiled family and returning to visit those who remain, Trethewey is bombarded by memories: hers, her beloveds’, and unnamed voices that pull at her for address. Visiting her grandmother who is ninety-one and asking what she remembers, “my grandmother conflates” Hurricane’s Camille and Katrina, she writes, “a woman who has spent most of her life in the same place, she knows she lives in Atlanta now, where I do, because she had to evacuate after Katrina, but she thinks she was at home during landfall, not lying on a cot in a classroom at the public school up the road from her house. Examined by a doctor after evacuating Gulfport, she was disoriented. She hadn’t eaten for weeks, even though the shelter provided MREs . . . the doctor spoke of *trauma* and *depression*, prescribed medication.”⁸⁴³ “She recalls how very young I was during Camille and how my parents moved my crib from room to room all night trying to avoid water pouring in through the roof. When I say, ‘no, Nana—
Katrina:

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Natasha Trethewey, *Beyond Katrina*, 11.

she looks at me, her eyes glassy with confusion, her lips pressed hard together, her brow deeply furrowed, as she tries to piece together the events of the previous two years. She has layered on the old story of Camille the new story of Katrina. Between the two, there is the suggestion of both a narrative and a metanarrative—the way she both remembers and forgets, the erasures, and how intricately intertwined memory and forgetting always are. This too is a story about a story—how it will be inscribed on the physical landscape as well as on the landscape of our cultural memory. I wonder at the competing narratives: What will be remembered, what forgotten? What dominant narrative is now emerging?⁸⁴⁴

Like Gordon describes with haunting, “those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when things are animated, when the over and done with comes alive, when the blind field comes into view, when your own or another’s shadow shines brightly,”⁸⁴⁵ Trethewey tries to get her bearings while facing a rapidly changing landscape and communities shaped by trauma. “People carry with them the blueprints of memory for a place,” she writes:

it is not uncommon to hear directions given in terms of landmarks that are no longer there: ‘turn right at the corner where the fruit stand used to be,’ or ‘across the street from the lot where Miss Mary used to live.’ There are no recognizable landmarks along the coast anymore, no way to get my bearings, no way to feel at home, familiar with the landscape. In time, the landmarks of destruction and rebuilding will overlap and intersect the memory of what was there—narrative and meta-narrative—the pentimento of the former landscape shown only through the shifting memories of the people who carry it with them.⁸⁴⁶

The landscape and its memories hold Trethewey and her beloveds in-between slipping away and emerging narratives. All along the coast, “evidence of rebuilding marks the wild, devastated landscape,” she writes, “a little more than a year before, much debris still littered the ground: crumbled buildings, great piles of concrete and rebar twisted into strange shapes, bridges lifting a path to nowhere. Now new condominium developments rise about the shoreline . . . here and

⁸⁴⁴ Trethewey, *Beyond Katrina*, 11.

⁸⁴⁵ Gordon, 197.

⁸⁴⁶ Trethewey, 60-61.

there are signs of what's still to come: posters reading 'South Beach,' and 'Beachfront living only better.'"⁸⁴⁷ But the reality of what "rebuilding" means for the displaced and dispossessed, the stories that are forgotten about longing for what was lost but never really existed, is the trauma archive Trethewey wants to trace.

What Trethewey offers, "the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding,"⁸⁴⁸ is a love letter, liturgy, dirge to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Trethewey says she's "surprised now that so much of my thinking comes to me in the language of ceremony. But then, when I look up the word *liturgy*, I find that in the original Greek it meant, simply, *one's public duty* . . . I am not a religious woman. This is my liturgy to the Mississippi Gulf Coast:

To the displaced, living in trailers along the coast,
beside the highway,
in vacant lots and open fields; to everyone who stayed
on the coast,
who came back—or cannot—to the coast;

To those who died on the coast.

This is a memory of the coast: to each his own
recollections, her reclamations, their
restorations, the return of the coast.

This is a time capsule for the coast: words of the people
—*don't forget us*—
the sound of wind, waves, the silence of graves,
the muffled voice of history, bulldozed and buried
under sand poured on the eroding coast,
the concrete slabs of rebuilding the coast.

This is a love letter to the Gulf Coast, a praise song, a dirge,
invocation and benediction, a requiem for the Gulf Coast.

This cannot rebuild the coast; it is an indictment,
a complaint,
my *logos*—argument and discourse—with the coast.

⁸⁴⁷ Trethewey, 23.

⁸⁴⁸ Gordon, 182-84.

This is my *nostos*—my pilgrimage to the coast, my memory,
my reckoning—

native daughter: I am the Gulf Coast.⁸⁴⁹

While Trethewey knows she cannot rebuild the coast, she offers a resistance to what is being inscribed on the landscape both in construction and national memory, by sitting with the ghosts and speaking about what has been made invisible (a needed sourness—in complaint, in indictment) witnessing to the memories of beloveds who lived on this coastline for decades who were displaced from their homes and systematically denied recovery and return.

Pushing us to think more deeply about intimacy and attachment in a devastated landscape, Trethewey's kinship of remainders witnesses to long histories of environmental and social injustice particularly through one ghostly figure, a beloved who should be there but is not, her brother Joe. Joe, who like many of the other residents that were not eligible for the government funds that helped corporations and wealthier residents rebuild, was arrested and imprisoned for transporting cocaine to fund the taxes to hold onto the now vacant land he inherited:

there was still the possibility of a life he imagined—prosperous, stable, perhaps even emotionally rewarding, as it had been when he was first renovating those houses. And it must have been in sight, reflected in the images of the 'good life' plastered on casino billboards up and down Interstate 10 and down Highway 49 toward the beach: attractive people, in elegant clothes, laughing into cocktail glasses poised above plates of beautiful, abundant food. The casinos were among the first to rebuild and recover, and they broadcast their message of affluence above the heads of people struggling to reconstruct their lives from remnants.⁸⁵⁰

Trethewey's trauma archive (ghost stories and environmental mourning) weaves in letters from Joe in prison, her despair and numbness at his circumstances, and ultimately witnessing to Joe's

⁸⁴⁹ Trethewey, 65-66.

⁸⁵⁰ Trethewey, 92.

story not being an extraordinary account but one of many in the uneven struggle for survival along the coast. Braiding in a narrative like Joe's along with histories of eroding wetlands and impending storms, I argue Trethewey demands that we regard these landscapes with complexity, resisting separating out one element as an environmental fix. Ghostly matters along the coast illuminate that these populations have troubled but deep attachments to these landscapes and their communities. Their trauma calls out for address, could be a wellspring of and for environmental knowledge, but is buried by "rebuilding" in the same inequalities and violent erasures that seethed before. The kinship of remainders Trethewey brilliantly traces are the pained explorations of attachments to everything rapidly slipping away and the bodies, communities, and habitats that remain to puzzle through and negotiate these changes. Trethewey's narratives should encourage us to continually ask: recovery and restoration for whom? To what ends? At what cost? My conception of kinship remainders helps us see what recovery looks like when we pay attention to what is seething outside the frame. The queer connections of life to object and place, those displaced by environmental crisis, reframe a notion of kinship around remainders and the haunting of those who cannot return. Kinship remainders are the bodies, objects, and lives of those who remain and carry these inheritances in their affinities and attachments.

Unspeakable Muck and Queer Melancholy

Reshaping our theory around kinship remainders on the Gulf Coast requires we leave behind awe, wonder, and reverence as normative affective attachments and wrestle with bad feelings. Drawing from queer theory's critiques of affective normativity, particularly Leo Bersani, Michael Warner, and Bidy Martin, Cvetkovich contends that part of the critique of universal narratives "requires that we also keep alive not only transgressive desires but also

emotional attachments, pleasures, fascinations, and curiosities that do not necessarily produce, reflect, or line up neatly with political ideologies or oppositional movements.”⁸⁵¹ For example, as Eve Sedgwick and others have noted, the “reclamation of shame constitutes an alternative to the model of gay pride, carving out new possibilities for claiming queer, gay, and lesbian identities that don’t involve a repudiation of the affects brought into being by homophobia.”⁸⁵² In her work to depathologize trauma, Cvetkovich attaches to these queer reclamations to “open up possibilities for understanding traumatic feelings not as a medical problem in search of a cure but as felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics.”⁸⁵³ By not presuming “in advance a particular affective experience associated with trauma,” but rather considering trauma as a “category that embraces a range of affects, including not just loss and mourning but also anger, shame, humor, sentimentality, and more,” Cvetkovich opens up ways to examine “historical and social experience in affective terms” through developing “queer approaches to trauma” that “can appreciate the creative ways in which people respond to it.”⁸⁵⁴ “Catalyzed in part by the AIDS crisis,” she writes, “queer scholars have also investigated the nexus of mourning and melancholy” producing “understandings of collective affective formations that break through the presumptively privatized nature of affective experience” and offering “reconsiderations of melancholy as a form of mourning that should not be pathologized.”⁸⁵⁵ Public recognition of traumatic experience has

⁸⁵¹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 46.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁵³ Cvetkovich, 47.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

often only been “achieved through cultural struggle,” which is one way Cvetkovich argues that we can view 1980s AIDS activism, as “the demand for such recognition.”⁸⁵⁶ That “battle has involved combating” not only oppression and homophobia but negotiations with the “persistence of mourning,” particularly how mourning and melancholy become critical parts of activism.⁸⁵⁷ Particularly in Eng and Muñoz’s work, explorations of melancholy articulate how affective experience is shaped by race, sex, and gender. Muñoz writes “about melancholy in works by African American gay men as a ‘depathologized structure of feeling,’ suggesting that ambivalences of disidentification, far from disabling cultural production, are a rich resource.”⁸⁵⁸ Cvetkovich highlights Douglas Crimp’s (1989) essay “Mourning and Militancy,” as canonical for trauma archive research in his argument that “militancy cannot ease every psychic burden and that the persistence of mourning, if not also melancholy, must be reckoned with in the context of activism.”⁸⁵⁹ Crimp’s essay articulates how insidious trauma invades the everyday and how trauma’s “effects are mediated through forms of oppression such as homophobia,”⁸⁶⁰ by claiming safe sex within persistent homophobia itself constitutes a loss: “alongside the dismal toll of death, what many of us have lost is a culture of sexual possibility . . . now our untamed impulses are either proscribed once again or shielded from us by latex . . . for many men of the Stonewall generation, who have also been the gay population thus far hardest hit by AIDS, safe sex may seem less like defiance than resignation, less like accomplished mourning than

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., 160.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid., 163.

melancholia.”⁸⁶¹ Gay men living with the everyday specter of AIDS must negotiate trauma that’s unspeakable, ungrievable, and rendered ghostly. Crimp writes:

through the turmoil imposed by illness and death, the rest of society offers little support or even acknowledgment. On the contrary, we are blamed, belittled, excluded, derided. We are discriminated against, lose our housing and jobs, and are denied medical and life insurance. Every public agency whose job it is to combat the epidemic has been slow to act, failed entirely, or been deliberately counterproductive. We have therefore had to provide our own centers for support, care, and education and even to fund and conduct our own treatment research. We have had to rebuild our devastated community and culture, reconstruct our sexual relationships, reinvent our sexual pleasure. Despite great achievements in so short a time and under such adversity, the dominant media still pictures us only as wasting deathbed victims; we have therefore had to wage a war of representation, too. Frustration, anger, rage, and outrage, anxiety, fear, and terror, shame and guilt, sadness and despair—it is not surprising that we feel these things; what is surprising is that we often don’t. For those who feel only a deadening numbness or constant depression, militant rage may well be unimaginable, as again it might be for those who are paralyzed with fear, filled with remorse, or overcome with guilt. To decry these responses—our own form of moralism—is to deny the extent of the violence we have all endured; even more importantly, it is to deny a fundamental fact of psychic life: violence is also self-inflicted.⁸⁶²

Crimp articulates that the war on representation, how minor communities respond to normativity and disinheritance, can themselves result in deep losses by positioning those out-of-step desires, affects, and kin deemed unruly outside the frame thus purging the community of “‘fringe’ gay groups,”—drag queens, radical fairies, pederasts, bull dykes, and other assorted scum.”⁸⁶³

Furthermore, Crimp “emphasizes the ways in which putatively normal practices of mourning are foreclosed for gay men—because they are faced with the prospect of their own deaths, because gay identities are erased at funerals organized by families, because they have been at too many funerals.”⁸⁶⁴ Crimp, too, seems to be asking, *what is too much? What is too much self (pride)*

⁸⁶¹ Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (1989): 11.

⁸⁶² Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” 15-16.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁶⁴ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 164.

when you were not supposed to have one? What is too much to remember when there is yet more? What is too much violence when you are already living with too much violence? For religion and ecology, this scholarship in queer, feminist, and critical race responses to trauma and mourning should make us: hesitant about universal environmental narratives, resistant to limiting our affective engagements by following these models that recognize those bodies, identities, places, and creatures rendered ghostly by our environmental hopes, and cautious about which subjects and affects we deem “appropriate” to fuel environmental change.

Thinking with the ghosts (the collateral damage, the acceptable losses, those bodies that have been living out complex and precarious relationships with their environments for some time) by embracing affects eschewed by universal environmental narratives like new cosmology, Jennifer James and Catriona Sandilands bring the melancholic affinities of queer trauma archives into environmental thinking through considering ecomelancholia for our troubled times. Sandilands and James join Cvetkovich, Butler, Muñoz, and Eng in wishing to “rethink Freud’s definition of melancholia as an inherently debilitating, pathological condition, who choose to read persistent mourning as missives from politically aggrieved and emotionally bereaved communities.”⁸⁶⁵ For Freud, James argues, “mourning is a necessary but *temporary* process of grieving which, in his words, ‘spontaneously’ ends after an unspecified period of time . . . Once the ego has successfully ‘renounced everything that has been lost,’ the mourner can ‘once more [be] free to replace the lost objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious . . . In proper mourning, grieving occurs, then dissipates after the object is relinquished” but for the “melancholic subject, however, mourning is seemingly unending. Undone by the experience of

⁸⁶⁵ Jennifer C. James, “Eco-Melancholia: Slavery, War, and Black Ecological Imaginings,” in *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, Stephanie LeMenager, Teresa Shewry, and Ken Hiltner, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 165.

loss, incomplete, the ego's libidinal energy scouts for new love objects for the ego before it has fully restored itself."⁸⁶⁶ If we "take the 'love object' as the natural world," James writes, "ecomelancholia can be thought of as the inability or *unwillingness* to 'stop mourning' ecological loss and losses associated with 'the land' in a present where loss continues."⁸⁶⁷ "Ecomelancholia disavows mourning's 'renewable' economy and the attendant theory that scarcity mitigates loss," James argues, "the recovery of lost love objects disappearing lands, species, finite natural resources, ways of life—would prove impossible in many instances. There will be no 'fresh' objects to replace the natural world, and none 'more precious.'"⁸⁶⁸ To read "African American literature ecocritically," James writes, to explore black environmental imaginaries, "is to encounter black loss," "black collective trauma," and the systematic denial of black communities from articulating their own complex affective relationships with the more-than-human world.⁸⁶⁹ While these losses continue unrecognized, both in our more-than-human relationships and marginalized negotiations with grief, it "will fall to the ecomelancholics," she writes, "those 'cursed with long memory,' to remind us of the disastrous consequences of forgetting."⁸⁷⁰ "How do we navigate the place of black grief," James asks, "especially if we are black women for whom that affect poses professional risks? My answer (at least today) is that we accept the unleashing of historical mourning as part of what we do, as a natural consequence of black historical looking."⁸⁷¹ Ecomelancholia's "historical and memorial disposition defends

⁸⁶⁶ James, 165-66.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁸⁶⁸ James, 166.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸⁷¹ Jennifer James, "Looking," *Feminist Studies* 41 (2015): 216.

against mourning's call to prematurely forget. It responds to the cumulative losses of nature, land, resources, and to traumas tied to those losses, such as death, deracination, and dispossession; it is activated by ongoing and interrelated social and political violence, including the catastrophes of war, genocide, and poverty."⁸⁷²

Working in queer ecologies, interdisciplinary scholarship that considers the joint construction of sexuality and nature by further unsettling nature-culture divides, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and others like Bruce Erickson, Giovanna Di Chiro, and Katie Hogan consider "environmentally inflected moral regulation," and other ways "in which historical and contemporary formations of natural space have been organized by changing understandings and agendas related to sexuality."⁸⁷³ Scholarship in queer ecologies asks:

what does it mean that ideas, spaces, and practices designated as 'nature' are often so vigorously defended against queers in a society in which that very nature is increasingly degraded and exploited? What do queer interrogations of science, politics, and desire then offer to environmental understanding? And how might a clearer attention to issues of nature and environment—as discourse, as space, as ideal, as practice, as relationship, as potential—inform and enrich queer theory, lgbtq politics, and research into sexuality and society?⁸⁷⁴

Recognizing the "absence of a societal and personal story of loss and grief in which to place environmental understanding," Mortimer-Sandilands draws from the "political potential of a queer rewriting of loss and melancholia" in memoirs tracing "intimate and world-changing relationships with AIDS and death."⁸⁷⁵ Mortimer-Sandilands emphasizes that if we do not yet

⁸⁷² James, "Eco-Melancholia," 167.

⁸⁷³ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erikson, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies," 6-12.

⁸⁷⁴ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, "Introduction," 5.

⁸⁷⁵ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies," 334.

have social recognition of immense ecological loss, particularly in those places and communities far from center, nor cultural expressions to mourn together, at what point is it clear, “that the subject will not,” she argues, “simply, ‘substitute’ one object for another.”⁸⁷⁶ Melancholia suggests a “present that is not only haunted but *constituted* by the past— literally built of ruins and rejections.”⁸⁷⁷ In a context in which certain lives are considered ungrievable, ecomelancholia *as resistance* “represents a holding-on to loss in defiance” of “imperatives to forget, move on, and transfer attention to a new relationship.”⁸⁷⁸ Mortimer-Sandilands offers “queer ecological activists a language in which to resist a commodification of nature that removes the specificity of nature, including the possibility of grieving for individual elements and instances of nature.”⁸⁷⁹ What might it mean “to consider the preservation of a public record of environmental loss,” she writes, “an ‘archive of ecological trauma’—made up of the kinds of art, literature, film, ritual, performance, and other memorials and interrogations that have characterized so many cultural responses to AIDS—as part of an environmental ethics or politics?”⁸⁸⁰ Furthermore, instead of “fetishizing the about-to-be-absences of a more ‘pristine’ nature,”⁸⁸¹ Mortimer-Sandilands advocates for the value of devastated landscapes by asking us to dwell with what has been lost and examine how trauma and loss can become a part of everyday environmental relationships. “What would it mean to consider seriously the environmental present,” she asks, “as a pile of

⁸⁷⁶ Mortimer-Sandilands, “Melancholy Natures,” 340.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Mortimer-Sandilands, “Melancholy Natures,” 354.

⁸⁷⁹ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, “Introduction,” 38.

⁸⁸⁰ Mortimer-Sandilands, “Melancholy Natures,” 342.

⁸⁸¹ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, “Introduction,” 39.

environmental wreckage, constituted and haunted by multiple, personal, and deeply traumatic losses? . . . In short, what might it look like to take seriously the fact that nature is currently ungrievable, and that the melancholy natures with which we are surrounded are a desperate attempt to hold onto something that we don't even know how to talk about grieving?"⁸⁸²

Cultivating an ecomelancholia that is sensitive to social inequalities, I argue, would require more thinking about the timescapes of environmental degradation—the sedimented complexities that shape our encounters and intimacies. It must resist the passive habits of white environmentalism that require ignoring intensifying devastation and its historical and ongoing effects on non-white bodies as part of loving the earth again. We must orient ourselves not toward one evolutionary narrative, one grand story, but the multiplicity of ignored or forgotten archives carried by the bodies and habitats of kinship remainders. Importantly, we must also shoulder the complicated emotions environmental activists will face within precarious futures—a willingness to sit with unpleasant emotions and an openness to creative responses to the kinds of trauma and pain that impact trouble-kin. Concluding this chapter, I look at two images from Kara Walker's *After the Deluge* that experiment with time, material, and embodiment to further help us to think through uncomfortable emotions at the intersections of racial and environmental trauma along the Gulf Coast. Walker's evocative images and prose serve, as I read them, as an ecomelancholic archive⁸⁸³—a preservation of the complex affective encounters avoided by universal narratives like new cosmology.

⁸⁸² Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures," 342.

⁸⁸³ My hopes for future lives for this project are that it will be afforded the time and resources to dig much deeper into the possible intersections of racial and environmental melancholy. For more see Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial*

Kara Walker's (1969-) work is provocative in all the affective ways that word resonates. Whether critics find her projects ultimately helpful or harmful, what they are is stimulating, unsettling, disconcerting, shocking. They illicit visceral response. Best known for her cut paper silhouettes that often depict graphic violence, sexual assault, and degradation, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw writes that Walker's "use of silhouettes and profiles to image race and 'otherness' . . . confronts and addresses the ongoing battle to counteract negative images of the African American body in Western visual culture and in the United States in particular."⁸⁸⁴ Walker taps into "both the latent and the virulent racist icons of the visual and textual past," Shaw argues, "in order to make her audience 'see the unspeakable.'"⁸⁸⁵ Furthermore, Shaw writes, "the disturbing and often melancholic tone of Walker's art reflects, and offers up for critique, the problem of the broader culture's inability to come to terms with the past."⁸⁸⁶ Like Morrison and Gordon's trauma archives, Walker's work sits with ghostly matters to listen for "a discourse made up of the horrific accounts of physical, mental, and sexual abuse that were left unspoken by former slaves as they related their narratives, the nasty and unfathomable bits of detritus that have been left out of familiar histories of American race relations."⁸⁸⁷ This "unclaimed discourse of the

Melancholia (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Angela Pulley Hudson, "Mississippi Lost and Found: Anne Moody's Autobiograph(ies) and Racial Melancholia," *Auto/Biography Studies* 20, no. 2 (2005); Tyrone S. Palmer, "'What Feels More Than Feeling?': Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017); Christopher Peterson, *Kindred Specters: Death, Mourning and American Affinity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016);

⁸⁸⁴ Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable*, 6.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

unspeakable continues to impact the ability of many European Americans and many African Americans to confront the terrible impression that the legacy of slavery continues to have on our individual and collective psyches,” Shaw contends, and Walker’s work picks at the “deeply embedded gothic culture of denial and repression at the core of contemporary society.”⁸⁸⁸

The provocative cut paper form Walker uses in many of her pieces forces the viewer to wrestle with unsettling ambiguities. The silhouettes trace black cut-outs but are not necessarily black bodies, they are open for interpretation, eliciting a squirming discomfort from the viewer about what is and is not projected onto the images. Through her research “into the history of silhouettes and race in American visual culture,” Shaw argues that the “artistic practice of Kara Walker is important not only for the ruckus that it stirred up, but also for the profound way that it redraws issues of race through the nostalgic and deceptively innocent form of the silhouette.”⁸⁸⁹ Walker subverts and rewrites “the white voice of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel, the mediated voice of the slave narrative, and the twentieth-century historical romance novel, as well as assorted libertine pornography of the previous two centuries,” through these silhouettes.⁸⁹⁰ “By rendering all of her characters black ciphers,” Shaw argues, Walker “is able to incarnate the ‘master, mistress, overseer, pickaninny, and buck,’ and elucidate the way power relations and the sexual exchange of raced and gendered bodies occurs within our varied cultural fantasies of race and representation.”⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁹ Shaw, 26.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid. 26.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

Of course, work this evocative faces detractors and sincere critiques about whether Walker entrenches troubling representations further into American imaginaries, but I am compelled by the power of Walker's work and its insistence that we cannot confront the present without conjuring up the past. Echoing J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Shaw argues that Walker's work ultimately raises the question of "what it meant for a nation's collective identity that certain Americans embraced slavery's culture of torture and death."⁸⁹² Crevecoeur's 18th century writings lamented "the state of a youthful self-styled southern gentry that was already decayed from its core, as gangrenous and putrescent as the bodies of the African slaves that it tortured to maintain its own dominance."⁸⁹³ Crevecoeur's question "of what such malfeasance meant for a collective American consciousness" still lies "unanswered in the beginning of the twenty-first" century and Walker's pieces address that gaping need for address.⁸⁹⁴ Using nineteenth-and twentieth-century source material "to visualize unspeakable experiences and to produce psychologically disruptive, gothic silhouette 'pageants,'" Walker's "paper silhouettes, prints, and drawings:

have shown themselves to be the shadows of similar sightless 'specters,' monstrous ghosts haunting the American imago. Her images present themselves to the contemporary spectator as challenges to the politeness of middle-class and liberal society. The abject state of the work cannot be dismissed as merely the product of their creator's self-loathing, social contempt, and subversive vision; rather it is linked to a pervasive culture of subsumed abjection . . . Their power lies in the way they make people feel uncomfortable by visualizing their sublimated fears and desires . . . Regardless of whether it is the guilt of having benefited from racism or of having been a victim of it, or of having harbored interracial, homosexual, bestial, sadomasochistic, or pederastic sexual desire, it is the guilt of never having owned up to any of it that will bother spectators as they experience Walker's work. 'It is not what you've done to me that menaces you,'

⁸⁹² Shaw, 153.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

declared James Baldwin during a taped discussion with writer Frank Shatz about slavery and abolitionists. ‘It’s what you’ve done to you that menaces you.’⁸⁹⁵

After the Deluge is what Walker calls a “visual essay,” a short text and a collection of Walker’s own works and some of other artists into a “ruminations on a fear of the deep and the problem of the shallow—skin deep.”⁸⁹⁶ Walker writes she “created this book because I was tired of seeing news images of (Black) people suffering presented as though it were a fresh, new thrilling subject.”⁸⁹⁷ “The book is the result of thinking like a Black Woman,” she writes, “perhaps absurdly so, because to be ‘Black’ in the context of the book means broad sweeps of types of representation: stereotypical, archetypal, Negro, African, the color of nighttime, the color of cut paper, the feeling of engulfment, the sense of humor, the style of outrage.”⁸⁹⁸ For *After the Deluge*, “the story that has interested me is the story of Muck,” Walker writes:

at this book’s inception the narrative of Hurricane Katrina has shifted precariously away from the hyperreal horror show presented to the outside world as live coverage of a frightened and helpless populace (relayed by equally frightened and helpless reporters) to a more assimilable legend. Lately, the narrative of the disaster has turned to ‘security failures,’ or ‘the question of race and poverty,’ or ‘rebirth.’ I’ve heard harrowing anecdotes of survival and humorous tales of rancid refrigerators. And always at the end of these tales, reported on the news, in newspapers, and by word of mouth, always there is a puddle—a murky, unnavigable space that is overcrowded with intangibles: shame, remorse, vanity, morbidity, silence.⁸⁹⁹

Staying with the Muck, the visual essay that flows out is a collection of her own pieces along with some nineteenth century art and more contemporary images that I read as positioning

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 155-56.

⁸⁹⁶ Kara Walker, *After the Deluge* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), jacket commentary.

⁸⁹⁷ Walker, jacket commentary.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Walker, *After the Deluge*, 7.

Katrina as an event,⁹⁰⁰ as per Ahmed, with a particular background and the visual essay details the “conditions of emergence,” for a disaster that Walker writes is misguidedly positioned as “new.”⁹⁰¹ The collection overflows with fluids: ocean waves, river flows, blood pools, breastmilk drips, oil spills. The fluid cannot be contained despite its unspeakability. “We tell stories of events to allude to the unspeakable,” Walker writes:

rumors and jokes fill in the uncomfortable, antisocial gaps. Vulnerability, failure, panic tell of themselves through careful observation of things like body language and eye contact. I’ve seen music, dance, and Mardi Gras celebrations activate damaged, closed-off psychic spaces; they provide hope. But what role can the visual arts play in reexamining one of America’s greatest social failures? ‘Not much’ is the pessimistic conclusion I came to, followed by a close examination of a line of thinking familiar to Blacks, as expressed to my grandmother: ‘All you have to do in this world is stay Black and die.’ This phrase sums up multilayered experiences of suppression, resentment, and rage. I have asked the objects in this book to do one more thing. Instead of sitting very still, ‘staying Black,’ and waiting to die, I have asked each one to take a step beyond its own borders to connect a series of thoughts together related to fluidity and the failure of containment.⁹⁰²

What fails to remain contained is not just the flood waters of Katrina but the Muck. The Muck is what Gordon might call the “seething absence” of an unspeakable presence that “investment in ontologies of disassociation” renders ghostly.⁹⁰³ Or what Christina Sharpe calls “monstrous intimacies,” those “subjectivities constituted from transatlantic slavery onward and connected, then as now, by the everyday mundane horrors that aren’t acknowledged to be horrors . . . slavery’s inherited and reproduced spaces of shame, confinement, intimacy, desire, violence, and

⁹⁰⁰ See also Lloyd Pratt, “New Orleans and Its Storm: Exception, Example, or Event,” *American Literary History* 19, no. 1 (2007) and “In the Event: An Introduction,” *differences* 19, no. 2 (2008).

⁹⁰¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 38.

⁹⁰² Walker, *After the Deluge*, 9.

⁹⁰³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xix.

terror.”⁹⁰⁴ “This book is not simply about New Orleans or Katrina or waterborne disaster,”

Walker writes:

it is an attempt to understand the subconscious narratives at work when we talk about such an event . . . Black life, urban and rural Southern life, is often related as if it were an entity with a shadowy beginning and a potentially heroic future, but with a soul that is crippled by racist psychosis. One theme in my artwork is the idea that a Black subject in the present tense is a container for specific pathologies from the past and is continually growing and feeding off those maladies. Racist pathology is the Muck, aforementioned. In this book’s analogy, murky, toxic waters become the amniotic fluid of a potentially new and difficult birth, flushing out of a coherent and stubborn body long-held fears and suspicions.⁹⁰⁵

The Muck, seething, and monstrous intimacies are the binding inheritances, not consanguineous lineage or evolutionary inheritance, that only advocating for a kinship of remainders can begin to help us understand.

Many of the images in the collection call out for an environmental reading but two images I find particularly moving. The first is one of the opening images of *After the Deluge*, a familiar one to those that write about Katrina, an AP image taken by Bill Haber. The full-page color photo shows a large black woman in a white tank top slowly moving through chest-high water.⁹⁰⁶ She carries a small bag, assumedly filled with whatever she could leave with, and a pack of bottled water. In full sun, around her the ripples in the water are a rainbow sheen—the chest-high flooding full of oil and other toxic substances from the multiple hazardous breaches in the storms wake. The image was and is jarring for many reasons the least of which is the painful juxtaposition of the toxic floods and bottled water. The title for the quilted collection, *After the Deluge*, stitches it into the context of biblical flooding. Reading this image, queer ecocriticism

⁹⁰⁴ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 3-4.

⁹⁰⁵ Walker, *After the Deluge*, 9.

⁹⁰⁶ AP Images/Bill Haber in Kara Walker, *After the Deluge: A Visual Essay* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 8.

scholar Michael P. Bibler finds that “the undrinkable toxic soup” and its oil-slick sheen “in which the woman swims” collapses “Noah, disaster and promise . . . into a single frame” and “relocated from the sky to the water itself, the toxic rainbow becomes a symbol of the ‘potentially new and difficult birth’ . . . Walker’s discussion of muck’s fertile possibilities repaints this colorful sludge as a potential source of transformation, maybe even salvation, in and of itself.”⁹⁰⁷ Salvation for whom, of course, is an open question. Bibler reads the image as “the promise of new life” for the woman in the “flood itself, rather than something far away in the sky,” her “salvation” lying in her “ability to negotiate the muck, to keep swimming.”⁹⁰⁸ I am more inclined to read the inclusion of this image and its fertile possibilities as directed toward the viewer. Whatever promise that could be made that would birth something new would be a promise to attend to the Muck. Whatever we make in the future carries her and the waters with us as a birthing of oddkin— a melancholic kinship of remainders that doesn’t forget. Reading it in connection with Walker’s commitment to staying-with the trouble suggests a way to think of queer love for mutated landscapes as a wading through the muck-that-binds bodies, beings, and habitats together in complex futures; no longer invested in disassociation but wedded in its intimacies.

The second image is one of Walker’s untitled silhouettes from 1996 that is included toward the end of the collection.⁹⁰⁹ It depicts a barefooted woman in an apron holding up a creature that is half-girl, half-alligator to the gaze of small more elegantly dressed male figure that stands to the right sweeping off his top hat in some form of address. Guided by Giorgio

⁹⁰⁷ Michael P. Bibler, “The Flood Last Time: ‘Muck’ and the Uses of History in Kara Walker’s ‘Rumination’ on Katrina,” *Journal of American Studies* 44, no. 3 (2010), 507.

⁹⁰⁸ Bibler, “The Flood Last Time,” 511.

⁹⁰⁹ Kara Walker, untitled, 1996. Cut paper, watercolor, and graphite on paper mounted on canvas, (176.5 cm x 167.6 cm), private collection. Walker, *After the Deluge*, 95.

Agamben, Holly Cade Brown reads this image as a “blurred human-animal hybrid” indicating that “the politics of distinction between the human and the animal that Agamben describes have historically been utilized and exploited in order to exclude and marginalize racialized subjects;” the “indelicat manner in which the female figure holds the monstrous child, indicates that the child is being held up in order to be inspected by a fully human form” and, judged inadequate, rendered disposable.⁹¹⁰ Any number of interpretations can be drawn from this image and Brown’s is compelling. However, the placement of the image toward the conclusion of the visual essay (*After the Deluge* is importantly sandwiched between these two images of rainbow promises and oddkin birthings) leads me to connect it to a birthing from toxicity. We can think of the gator-girl as the fruits of the tangled histories and toxic sediments Walker wades us through. Holding her up by a braid for inspection replaces the swinging strange fruit of southern trees with a different kind of strangeness—a mutation via the rot of slow violence, the embodied implications of histories of toxicity and racialized violence in the swampy south that are rendered ghostly by environmental theory.⁹¹¹ Again, I read the image less as commentary on the disposition of the female figure and more as call to viewer, what do we make of all this now? Take a look at what you’ve done. Whatever our interpretation, there is an intimacy here: a kinship of those left behind seeping into each other, a seething unleashed that unsettles our conceptions of intimacy and reciprocity. Can we create an environmental theory that would reach

⁹¹⁰ Holly Cade Brown, “Figuring Giorgio Agamben’s ‘Bare Life’ in the Post-Katrina Works of Jesmyn Ward and Kara Walker,” *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 1-19.

⁹¹¹ My gratitude to Christopher Carter and my copanelists on the 2017 AAR panel “Critical Approaches to Racial and Environmental Justice”, particularly Karen Crozier from the Fresno County Historical Museum and her paper titled “Black Prey, White Predator: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Practical Theology of Racial Freedom in the U.S. ‘Wilderness,’” for helping me develop these nascent ideas.

out and take up that gatorbaby and cradle her to our breast? What could religion and ecology accomplish by claiming her as beloved kin?

For kinship to be provocative for the future, for devastated landscapes and precarious others, what kind of kinship do we want to cultivate? The kinship of remainders I have traced here (those who remain in devastated environments, who remain with trouble-kin, who are the remainders outside of normative kinship's embrace) model how to *do* kinship rather than just be kin. They project kinship as an active process of remembering and forward desire, the desire to be-long into the future even for the disinherited. Staying with the trouble—the ghosts, the muck, the monstrous—these stories tell us about intimacy and attachment by resisting universal narratives like new cosmology's to articulate how complex emotional relationships really are, how trauma and grief can be motivating for environmental thinking, and how affinity and attachment mean different things here—not easy reciprocity but a twisting braid that is often horrifying but nonetheless intimate. These intimacies push us to ask, how do we reckon with what religion and ecology has rendered ghostly? We must cultivate “the willingness to follow ghosts, neither to memorialize nor to slay,” Gordon writes, but to “follow where they lead, in the present, head turned backwards and forwards at the same time. To be haunted in the name of the will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine what was lost that never even existed, really. . . . If you let it, the ghost can lead you toward what has been missing, which is sometimes everything.”⁹¹²

⁹¹² Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 57-58.

Chapter Seven Queer Love for Devastated Landscapes

Late summer 2017, it is flooding in Texas. Harvey came to my city, Houston, and reshaped how I feel about it. Moving up the Texas coast, Harvey chewed up and spit out the coastline then sat for a spell saturating the Bayou city with an unfathomable amount of rain. We evacuated shoving two kids, my mother, four dogs, and two guinea pigs into the car and drove practically blind deeper into Houston on a disturbingly abandoned freeway because all other roads were already underwater. I grabbed my laptop, books, and some framed pictures on the way out but forgot dry pants. County dump trucks came to evacuate one of my sisters and her children. My other sister, a teacher in a rural district, joined other teachers in pickup trucks moving house-to-house checking on students and helping to clear away dead livestock. Returning after some of the flood water receded, we did the agonizing wait of seeing how high the Brazos river would crest. We stood on the levee separating the wet from the dry turning our neighborhood into an island while all the other homes across the street started filling up and gratitude started feeling like a shameful twist in my guts. Conversations with strangers and friends start with identifying whether you were part of the wet or the dry, and then move to describing panicked evacuations, frustrating waits on FEMA funds, and an uncomfortable gratitude (*we know we should be thankful*) for what remains. Late summer 2017, Irma and Maria destroyed the islands and California and Montana caught on fire. Recovering from 2017, many of us are (understandably) more intimate with apocalyptic thinking. It is difficult to find media about the storms that does not use “apocalyptic” to try and describe the damage.

What has not changed, except for perhaps my sense of urgency, is what I want to advocate for here at The End which is resistance to our apocalyptic habits through crafting futures with disaster. Continuing the work of the previous chapter on developing a new sense of

what kinship might be, concluding I want to think on futurity for trouble-kin. What future is there for damaged habitats, disabled, ill, and mutating bodies? Why stay with devastated landscapes when those who claim common sense have moved-on? How might we resist both Edenic pasts *and* apocalyptic futures by staying with the trouble of environmental disaster?⁹¹³ Concluding, I consider hopes for flourishing in troubled times by cultivating desires to be-long for abject human and nonhuman bodies both within our theory and our environments. Further engaging Carolyn Finney's argument that our problematic relationships with the natural environment are intimately linked to our problematic relationships with each other, I contend the lack of engagement with the human and nonhuman creatures and habitats changed by devastation is the result of environmental theory's fundamental discomfort with desire and futurity for ill, disabled, and abject bodies.

Another response to the trouble of creatively addressing environmental degradation is working through the compulsory able-bodied and able-mindedness within new cosmology's conceptions of kinship, within most steams of environmental thought, while illuminating how it contributes to aversion to damaged creatures, ecosystems, and communities. The discomfort, disgust, and paternalism scholars like Alison Kafer, Stacy Alaimo, Mel Chen, Kelly Fritsch, and Sarah Jaquette Ray spotlight as habitually directed toward porous disabled and ill bodies affectively maps onto ill and disabled creatures, environments, and the human communities that experience them intimately. Tracing a conversation between scholarship in crip and queer theory on cultivating futures that embrace abject bodies—imagining disability, desire, and intimacy differently—I conclude by offering alternative mappings of affinity and futurity through challenging religion and ecology to push beyond a reliance on simplistic readings of biological

⁹¹³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

kinship to explore: what is desired in “nature”? And, what does “nature” desire? Furthermore, what does it mean to *desire nature* when this “nature” is devastated?

Understandably, environmental thinking within religion and ecology can tend toward apocalyptic thinking.⁹¹⁴ Moderately comfortable with apocalyptic narratives in American religio-cultural landscapes, religion scholarship on environmental concerns often uses apocalyptic tones to convey urgency and “wake-up” scholarship. Though, resonating with the hesitancy in Timothy Morton (2010, 2013) Lisa Sideris (2013, 2015), Catherine Keller (1996), and Whitney Bauman’s (2014, 2015) work on ecoapocalyptic themes, I similarly question what apocalypticism accomplishes, occludes, and protects.⁹¹⁵ Keller and Bauman recognize that apocalyptic narratives “can be a source of violence towards human and earth ‘others’” particularly those “norm of the center—dark bodies, poor bodies, multiply abled bodies, queer bodies, and animal bodies,” which are considered “acceptable losses in disasters” like BP and climate change fueled storms.⁹¹⁶ Futurity for bodies beyond grieving, those bodies occluded by apocalyptic fantasies, are my concerns here “at the end” of this project. Building on the attention to quotidian encounters in previous chapters, I inquire about those creatures and vital materialities absented by speculative futurities that erase multiplicities of environmental encounter.

⁹¹⁴ JAAR’s June 2015 special issue on climate change is a good example of the use of apocalyptic language in religion and ecology.

⁹¹⁵ Sarah J. King, “*The End of the World As We Know It? Apocalypticism, Interdisciplinarity, and the Study of Religion.*” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2015), 424.

⁹¹⁶ Whitney Bauman, “Disability Studies, Queer Theory, and the New Materialism,” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 71.

Apocalyptic Futures

Haraway argues that staying with the trouble resists two frequent responses to the “horrors” of the “Anthropocene”—the geological epoch characterized by tremendous human transformation of the planet.⁹¹⁷ The first, is a “comic faith in technofixes” or “technoapocalypses;” “whether secular or religious: technology will somehow come to the rescue of its naughty but very clever children, or what amounts to the same thing, God will come to the rescue of his disobedient but ever hopeful children” however destructive this rescue may prove to be.⁹¹⁸ The second response, a perhaps more destructive bitter cynicism Haraway argues, is the “position that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world.”⁹¹⁹ While this attitude makes sense, she says, in our current environmental distress, the futurisms in both of these common responses ignore the tangle of our material and social realities and can be discouraging to potential odd-couplings, working together in surprising combinations for change.

As I have outlined, in areas of ecological collapse habitat and species erasure are quotidian realities offering religious ecotheory numerous affective quandaries. Renewed or continued existence for diverse naturecultures is precarious so hopes for a return to wholeness are painfully inappropriate and hopes for the future are complex. In these times, understandably, public sentiment and environmental thinking within religion and ecology can tend toward apocalyptic affects. However, apocalyptic affects can obscure the fact that some bodies and

⁹¹⁷ Haraway, *Staying With The Trouble*, 3.

⁹¹⁸ Haraway, 3.

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

communities are habitually regarded as environmentally disposable, their losses rarely registered as loss, and in times of crisis most often abandoned. While we cannot avoid apocalyptic thinking in a culture saturated by it, apocalyptic tendencies should give us pause as Haraway and Marilyn Strathern suggest, “it matters what matters we use to think other matters with . . . it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”⁹²⁰

While some ecoapocalypticism wrestles directly with Jewish and Christian texts, what is more pervasive within what Catherine Keller calls our “apocalyptic imaginary,” is a “wider matrix of unconscious tendencies, an *apocalypse habit*,” that simmers under a “colloquial idiom” just “spectacular enough to bring to the surface the totalizing threat which lurks just beneath mass consciousness.”⁹²¹ This “apocalypse pattern,” she writes, “always adjacent to suffering, rests upon an either/or morality: a proclivity to think and feel in polarities of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’; to identify with the good and to purge the evil from oneself and one’s world once and for all, demanding undivided unity before ‘the enemy’” and “expect some cataclysmic showdown in which, despite tremendous collateral damage (the destruction of the world as we know it), good must triumph in the near future with the help of some transcendent power and live forever after in a fundamentally new world.”⁹²² The apocalypse pattern, Keller argues, is “neither good nor evil, sometimes very good and sometimes very evil” with some feminist and critical race theorists drawing-out revolutionary counter-readings of the apocalyptic script but most habitual tracings following a tendency “to get active, to get enraged, and then to give up, surrendering to the lull of the comforts and conveniences extracted from the tribulations of the rest of the

⁹²⁰ Haraway, 12.

⁹²¹ Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, Second edition (New York: Augsburg Fortress, 2004) 11-13.

⁹²² Keller, 11.

planet.”⁹²³ “We think that we must ‘save the earth,’” Keller writes, but “who can carry this? In other words, to the extent that we get uncritically hooked on apocalypse—not merely the situation but the habit—we contribute to it.”⁹²⁴ This habit, “whatever the anti-imperialist merits of the original metaphors may be,” is destructive, “and perhaps first of all self-destructive.”⁹²⁵ “We wish for messianic solutions,” Keller writes, “and end up doing nothing, for we get locked into a particularly apocalyptic either/or logic—if we can’t save the world, then to hell with it. Either salvation or damnation.”⁹²⁶

“Because disaster tales are intertwined” with “critical processes of meaning-making,” Julia Watts Belser writes, “the stories we tell about disaster are never ethically neutral.”⁹²⁷ In the more sinister forms of our apocalypse habit, Belser argues, “the stories we tell about crisis and catastrophe often intensify structural violence, augmenting existing dynamics of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism.” The apocalypse habit resonates in many ways with Ahmed’s phenomenological reading of whiteness as a *bad habit*, tendencies that we socially inherit that “allow some bodies to take up space by restricting the mobility of others.”⁹²⁸ White able-bodies might not think to ask: whose nature is lost? What kind of nature is in peril? But this inherited obfuscation carries histories of investments made over time that shape spaces and encounters. As I have outlined, our inherited American protestant environmental imaginary allows for only a

⁹²³ Keller, 14.

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁹²⁷ Belser, “Disability and the Social Politics of ‘Natural’ Disaster: Towards a Jewish Feminist Ethics of Disaster Tales.” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 52.

⁹²⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 129.

particular conception of nature, one that comes at the expense of marginalized bodies, to be both reified and continually in peril. This form of nature, through simultaneous influences of eugenics, primitivism, and muscular Christianities, has been systematically and affectively denied to so many bodies (black, brown, immigrant, queer, disabled) and so unable to address damage, disablement, and difference that it is, as Tim Morton argues, a nature that never existed in the first place. “Ecoapocalypse is always for someone,” Morton writes, “it presupposes an audience. What kinds of sadistic ‘you asked for it’ fantasies does it promote.”⁹²⁹ While *apocalyptic* can affectively capture so many of the feelings sticking to these contexts, the anticipation, fear, and the uncertainty in the aftermath, our apocalyptic habits direct attention away from entrenched inequality, the slow violence at play in the impact of these storms, the continual and compounding precarity shaping so many human and nonhuman encounters. It sidesteps the thick ongoingness of environmental degradation. Should we abandon Louisiana? The Gulf Coast? The challenge now to is to become capable of responses that illuminate all the ways we already have and collectively resists moving on—come hell *and* high water.

Disability, Illness, and Environment

Thus far I have considered affinity and attachment within communities shaped by long histories of environmental racism, trauma, and dispossession. Here, I want to think more on the material changes shaping this kinship of remainders particularly environmental illness and disability. Attempting to think fecundity for all, what do we make of futurity for the eyeless shrimp, clawless crabs, fish with oozing sores, undocumented and imprisoned clean-up crews,

⁹²⁹ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 100.

bodies breathing toxic air and wading through toxic waste, bodies that are becoming something-other that make us uncomfortable? “We carry our most intimate view of nature,” Sharon Betcher argues, “within our pictures of health.”⁹³⁰ In a culture with a “monopolizing preoccupation” with health, striving for it, “seems so inherently natural that religious communities, including eco-spiritual movements, appear unconscious of the politics” or the image of nature involved.⁹³¹ Disability and environmental illnesses often surface in religious ecotheory as “failed health”—compelling traces of the toll chemical pesticides, landfills, poor air quality, and other toxins have on our “unevenly polluted biosphere.”⁹³² Julia Watts Belser suggests that disability and illness function in these contexts as both “a tangible, corporeal demonstration of harm done and a potent goad that might yet compel a reluctant populace to self-interested action on behalf of the biosphere.”⁹³³ Caring for nonhuman nature is preached as for our own good—ensuring a happy, healthy species. However, critical disability studies questions the “implications of these evocations of disability” as “cultural trope(s)” that use disability “to signify human suffering, to evoke pity, and to embody tragedy, limitation, dejection, and loss.”⁹³⁴ This reliance on the “tragic cripple” trope leads Betcher to ask, “can disabilities be within ecological discourse something more than a metaphorical and statistical scare tactic to catalyze persons’ environmental best practice?”⁹³⁵ Since ill and disabled bodies never appear in new cosmology

⁹³⁰ Sharon Betcher, “The Picture of Healthy: ‘Nature’ at the Intersection of Disability, Religion and Ecology” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 13.

⁹³¹ Betcher, “The Picture of Healthy,” 11.

⁹³² Julia Watts Belser, “Religion, Disability, and the Environment” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 2.

⁹³³ Belser, “Religion, Disability, and the Environment,” 2.

⁹³⁴ Belser, 3.

⁹³⁵ Betcher, 11.

narratives, and are rarely invited into broader conversations in religion and ecology, our field has not cultivated a response to Betcher's lament.

Functioning as one response⁹³⁶ to this question; however, and helpful for thinking about affinity and attachment with bodies and environments impacted by environmental degradation, is working to challenge environmental conceptualizations of nature that tend to “assume that everyone accesses nature in the same way” enforcing that it is “this presumption that colors environmental political visions.”⁹³⁷ Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* asks “whose experiences of nature are taken as the norm within environmental discourses,” and “what do these discourses assume about nature, the body/mind, and the relationship between humans and nature?”⁹³⁸ Within these boundaries, “nonnormative approaches to nature and the limitations of the body are erased” and “able-bodiedness becomes a prerequisite for imagining environmental futures” thus binding environmental theory to a “very particular kind of body.”⁹³⁹ This body

⁹³⁶ For more helpful resources on disability, health, and environmental thought see Mel Y. Chen, “The Reproduction in/of Disability and Environment,” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 79-82; Kelly Fritsch and Anne McGuire, “Introduction: The Biosocial Politics of Queer/Crip Contagions,” *Feminist Formations* 30, no. 1 (2018): vii-xiv; Lisa Nichols Hickman, “Lead Me Beside Still Waters: Toxic Water, Trisomy 21 and a Theology of Eco-Social Disability,” *Worldviews* 19 (2015): 34-50; Max Liboiron, et. al., “Toxic Politics: Acting in a Permanently Polluted World,” *Social Studies of Science* 48, no. 3 (2018): 331-349; Jasbir K. Puar, “Prognosis Time: Toward a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility, and Capacity,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 2 (2009): 161-172; *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Sarah Jaquette Ray, “Environmental Justice, Vital Materiality, and the Toxic Sublime in Edward Burtynsky's Manufactured Landscapes,” *GeoHumanities* May (2016): 1-16; Rita Turner, “The Slow Poisoning of Black Bodies: A Lesson in Environmental Racism and Hidden Violence,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 15, no. 1 (2016): 189-204.

⁹³⁷ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 23.

⁹³⁸ Kafer, 23.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

might have meaningful, spiritual, transformative experiences in nature, but this body is also in control of these encounters—who, when, and how much it engages, when and where to pull-in close, and when to disengage. Disabilities, however, challenge (sometimes visibly) the “dominant assumption that bodies are neatly bounded powerhouses of capacity. Disabled bodies belie conventional conceptions of the body as secure, enclosed, and sovereign.”⁹⁴⁰ The “disabled body is not alone in this respect,” Belser writes, “stigmas of permeability and contagion,” like we see in the rhetoric advocating abandonment of New Orleans and its residents after Katrina, shape “prevailing discourses of race and class-marked bodies, just as they characterize negative conceptions of feminine and queer corporealities. Yet disability,” can display “the vulnerability of the human body in a particularly concrete way, forcing an acknowledgement that human being is radically affected as flesh meets world. Dominant culture recognizes—and recoils from—the trans-corporeality of the disabled body.”⁹⁴¹

Of course, it is not just new cosmology and other forms of contemporary environmental thought that are committed to able-bodied environmental imaginaries. Eco-crip scholars remind us that our inherited American environmental imaginary linking nature with spiritual redemption, moral improvement, and affective renewal also relies on able-bodiedness. Disabled and ill bodies, like female, queer, black, and brown bodies, are not inheritors of the American Protestant environmental imagination as a line of investment. The white, affluent, male ideal that can leave the crowded city and explore restorative nature is also what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls

⁹⁴⁰ Belser, “Religion, Disability, and the Environment,” 2.

⁹⁴¹ Belser, 6.

the “normate”⁹⁴² body, or what Sarah Jaquette Ray terms the “wilderness body ideal.”⁹⁴³ Ray’s article, “Risking Bodies in the Wild: The ‘Corporeal Unconscious’ of American Adventure Culture,” addresses the “extent to which environmentalism,” the wilderness movement as an essential part, “and the ideal of American identity developed” together “in opposition to a fundamental category of ‘otherness’—disability.”⁹⁴⁴

Reading the same time period as Evan Berry, Ray argues the “corporeal unconscious,” that characterizes U.S. environmentalism “prizes the ‘fit’ body—able, muscular, young, and male.”⁹⁴⁵ “Extending Progressive Era links between the body, social hygiene, and the wilderness encounter,” through this fit body environmental thought simultaneously solidified “social notions of purity and fitness” and gave meaning to the disabled American body as socially, politically and culturally unfit, unproductive, and unrecruitable.⁹⁴⁶ Ray argues there is a “material, constitutive relationship between disability and American environmental thought and practice” as environmental thoughts’ genesis in the wilderness movement imbued the “fit body with values of independence, self-reliance, genetic superiority, and willpower,” and then provided wilderness as the setting to “rehearse these values” by living out their salvific potential.⁹⁴⁷ Through coding “certain bodies as (already) morally good and pure,” unfit bodies (those racialized, female, poor,

⁹⁴² Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Feminist Theory, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *Feminist Disability Studies* 14, no. 3 (2013): 1-32.

⁹⁴³ Sarah Jaquette Ray, “Risking Bodies in the Wild: The ‘Corporeal Unconscious’ of American Adventure Culture,” in *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, 29-73 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 32.

⁹⁴⁴ Ray, 32.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁴⁷ Ray, 48.

and disabled bodies) in their unrecruitability became not just a threat to American identity but to “Nature itself”⁹⁴⁸ in their incongruity with ideal visions of reciprocal or harmonious relationships between humans and nature. This environmental inheritance continues to reverberate both in contemporary investments in nature as an adventure sport paradise, the white male pitting himself against nature and surviving, and the absence of multiplicities of nature encounters. The “disabled body,” Ray writes, “is simultaneously the most absent and the most necessary for reifying white bourgeois identity” as the “disabled body is necessary to give risk and adventure any meaning, and yet the disabled body must remain invisible. The double bind of risk culture becomes evident because risk in fact threatens disablement.”⁹⁴⁹

The reverberations of this environmental inheritance that are most detrimental for devastated landscapes are investments in maintaining the invisibility of disabled bodies. Still, even in this cultural moment, disabled representation in nature encounters is incredibly rare and academic conversations on disability, illness, and the environment are nascent. In religion and ecology, they continue to be almost wholly absent. While “tales of communities in crisis commonly depoliticize disaster” and obscure “the political significance of structural inequalities that render people with disabilities more at risk in disaster,” in truth “the disabled body,” Julia Watts Belser argues, is inscribed socially and environmentally with a “narrative of ‘natural’ vulnerabilities and inevitable suffering” that facilitates their abandonment.⁹⁵⁰ These well-worn routes that contribute to the invisibility of disabled bodies and their environmental experiences only feed into the realities of what we saw unfold in Katrina, Rita, and Harvey which is disabled

⁹⁴⁸ Ray, 34; 47.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁵⁰ Belser, “Disability and the Social Politics of ‘Natural’ Disaster,” 51.

populations were particularly hard-hit by these storms. In Louisiana there was no disaster planning for people with disabilities.⁹⁵¹ There was no plan for evacuating those that needed mobility assistance. There were no translation services for those with sensory disabilities. There was no registry to locate residents that were unable to reach safety without assistance. The poor, ill, disabled, and elderly were most likely to die during Katrina and people with disabilities were left to drown in their mobility devices in their homes, in second-story apartments, sitting in the heat in wheelchairs on the highway, in nursing homes and hospitals without power and staff.⁹⁵²

Complicating this discussion, like the problematic histories facing black and female bodies and environmental thinking, is disability studies' flight from social presumptions of people with disabilities as more proximate to nature/nonhuman animals. The strained relationship between disability and animality traces back to Darwin's nineteenth-century "paradigm-shifting theory of evolution" that "identified feebleminded and racialized peoples as key evidence of human animal origins."⁹⁵³ Consequently, while there is work in disability studies

⁹⁵¹ While the experiences of people with disabilities during Katrina are truly horrifying, this lack of preparation for marginalized communities in disaster is not unique to Louisiana/New Orleans. It is a national problem. For more see Adrien A. Weibgen, "The Right To Be Rescued: Disability Justice in an Age of Disaster." *Yale Law Journal* 124, no. 7 (2015): 2202-2679.

⁹⁵² To sit with narratives about these abandonments see the short film "The Right to Be Rescued," Rooted in Rights organization, <https://www.rootedinrights.org/videos/emergency-preparedness/the-right-to-be-rescued/>; also "People With Disabilities Left Behind During Katrina Tell Their Stories," *Huffington Post* August 27th, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jordan-melograna/people-with-disabilities-2_b_8045700.html; National Council on Disability, "The Impact of Hurricane Katrina and Rita on People with Disabilities: A Look Back and Remaining Challenges," August 3rd, 2006, <https://ncd.gov/publications/2006/Aug072006>; Karen Willison, "After Hurricane Harvey, Disaster Relief Efforts Are Failing People With Disabilities—Again," *The Mighty* August 28th, 2017, <https://themighty.com/2017/08/hurricane-harvey-relief-efforts-are-failing-people-with-disabilities/>; Shelton, Kyle, "People With Disabilities Are Pushing for More Inclusive Rescue and Recovery Programs In Harvey's Wake," *Rice Kinder Institute for Urban Research*, August 23rd, 2018, <https://kinder.rice.edu/2018/08/22/people-disabilities-are-pushing-more-inclusive-rescue-and-recovery-programs-harveys-wake>.

⁹⁵³ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, "Precarity and Cross-Species Identification: Autism, the Critique of Normative Cognition, and Nonspeciesism," 556.

on how “built environments⁹⁵⁴ privilege some bodies and minds over others” through focusing on accessibility and representation, there is less scholarship on the “specific ways toxic environments engender chronic illness and disability, especially for marginalized populations, or the ways environmental illnesses, often chronic and invisible, disrupt dominant paradigms for recognizing and representing ‘disability.’”⁹⁵⁵ These concerns have merit as I can easily see, like my conversations on trauma and environment, work that considers how environments can be disabling (or can debilitate further) being used to dismiss people with disabilities as without future, purpose, or hope in a rapidly changing environment. I understand hesitancy with investing in environmental thought from voices in disability studies that argue not all people with disabilities desire “fixing” or normative conceptions of health, especially since the true impediments are access and representation not difference, because most narratives discussing disability and environmental decline champion only normative conceptions of health.

One source of these tensions, Kelly Fritsch argues, is the “material-discursive production of disability” that intimately links “forms of neoliberal biocapitalism” together with “consequences for how we think toxicity and disability together.”⁹⁵⁶ As I have mentioned, the U.S. has “sorely lacking standards and laws regulating chemical production and distribution,” and the risk of environmental exposure “can debilitate certain populations more than others,” the

⁹⁵⁴ Kafer’s (2013) work highlights how disability studies often does not recognize wilderness/nature as a constructed environment.

⁹⁵⁵ Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, “Introduction,” *Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 3.

⁹⁵⁶ Kelly Fritsch, “Toxic Pregnancies: Speculative Futures, Disabling Environments, and Neoliberal Biocapital,” in *Disability Studies and Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*, Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara, eds. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 360.

production of disability in America shapes disability as “an individually economically quantifiable toxic condition.”⁹⁵⁷ Contemporary panic about the dangers of exposing fetuses and children to toxins in the environment, Fritsch and Mel Chen argue, resonate only when white children and white legacies are at risk while “black children are ‘assumed to be toxic’”⁹⁵⁸ and without kinship lineages that require financial investments. While, as Chen, Alaimo, and Fritsch demonstrate, we live in increasingly toxically-threatening planet (with politics not inherent difference determining levels of exposure) “discourses representing disability as the failure of the body to meet some normative standards” have not disappeared; “people still want a ‘healthy baby’ to such an extent that disability deeply disturbs this desire.”⁹⁵⁹ Kafer, in a crip reading of Haraway’s feminist cyborg figure, argues this compulsory reproduction of able-bodies is driven by “ideologies of wholeness,”⁹⁶⁰ that are so pervasive that speaking into this context and calling for futures that desire disability is disturbingly improper in its rejection of normative kinship networks and the cause of American futurity.

These are sticky dialogues. I think they are worth having; however, because crip materialities offer incredibly valuable insights for environmental ethics. Considering precarious futures, it is critical that we wrestle with the realities that people with disabilities (disabled bodies, encounters, and imaginaries) continue to be absented in our theory and policy and this lack of representation, like missing nonessentialized black environmental identities, contributes to people with illnesses and disabilities being last in consideration for rescue, policy interventions, restoration, and rebuilding efforts post-disaster. Furthermore, considering new

⁹⁵⁷ Fritsch, “Toxic Pregnancies,” 360; 376.

⁹⁵⁸ Fritsch, 373.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁹⁶⁰ Kafer, 106.

cosmology's ethical argument *for the future*, the erasure of disabled bodies and toxic environments can be understood as not incidental to these strains of religious ecotheory but *fundamental* in order to maintain new cosmology's affective investments. Disabled bodies, with complex encounters and material needs, with potentially ambivalent feelings about a nature constructed either in their absence or as evidence of their inhumanity, and with potentially visible testaments to the realities of our porosity and the impacts of toxic immersion, unsettle so many of the ontological and ethical commitments new cosmology tightly clutches. Primarily, I argue the side-stepping of environmental degradation and the complete lack of attention to people with disabilities is because the presence of ill and disabled bodies and habitats resists the speculative futures new cosmology invests in—"hopeful" (in its narrowest conception) futures of reciprocal healing for human and nonhuman others if humans choose to invest in evolutionary kinships. It is doubtful devastated landscapes and people with illnesses and disabilities can be part of these futures so the question remains, how do we explore "wanted, unwanted, and even unknowable intimacies with our environments," in ways that unsettle the desirability of normate lives and attend to "the nuances of disabled lives as viable alternatives?"⁹⁶¹ Resisting these erasures, I argue we need alternative futures, disability futures, within religion and ecology that desire embodied difference in our shared precarity.

Desiring Eco-Crip Futurity

Providing an excellent model for this precarious embrace, Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* appeals to methodological alliances between queer and crip theory, particularly pulling from queer kinship and temporality, to articulate "crip time," by wrestling with the "ways in which

⁹⁶¹ Mitchell and Snyder, "Cross-Species Identification," 554; 570.

‘future’ has been deployed in the service of compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness.”⁹⁶² Kafer critiques two problematic framings of crip futurity that are also relevant for thinking about futurity for devastated landscapes. First, Kafer highlights that futurity for bodies with disabilities is often “framed in curative terms, a time frame that casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress.”⁹⁶³ Within this frame of “curative time” the “only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure.”⁹⁶⁴ Curative time cannot allow the persistence of bodies with disabilities because they break this hopeful arc. Consequently, crip theory must “engage in the process of articulating other temporalities, other approaches to futurity beyond curative ones.”⁹⁶⁵ I have detailed how Edenic pasts and apocalyptic futures do devastated landscapes no favors and how through their sheer absence new cosmology and religion and ecology invest in compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness by similarly projecting futures without the persistence of disabled bodies. Thus, religion and ecology is in the similar position of needing to articulate other temporalities for devastated environments cast out of time if it hopes to be relevant for the future.

Second, in critique of Lee Edelman’s shaping of queer futurity, Kafer argues crip theory must be wary of rejecting futurity outright. Edelman highlights the compulsory heterosexuality in American politics that is centered around consanguineous kinships and the figure of the child as its inevitable telos.⁹⁶⁶ Provocatively, Edelman argues queers would be better off refusing the

⁹⁶² Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 27.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁶ Lee Edelman. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

future altogether. Resonating with Edelman, Kafer agrees the figure of the child is certainly used to “buttress able-bodied/able-minded heteronormativity,” especially through prenatal testing and selective abortion.⁹⁶⁷ Furthermore, Kafer finds commonality with Edelman’s argument that compulsory heterosexuality leads to an “ethics of endless deferral,” where focus on a better future requires diverting “our attention from the here and now” and the need for political interventions for queer communities.⁹⁶⁸ The framing of disability mirrors compulsory heterosexuality, Kafer contends, with this “firm focus on the future” often “expressed in terms of cure and rehabilitation, and is thereby bound up in normalizing approaches to the mind/body” rather than dedicated to investments in the “needs and experiences of disabled people in the present.”⁹⁶⁹ Within deferred futurity, queerness and disability “cannot appear as anything other than failure” in their inability to conform to particular kinship parameters so it is easy, Kafer contends, to see clearly “how futurity has been the cause of much violence against disabled people, such that ‘fuck the future’ can seem the only viable crip response.”⁹⁷⁰

Yet, where she departs from Edelman, Kafer argues it is “these very histories ultimately” that “make such refusal untenable.”⁹⁷¹ “I do not think the only response to no future,” she writes, “—or rather, to futures that depend upon no futures for crips—is a refusal of the future altogether. Indeed, ‘fucking the future,’ at least in Edelman’s terms, takes on a different valence for those who are *not* supported in their desires to project themselves (and their children) into the

⁹⁶⁷ Kafer, 28-29.

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

future in the first place.”⁹⁷² Kafer sides with Heather Love and José Muñoz who contend the child of compulsory heterosexuality’s sovereign futurity, that Edelman describes, is ultimately a white child. Furthermore, the “always already whiteness” of the future child “is a whiteness framed by and understood through regimes of health and hygiene”⁹⁷³ suturing stigmas of permeability and contagion to undesirable kinship lineages. “Queer kids, kids of color, street kids—all of the kids cast out of reproductive futurism—have been and continue to be framed as sick, as pathological, as contagious” conflating race, class, and disability.⁹⁷⁴ Instead of abandoning futurity, Kafer calls for consideration of real complex lives, “critical maps of the practices and ideologies that effectively cast disabled people out of time and out of our futures,” and careful attention to the ways “incidents of illness and disability” are “inextricably bound, and differentially bound, to race/class/gender/nation.”⁹⁷⁵

Wholesale abandonment of futures for disasterscaapes, as Haraway and Keller highlight, is a tempting option. It is a habit that many environmentalists are determined not to break. Avoidance and erasure, however, has done little to actually solve the progression of environmental degradation and its uneven impacts on the poor. Desiring nature solely as wholeness or reciprocity, Haraway drawing from Gayatri Spivak argues, continues to position nature as an impossibility— “as that which we cannot not desire. Excruciatingly conscious of nature’s discursive constitution as ‘other’ in the histories of colonialism, racism, sexism, and class domination of many kinds, we nonetheless find in this problematic, ethno-specific, long-

⁹⁷² Kafer, 32.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

lived, and mobile concept something we cannot do without, but can never ‘have.’ We must find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession.”⁹⁷⁶ Refusing futurity for devastated landscapes does not do much justice to those bodies, identities, communities, and habitats that have always been denied the embrace of nature and American futurity. Questions like those Kafer, Love, and Muñoz ask—why do some children have futures and others do not, who gets to decide what constitutes hope (which embodiments are worth dreaming), why are some bodies allowed to desire the future (be desirable futures) and others not— seem much more productive than our apocalypse habit.

Resisting temporal frameworks that depoliticize disability and position people with disabilities as without futures, Kafer advocates for a political/relational model of disability that focuses instead on the “political experience of disablement” and sees disability as a “potential site for collective reimagining” for the future.⁹⁷⁷ Disability, she argues, exists not only in “relation to able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, such that disabled and abled form a constitutive binary,” but also “disability is experienced in and through relationships; it does not occur in isolation.”⁹⁷⁸ These relationships include friends, family, attendant care, objects and spaces, procedure and policy. Her concern, she writes, is with framing disability:

not as a category inherent in certain minds and bodies but as what historian Joan W. Scott calls a ‘collective affinity.’ Drawing on the cyborg theory of Donna Haraway, Scott describes collective affinities as ‘play[ing] on identifications that have been attributed to individuals by their societies, and that have served to exclude them or subordinate them.’ Collective affinities in terms of disability could encompass everyone from people with learning disabilities to those with chronic illness, from people with mobility impairments to those with HIV/AIDS, from people with sensory impairments to those with mental

⁹⁷⁶ Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway 63-124 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 64.

⁹⁷⁷ Kafer, 8-9.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

illness. People within each of these categories can all be discussed in terms of disability politics, not because of any essential similarities among them, but because all have been labeled as disabled or sick and have faced discrimination as a result.⁹⁷⁹

These, what Kafer terms “crip affinities,” resonate with work in queer theory that recognizes terms like “queer” are fluid sites of collective contestation, and the “experience of illness and disability,” she writes, can be understood in “Jasbir Puar’s framework, as an *assemblage*, where ‘[c]ategories—race, gender, sexuality [and, I would add, disability]—are considered as events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than as simply entities and attributes of subjects.’”⁹⁸⁰

Crip affinities offer “alternative ways of understanding ourselves in relation to the environment, understandings which can then generate” new possibilities for “intellectual connections and activist coalitions”⁹⁸¹ by demonstrating how very much different groups negotiating the intersections of social exclusions and environmental decline have to say to one another. Like Kimberle Crenshaw articulates with intersectionality, crip affinities offer ways to spotlight how forms of power intersect and interlock.⁹⁸² The stigmas of permeability and contagion that affectively position disabled bodies as undesirable, without future, environmentally threatening, or inconsequential, are shared by sexual minorities and black communities resisting entrenched uses of “nature” to proscribe gender, sexual identities, practices, affinities, attachments, kinships, and alternative futures. Following the long histories I

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁸⁰ Kafer, 10.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., 131.

⁹⁸² Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 8 (1989): 139-167.

outlined of pressing social exclusions into America's very landscapes, crip affinities can help us further puzzle through devastated landscapes—eyeless shrimp, clawless crabs, fish with sores, eroding coastlines, oil-slick habitats, superfund seepage, lost-histories, abandoned black, disabled, and elderly humans—as complex assemblages made up of the diverse inheritors of toxic investments.

Kafer argues how one “understands disability in the present determines how one imagines disability in the future: one’s assumptions about the experience of disability create one’s conception of a better future.”⁹⁸³ “I desire crip futures,” she writes:

futures that embrace disabled people, futures that imagine disability differently, futures that support multiple ways of being. I use this language of desire deliberately. I know how my heart can catch when I see a body that moves oddly or bears strange scars. I know how my body shifts, leans forward, when I hear someone speak with atypical pauses or phrasing, or when talk turns to illness and disability. Part of what I am describing is a lust born of recognition, a lust to see bodies like my own or like the bodies of friends and lovers, as well as a hope that the other finds such recognition in me. Perhaps most important to this examination of disability futures, it is a desire born largely of absence. We lack such futures in this present, and my desires are practically inconceivable in the public sphere. There is no recognition that one could desire disability, no move to imagine what such desire could look like.⁹⁸⁴

Kafer’s desires here, again, resonate with Mel Chen’s conception of queerness as *improper affiliation*. Recognizing that desire always overflows the contours meant to contain it, Kafer, Chen, and other queer ecologists recognize cultivating impropriety in kin-care may be our hopeful future.⁹⁸⁵ It seems to be, as Kafer suggests, that without reconsidering our current

⁹⁸³ Kafer, 2-3.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁸⁵ For more creatively improper kin-care see: Jonathan L. Clark, “Uncharismatic Invasives” *Environmental Humanities* 6 (2015): 29-52; Stephanie Erev, “What Is It Like to Become A Bat? Heterogeneities in An Age of Extinction.” *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2018): 129-149; James Hatley, “Blood Intimacies and Biodicy: Keeping Faith with Ticks.” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): 63-75; Eben Kirksey, *Emergent Ecologies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015; Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014; Kelsi Nagy and Phillip David Johnson II, eds, *Trash Animals: How*

imaginings of disability that religion and ecology would not be able to speak to relationships with damaged environments and creatures in any meaningful way. What sorts of different futures might we imagine, what conceptual and activist openings might be possible, if we consider the embodied experiences of illness and disabilities *as we experience ill and disabled ecosystems*? What might it mean to religious ecotheory if we not only carved out space for but *desired* queer eco-crip affinities— “bodies with limited, off, or queer movements and orientations”⁹⁸⁶— and asked what these bodies desire for the future, how their encounters, intimacies, and attachments reshape what can be said about hope? Finding our way out of the problem of foreclosed futures for devastated landscapes begins with relocating kinship love away from evolutionary inheritances that ignore our toxic immersions, and towards relocating future desire within kinships of remainders, collective affinities between queer, black, and disabled ways of being, and a desire for being-long (in all its different forms) for everyone.

What the Water Gave Me

I began with detailing how creatures impacted by BP demanded a reshaping in my environmental thinking—how I lacked the conceptual tools to puzzle through my feelings. I end with the personal and attachment to turtles. During the strange waiting period (uncanny hurricane

We Live With Nature's Filthy, Feral, Invasive, and Unwanted Species. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013; Anthony K. Nocella II, Judy K.C. Bentley, and Janet M. Duncan, eds. *Earth, Animal, and Disability Liberation*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012; Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012; Mick Smith, “Dis(appearance): Earth, Ethics and Apparently (In)Significant Others.” *Australian Humanities Review* 50 (2011): 23-44; Anna Tsing, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species.” *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2012): 141-154; *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. New Jersey: Princeton, 2015; Thom van Dooren. *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*. New York: Columbia Press, 2014

⁹⁸⁶ Kafer, 148.

time) between the Harvey rain waters receding and the river levels rising, standing in long lines at the grocery trying to think of what to get out of what was left to sit out being an island for a while, I became obsessed with rescuing the displaced turtles (Texas river cooters and western painted turtles) confusedly waddling away from all the overfull swamps, ponds, and fountains into traffic. Not one to make a spectacle of myself nor even very fond of turtles (their slimy mossy-ness and heft makes them particularly difficult to transport in hot traffic) I, nevertheless, found myself frantically searching for them while we drove to check on friends and borrow medical supplies for my son. I'd yell for my spouse to stop driving and hop out hips-churning in humidity-stuck clothes to grab them and take them back to the water. I know nothing about turtles. I never had a particular affinity for them before, but I found myself thinking about them all the time. I knew as my anxiety increased each time I saw one smashed by cars, and in spite of my awareness that as soon as the Brazos floods came they would all wash out into unsafe places again, that this obsession is and is not about wanting to protect the turtles. I did not want to be displaced into a shelter despite its professed safety and I wanted to be home to ride out whatever was coming. I had not prepped my children for a shelter. I had nowhere near enough medical supplies prepared. I felt so stupid for not preparing better. How much preparation is enough? I wanted to take those turtles to their homes too, despite how irrational jumping into traffic became. I watch for them still, more than a year later scanning curbs and intersections, and I have a place to take the injured ones. A queer biophilic encounter perhaps—a noticing, a connection, not through their beauty (though they certainly are beautiful) but through a mass of fear, anxiety, frustration, and despair. I do not know if moving the turtles gives me hope. Mostly, like any environmental thought in our contemporary moment, it feels too little too late, not enough, almost embarrassing in its smallness. Sitting with the squirmy discomfort about how

best to live, love, and hope in our labor of forming response-abilities; however, is ours to undertake.

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Vita

DR. COURTNEY O'DELL-CHAIB

ceodell@syr.edu

EDUCATION

2019 Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Ph.D. Religion

Certificate of Advanced Study in Women's and Gender Studies

Certificate of University Teaching

Dissertation: *Desiring Devastated Landscapes: Love After Ecological Collapse*
directed by Dr. M. Gail Hamner

2009 Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, TX

M.T.S. Theological Studies

Thesis: "Which Woman/Whose Nature? Constructing a Political
Ecofeminist Theology" directed by Dr. Namsoon Kang

2007 Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

M.A. Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies

Thesis: "Mothers with Multiple Sclerosis: Voice, Identity, and
Empowerment" directed by Dr. Claire Sahlin

2004 Baylor University, Waco, TX

B.A. History

Minor in Religion

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Environmental Justice

Environmental Humanities

Religion, Nature, and Culture

Religion and Ecology

Gender and Sexuality Studies; Feminist Theory; Ecofeminism

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Religion and Cultural Studies

Feminist Science and Technology Studies

Christianities in the Americas

Ecospirituality; Feminist Spiritualities

Feminist Theologies

Affect Studies

Queer Studies

Disability Studies

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Problem: “Ethical Alignment with the Non-Human? Perspectives from New Materialism, Affect Theory, and Religious Studies”

Text: *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāna, Book X*

Movement: The Arts and Crafts Movement in America (1875-1920)

Person: Luce Irigaray

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Syracuse University

Introduction to the Study of Religion (Fall 2015, Spring 2016)

Religion, Sexuality, Ecology (Fall 2014)

Teaching Assistant, Syracuse University

Medieval Christianities (Spring 2016)

Christianity (Fall 2015)

Indigenous Religions (Fall 2014)

Bioethics (Spring 2013)

Introduction to Christianity (Fall 2013)

Goddesses, Women, and Power in Hinduism (Spring 2013)

Religion Today in a Globalizing World (Fall 2012)

Religion and the Conquest of America (Spring 2012)

Depth Psychologies and Religious Ethics (Fall 2011)

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

“The Shape of this Wonder? Consecrated Science and New Cosmology Affects.” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Forthcoming June 2019.

“Curatorial Authority in Digital Scholarship: A Review of Materializing the Bible.” *American Anthropologist* 120, no. 4 (2018): 843-848.

“Biophilia’s Queer Remnants.” *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 46, no. 3-4 (2017): 18-23.

“Toxic Bodies, Sacred Ecologies.” *Jugaad: A Material Religions Project*.

<https://jugaad.pub/toxic-bodies-sacred-ecologies/>

6 April 2016.

Books

Mothers with Multiple Sclerosis: Voice, Identity, and Empowerment, VDM Verlag 2008

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

2019 “Environmental Trauma, Haunting, and Oddkin” Presenting with New Trends in Religion and the Environment, European Academy of Religion, Bologna, Italy

2018 “The Shape of this Wonder? Consecrated Science and New Cosmology Affects” Presented with the Science, Technology, and Religion Unit, American Academy of Religion, Denver, CO

2018 “Levee Affects: Threat, Displacement, and Slow Violence” Presented with Capacious: Affective Inquiry/Making Space, Millersville University, Lancaster, PA

2018 “Melancholic Publics: Environmental Trauma, Haunting, and Oddkin” Presented with

- Being Human in the Age of Humans: Perspectives from Religion and Ethics, Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, IN
- 2017 “Making-With Disaster” Presented with the Religion and Ecology Group/Critical Approaches to Racial and Environmental Justice, American Academy of Religion, Boston, MA
- 2016 “Queer Love for Mutated Landscapes” Presented with the Queer Studies in Religion group, American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX
- 2016 “Biophilia’s Queer Remnants” Presented with the Religion, Affect, and Emotion group/Animals and Religion group, American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX
- 2015 “Desiring Devastated Landscapes: Cultivating Biophilia Within Ecological Collapse” Presented with the Religion & Ecology group, American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, GA
- 2015 “Desiring Devastated Landscapes: Affective Intimacies After Ecological Collapse” Presented with Affect Theory ‘Worldings/Tensions/Futures,’ Millersville University, Lancaster, PA
- 2015 “Fecund Figurations: Love After Ecological Devastation” Presented with Sacred Literature, Secular Religion: A Conference on Cultural Practices, Le Moyne College Religion and Literature Forum, Syracuse, NY
- 2014 “Eyeless Shrimp, Clawless Crabs, and Me? Nomadic Becomings and Affect in the Post-Deepwater Horizon Anthropocene” Presented with the Religion, Affect, and Emotion group, American Academy of Religion, San Diego, CA
- 2014 “Border, Body, Wounds: Reconceptualizing the Wounded Body in Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Corpus*” Presented with the Eastern International Region of American Academy of Religion, Syracuse University
- 2013 “Eyeless Shrimp, Clawless Crabs, and Me? Nomadic Becomings in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*” Presented with The Return of the Text: A Conference on the Cultural Value of Close Reading, Syracuse, NY
- 2012 “Michelle Duggar and Public Receptions of Pregnancy Complications,” Presented with American Culture Association, Boston, MA
- 2007 “Mothers with Multiple Sclerosis: Voice, Identity, and Empowerment” Tenth Annual Student Creative Arts and Research Symposium, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

INVITED TALKS

- 2013 “Degree Completion for Parents” Presented with the Graduate School Professional Development Series, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

RESEARCH PROJECTS

- 2017- Research Consultant to Dr. Amy Morgenstern, Director of Blue Star Admissions Consulting, Project Title: *Living for Love: A Feminist Philosophical Escapade*
- 2009 Research Assistant, Texas Christian University, to Dr. Stephen V. Sprinkle, Director of Field Education and Supervised Ministry Project Title: *Unfinished Lives: Reviving the Memories of LGBTQ Hate Crimes Victims.*
- 2008 Research Fellow, Texas Freedom Network Austin, TX
Project title: “Just Say Don’t Know: Sexuality Education in Texas Public Schools.”

2007 Graduate Research Assistant, Texas Woman's University Multicultural Women's and Gender Studies Program
 Project title: "Factors Affecting Access to Computing Technologies for Single Mother College Students."

AWARDS AND HONORS

2013 Theta Chi Beta Chapter, Theta Alpha Kappa Religious Studies Honor Society
 2008 Brite Divinity School Faculty Book Award, Outstanding Student in Spirituality
 2007 Brite Divinity School Faculty Book Award, Outstanding Student in Spirituality
 2006 Texas Woman's University General Scholarship

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

2018- Contributing Editor, Jugaad: A Material Religions Project
 2018 Chair, "Networks, Affects, and Social Bodies," Religion, Affect, and Emotion Unit, American Academy of Religion, Denver, CO
 2015 Chair, "Gender, the Performance of Gender, and Religion" with the First Annual Undergraduate Conference on Religion and Culture, Syracuse University

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2015 Admissions Representative to the Graduate Committee, Religion Department, Syracuse University
 2014 Senator-At-Large, Syracuse University Graduate Student Organization (GSO)
 2014 Chair, Family Concerns Committee, GSO
 2014 Co-President, Religion Graduate Organization
 2013 Member, Syracuse University Senate Women's Concerns Committee
 2013 Member, Child Care Advisory Committee, Benefits Review and Working Group Report
 2013 Senator, Syracuse University Senate
 2013 Senator-At-Large, Syracuse University GSO
 2012 Member, Family Concerns Committee, GSO
 2012 Liaison, Off-Campus and Commuter Services, GSO
 2012 Member, Religion Graduate Organization (2012-2016)
 2009 Chair, Inclusive Language Policy Drafting Committee, Brite Divinity School

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

American Academy of Religion
 National Women's Studies Association
 Theta Alpha Kappa

CONNECT WITH ME:

<https://courtneyodellchaib.academia.edu/>
<https://jugaad.pub/editors/courtney-odell-chaib/>
<http://religion.syr.edu/people/grads/odell-chaib-courtney.html>