**Week 14 – Discussion:**

2) What is **“biocultural hope”** according to Kirksey et al? How is this informed by Derrida’s distinction between **apocalyptic and messianic** thinking? Does this hope arise through practices such as caring for other beings? (pp. 35, 54-57). How do you understand the figure that hope ‘move[s] like oil in water’ (39)? Does “biocultural hope” **challenge the dominant nature-culture divide** in political action? If yes, in what way?

Biocultural hope is a way of coping with the aftermath of environmentally disastrous events. The work of arts, described by Kirksey et al., create feelings of careful continuation in blighted environments[[1]](#footnote-1) and various ways of living together with affected species.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Based on Derrida’s distinction of messianic and apocalyptic thinking, biocultural hope can be understood as a coalescence of the acceptance of future, which is widely unpredictable, but animated with agents of hope.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The creative people in New Orleans create biocultural possibilities of transformation of life in the aftermath of catastrophes. Instead of taking on inert apocalyptic thinking, which destroys hope, they shift notions of end time to ideas for new beginnings. They move around the apocalyptic thought of Derrida’s dessert, but also avoid to internalize the disconnection of materiality, which is linked to messianic thinking.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Hopes as force of motivation (like oil) may stay at the surface of our consciousness (water), but eventually they are dissolved by intervention (dispersants), which will only lead to their reduction of visibility, but will not completely erase them. The impact of challenged hopes might be more powerful (increased toxicity of dispersed oil) if we adapt them to the actual (catastrophic) situation and enrich them with new ways of caring for those, who are not being cared about. Thus, creating substratum for coalescence of hope and care.

“Biocultural hope” challenges the conception of nature and culture as separated worlds, because it accepts the given disastrous situation as caused and constructed, but also reveals the intersectional politics it entails. It scrutinizes the possible ways to proceed in a caring behaviour, not only towards afflicted people, but also species, who’s suffering is made visible.

5) What is meant by the concept “shared interdependent transsex” that Bailey Kier proposes? (p. 7) How do you understand the closing statement on page 9: “…**we are the future organisms that we are becoming**”?

Species developed through evolution have changing hormone levels (“hormonal vulnerabilities”[[5]](#footnote-5)) over their lifetime, which are also affected by their lifestyle. Human culture coined by material consumption influences endocrine systems and the processes of sexing. This transformation of human sex (“transsex”) can be seen as opportunities for reconceptualization of the rigid normative notions of binary sex.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Bailey Kier proclaims that bodies are constant ecological processes in interconnected exchange with the shared environment (relations, adaptions, metabolisms, reproductions). Thus human sex is interrelated and in constant transformation. Acknowledging the constant variations of human bodies and sexes through exterior, as well as interior influences, means to accept human sex as responsive to bio-industrial-chemical agents (nutritious and toxic). Therefore, sexual attribution is questioned and reshaped with a potential of dissolving imaginative alterity between sexes.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In constant endocrine transformation “becoming” means to reflect on the ongoing environmentally interconnected corporeal processes as possibilities for change of normative exclusive and degrading attitudes towards deviants or marginalized species (human and non-human) in given (disastrous) situations and not to try to return to a former state of pureness. Therefore, it means acknowledging variability rather than difference from purity and inclusively encompassing dangers, resilience and potential at the same time.[[8]](#footnote-8)

1. Cf. Eben Kirksey/Nicholas Shapiro/Maria Brodine, “Hope in Blasted Landscapes”, *The Multispecies Salon,* Durham/London: Duke University Press 2014, pp. 29-63, here: p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Kirksey/Shapiro/Brodine, “Hope in Blasted Landscapes”, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Kirksey/Shapiro/Brodine, “Hope in Blasted Landscapes”, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Kirksey/Shapiro/Brodine, “Hope in Blasted Landscapes”, p. 56f. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Malin Ah-King/Eva Hayward, “Toxic Sexes. Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption”, *O-Zone*, 1, 2014, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Ah-King/Hayward, “Toxic Sexes” p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Ah-King/Hayward, “Toxic Sexes” p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Ah-King/Hayward, “Toxic Sexes” pp. 7-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)