**Gender, Nature, Culture Week 14 Questions**

**Question 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?**

According to Kirksey et al, “biocultural hope” is a form of hope based on continuing to persevere in the aftermath of environmentally disastrous events by creating alliances amongst social and environmental worlds in the historical present, all in spite of the “blasted” nature of the landscapes in which we place this hope. In particular, this is brought about through elements such as interspecies care, which in turn generates openings for more audacious hopes (p. 57.) Essentially, learning to live conscientiously as a species amongst other species and developing specific and concrete relationships between human and nonhumans brings about future possibilities of a better world (p. 56.)

Therefore, Derrida’s definition of messianic thinking is not what we are aiming for in producing this sort of hope, but it can be used to inform our direction for revolutionary thinking. We need to be specific and concrete with where we put effort to create a better world, and only from that point will there be room for messianic beginnings that are currently unpredictable. Rather than starting off with “spectral” (p. 56) and empty thoughts of the future that are undefined and aggressively “refuse to be grounded in any figure” (p. 35,) we should set our intentions on small and achievable goals that can be built upon in a practical way. On the other hand, Derrida’s distinction of apocalyptic thinking is pretty much always unhelpful, as it leaves no room for hope and “emancipatory desire” (p. 31) in the first place, predicting instead that we are powerless to change the course of environmental disaster, and we therefore shouldn’t even bother trying.

“Biocultural hope” is grounded in practices such as caring for other beings. This is exemplified by the Pretty Doe Dairy project, which uncovered how nurturing individual relationships and partnerships across species post-disasters breeds confidence in the possibility of a better world. It also has the potential to establish and deepen relationships between people. In turn, this can start a dialogue about political, environmental and social implications and how all these issues are interconnected. It is a small and precise action that we can take that has a domino effect on considering an optimistic future of living in a ‘blighted’ world.

In a similar way, I understand the description of hope “mov[ing] like oil in water” (p. 39) as a symbol of how small ideas or ‘droplets’ can connect with one another and join together, becoming stronger than they were alone. The text suggests that hopeful desires can be grasped at a “molecular level” (p. 31.) From there, the possibility for “collective imagination” (p. 39) is introduced, as they ‘dance’ together. Furthermore, it is the “indeterminate nature” (p. 39) of hope that can lead to something. Hence, Derrida’s definition of messianic thought is introduced again, as the way oil moves through water is unpredictable but simultaneously powerful. To complicate this analogy further, oil embodies the ills of extractive capitalism in a literal way. As well as this, the Corexit disperser added to the mix makes the movements of oil even more mysterious and ever-changing, with no fixed ending – calling on the basis of messianic time which predicts that revolutionary periods can fade and just as easily return.

Finally, “biocultural hope” does indeed challenge the dominant nature-culture divide in political action. It denies the traditional separation of ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ worlds through basing itself in the idea of interspecies care and kinship, and specifically in living alongside other species rather than in opposition to them. Furthermore, the text states that at once, biocultural hope brings together “mystical local history, secrets of the soil, and community participation” (p. 56) without assuming that they belong to different realms. This type of hope also sees some optimism in other species outliving humans (p. 48,) which inherently suggests that humans and their ‘culture’ are not the be-all-and-end-all but just one element within the world around.

**Question 4**

**What alternative conceptions of ‘sex’ and sexual environmental politics are offered by Ah-King and Hayward to challenge the discourse of “sex panic” that arose in the wake of sex transformations in animals induced by endocrine disruptors?**

The text discusses the “sex panic” and how it reveals the ways in which sexual politics play a part in environmental movements and are generally based on reinforcing sexual normativity. Essentially, the areas of concern for preservation and protection are determined by heteronormative expectations of what is ‘pure’ (p. 4.) Hence, the “sex panic” occurs when human sex, particularly the male sex on which the patriarchal system operates, is threated (p. 5.) This level of panic is rarely seen in reaction to other threats, such as cancer and loss of habitat (p. 5.)

What Ah-King and Hayward suggest in facing this problem is to completely reconceptualise sex and its transformations with an alternative framework that “unsettles old assumptions” and is “less apocalyptic” (p. 5.) This framework must accept and come to terms with what has already happened, rather than operate on the assumption of returning to what is supposedly ‘pure.’ It requires looking at sex as “open potentials” (p. 6) rather than a fixed binary. Ah-King and Hayward’s ontological view of sexing is one of a dynamic and ongoing process, with potential for healing and restoring. Toxification itself becomes enfolded in this process instead of being an outside enemy or disruptor, thus accepting endocrine disruption as an “unavoidable co-presence” (p. 8.) The framework calls on us to face the process of sexing, which has no blueprint or clear path, without prejudice and pre-conceived notions of ‘normality.’