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Nature Bites Back: The Anti-Pastoral Thesis in Queer and Trans Studies

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This introduction lays the groundwork for the special issue's focus on the question, "What could anti-pastoral thought yield for queer and trans ecologies and anthro-decentric movements beyond the human?" We trace a lineage of the pastoral in Western thought, showing how ecocritical approaches have drawn on this heritage while also contesting it and emphasizing the necessity for a decolonial lens on the very constitution of the pastoral as of a piece with settler colonialism. We link the question of the anti-pastoral to the thread of the antisocial in queer theory while also delineating the role of the pastoral in queer theory. We define the pastoral and antipastoral as being in complex relation to one another, much as queer and trans theory have been developing in complex relation to one another. We trace the trajectory of the essays in the special issue to highlight their linkages and convergences; we argue that the composite picture presented here, while not exhaustive, deploys the anti-pastoral to recast how whiteness, maleness, and cis-heteronormativity circumscribe the limits of a certain genre of the human and disrupts historical conflations of land and the feminine, the perverse and "unnatural", and offer promising new directions for considering queer relationality beyond the human.

In the mode of the pastoral, nature has long figured in Western culture as a welcome respite, a restorative space for humans, though of course the natural world has never been fully contained and tamed by humans. The pastoral's presumed separation from ordinary life, however, affords a repose not only for indulging in the pleasures of nature, which are real, but also a locus for imagining human relations differently, whether to transgress taboos or explore new norms. For this reason, the pastoral has not infrequently been charged with homoerotic potential, if not also queer and trans possibilities. In *Queer Cinema in the World*, Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt specify two subcategories of the pastoral that describe the interrelations of queer and trans life with the natural world: the "homoerotic pastoral" and the "queer eco-critical.[1] The former generally portrays white male same-sex eroticism in positive spaces of refuge, relaxation, and sensual discovery, while the latter depicts queer and trans people as environmental stewards who aim to collapse hierarchies of embodied difference and to foster non-dominant connections with nonhumans. What is left out of this taxonomy, as Cameron Clark has written elsewhere, is an *anti-pastoral* mode, a recurrent genre that expresses pessimism and negativity to limn the dire links among capital accumulation, labor alienation, and environmental destruction.[2] We aim in this special issue to address this gap in critical inquiry so as to pave new ways to conceptualize LGBTQ environmental aesthetics, politics, and ethics in light of the ecological crises that our planet is now facing.

Our contributors extend readings of the anti-pastoral in various ways to show how, a queer and trans lens on the anti-pastoral yields a fresh vantage on current discussions about the Anthropocene's disparate impacts across colonized and decolonizing spaces. In questioning the human presumption of dominion over nature, our issue aims for diminishing as well as decentering the human in relation to other beings. If everything has the corroding imprint of Man on it now, to recall the face drawn in the sand that Foucault describes being washed away at the end of *The Order of Things*, how do we think about that interface, that encounter, between human and nonhuman beings differently, beyond Man?[3] In posing our question this way, we underscore that the queer anti-pastoral draws not only on Foucault as an essential thinker for queer theory but also on decolonial theory, where Sylvia Wynter's call for a new science of the word also impels thinking beyond Man.[4] Building on Foucault's distinction between classical and modern epistemes, Wynter defines *homo politicus* (Man1, a secular political Enlightenment subject) and *homo oeconomicus* (Man2, a bio-economic Darwinian subject), as particular modern, Western genres of the human. Wynter acutely details how the Enlightenment-inherited, post-Darwinian naturalization of Man as a biologically-constituted, rational, sovereign, and self-interested species arises through

the mythic narratives of settler colonialism and racial capitalism. What's important for our purposes here is that this narrow genre of the human emerges through narratives that rely on pastoral idealism in order to render nonhuman nature into land, resources, and eventually property. For all its marginality, a queer or trans anti-pastoral is thus unthinkable without consideration of how decolonial theory raises the question: for which humans is nature "outside"? What lives, locations, and entities have been fabricated as extractable resources or disposable waste?

If the pastoral offers vectors for considering how trans and queer life affirmatively encounters nature, and if the anti-pastoral tarries with the negative elements of nature to bring expression to the marginalizing, repressive, and oppressive effects of capitalism and colonialism on modes of desiring and identity, then that brings us to the question: What could anti-pastoral thought yield for queer and trans ecologies and anthro-decentric movements beyond the human? While the past few decades have proven true the American literary critic Leo Marx's premonition that our current ecological crises are "bound to bring forth new versions of the pastoral,"[5] our goal here is not so much to classify and proliferate another category but to chart anti-pastoral thinking as a vector for queer and trans critical inquiry. To this end, we acknowledge that "queer" and "trans" have related but distinct historical, cultural, and political meanings, and though we do not wish to collapse their differences, we bring "queer" and "trans" together in this volume through the injunction that LGBTQ+ issues are ecological and environmental issues that challenge the dominance of Man.

Our issue's provocation thus works across the array of our key terms: pastoral, anti-pastoral, trans and queer. Let us first consider the relation that these queer and trans ecologies have to the pastoral, which, while not explicitly anti-social, has long been understood as set outside of the social and variously marked explicitly as queer, homoerotic, or free from normative sexual and gender constraints. Indeed, the pastoral's queer possibilities come about precisely because of the pastoral's social marginalization; the marginality of both the pastoral and the queer has been an important motive for critics to think the two together, as scholars working in a queer ecocritical vein including Fone (1983), Marcone (2011), Nardizzi (2013), Shuttleton (1999), indicate.[6] This tracks with how the pastoral itself has been central to environmental writing more generally: as Greg Gerrard has argued, both the early stages in the development of ecology and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a founding text of modern environmentalism, are indebted to the pastoral tradition, while Lawrence Buell argues that the pastoral subtends American literary genres that deal with nature, whether frontier narratives or "nature writing."[7] Arguably, then, the very institutionalization of queer and trans ecologies rests on the pastoral as a foundational ground for analysis and critique.

We can take as a prime example the now-canonical volume *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010), edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, which opens with an analysis of *Brokeback Mountain* to formulate the field's conceptual framework. As the authors show, both the film and the project of queer ecologies, more broadly, challenges dominating discourses of "nature" and "sexuality" by unsettling heteronormative ideals pertaining to the environment and gendered embodiment. Placing *Brokeback Mountain* in a Western lineage that begins with ancient bucolic poetry wherein "male homoeroticism [is] a central facet of the pastoral depiction of nature as a site for innocent, corporeal plentitude," Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson discern that many LGBTQ artists and intellectuals have drawn on this long pastoral tradition. They have done so strategically to envision "a queer history, a queer space, and indeed a queer nature: the idealized, bucolic 'naturalness' of pastoral homoeroticism calls into question the idea that heterosexuality is the only 'natural' sex around."[8] Yet, in a brief parenthetical note, they suggest *Brokeback Mountain* is not a simple Arcadia, for "this pastoral [by contrast] is interrupted by both homophobes and coyotes."[9] We hear an echo of this pastoral version in Oliver Baez Bendorf's writing on "Nature" in the inaugural edition of the journal *TSQ* when, likewise invoking the phobic and the bestial, he writes, "A transgender pastoral may be verdant and bucolic, but the reality is occasionally interrupted by transphobes, cunning or dumb, who howl and leave their scat."[10] If contemporary queer and trans pastorals are not merely environments of pleasure or communal belonging but spaces threatened by disruptive phobic incursions, then what might constitute an anti-pastoral within this corpus of queer ecocriticism?

To begin answering this question, we must consider how this pastoral space comes to be carved out, established apart from "civilized" or metropolitan spaces; settler colonialism underpins the frontier fantasies of the genre of the Western that *Brokeback Mountain* participates in. Buell observes "the historic importance of pastoral, frontier, and wilderness themes to the American imagination," an imagination driven by white colonialist and capitalist aspirations.[11] Buell cautions that "[i]t is no easy matter to extricate oneself from these biases"—namely, biases embedded in the othering of nature as a way to further marginalize those disempowered by settler colonialism and patriarchal capitalism—"to arrive at a more ecocentric state of thinking than western culture now sustains, without falling into other biases like environmental racism."[12] Yet what strikes us as anti-pastoral thought can be seen to be expressed by early African American literature. As Michael Bennett notes, autobiographies of formerly enslaved people often overturned the central tenets of Euro-American pastoralism in three ways: (1) by rejecting lyrical or metaphorical ruminations of the land for a

more material sense of place; (2) by favoring the city as a refuge and site of vitality or possible freedom over a natural world so mired in colonial-capitalist violence; and (3) by expressing not elegiac nostalgia for a bygone past but a temporal emphasis on futurity in "the Promised Land waiting beyond this mortal coil".[13] What's crucial to Bennett's analysis and to how we mobilize anti-pastoral thought in this special issue is that early African American literature proposes not a simple inversion of the pastoral's spatiotemporal contrasts but a means to encounter different ecocentric ways of being in the world beyond the dictates of Man.

While the US has its unique take on how the pastoral so centrally and ambivalently structures its literary culture, it is far from unique in using the pastoral to fuel imagination of other spaces humans could occupy and how they might comport themselves differently there. The anti-pastoral turns the screw further, reminding us of a dissenting, detrimental, or dangerous difference of or in those other spaces.

We might anchor the anti-pastoral in one of the inaugural texts of queer theory, Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (1976). In the opening chapter, Foucault suggests that pastoral idealism, or the false division of nature and culture, is fundamentally rendered obsolete by the modern conversion of sex into a discursive object in the human sciences. This thesis enters the text through a noteworthy shift from scholarly language to the rhetoric of a fable or fairy tale, as Foucault writes:

> One day in 1867, a farm hand from the village of Lapcourt, who was somewhat simple-minded … was turned in to the authorities. At the border of a field, he had obtained a few caresses from a little girl, just as he had done before and seen done by the village urchins around him; for, at the edge of the wood, or in the ditch by the road leading to Saint-Nicolas, they would play the familiar game called "curdled milk"…. What is the significance about this story? The pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, from a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.[14]

As many have noted, Foucault is rather casual here about the crime of pederasty. But in this context, what strikes us about this early articulation of the crime of pederasty is Foucault's spatio-temporal construction of the tale. For rather than imagining the countryside through wide-open vistas of erotic freedom, Foucault emphasizes instead the liminal border spaces of the field, wood, and a ditch near Saint-Nicholas, thereby

placing sexual activity in sites that oscillate between near visibility and near invisibility. These interstitial spaces for sex are further doubled in temporal terms, marking at once a pre-modern moment curiously inscribed by what Foucault calls "these timeless gestures, these barely furtive pleasures" right as such expressions are beginning to be regulated through "a whole machinery of speechifying, analyzing, and investigating."[15] "Pettiness" is the key to understanding the depth of Foucault's disdain for how this new regime of sexuality reduces certain types of erotic affiliation into perverse acts or identifications. Yet, the very duplicitous structure of this pastoral—its polyvalent folds of space and time and the stark asymmetries among village participants—compels us to remark that such "bucolic pleasures" are never truly independent of power relations in the first place.[16] The very power relations that set aside the pastoral for so-called "innocent" nonnormative pleasures are also the ones that undergird the anti-pastoral's menace.

We cannot forget that Foucault's pejorative sense of the pastoral is indebted to Marxist critiques of Romanticism and how this critical lens relates to analysis of power.[17] In this case the agency of both the molested girl and the "simple minded" farm hand, who takes the fall for all the other "village urchins" whose abuse of the girl goes unchecked, remain unremarked; we cannot read anyone's pleasure other than the urchins' indirectly narrated by the passive voice ("and seen done by"). One might ask, what is the occasion of the farm hand's witnessing the urchins' petty pleasures? Does this silence mark the farm hand's own abuse by the village boys, which he repeats with the girl? What makes these bucolic pleasures "inconsequential" is the power exercised by the urchins, which passes unmentioned, as though boys will be boys. Both this fable and the law whose emergence it marks, seem unable to imagine that the girl could be the perpetrator of this petty petting—in other words, that her caresses would be driven by her own desire and not the demand of the urchins or the farm hand. This is barely noted in Foucault's account because such activities are normalized in the emergence of the dispositif of sexuality.

What makes this scene a germ of the anti-pastoral is Foucault's critique of the machinery of judicio-medical surveillance emerging around the farm hand and eclipsing the interstitial spaces where bodies and pleasures can be explored seemingly without consequences. As that machinery serves to coalesce and enforce dominant modes of patriarchal, heteronormative, and capitalist sexual organization, Foucault focuses on the loss of less regulated pleasures, but not on the loss of less regulated harms. In other words, the nostalgia for bucolic pleasures or for interpersonal connections in interstitial spaces privileges alternative pleasures, but not alternative harms. If we cannot imagine the girl's exploitation of the farm hand, we also cannot recognize the harms that remain unaddressed in the conventions that rein in desire under the imprint of Man.

The ambivalence of the pastoral in Foucault's elegiac representation of what modern sexual science has lost is hardly foreign to the pastoral genre itself. "Pastoral is a queerer business," William Empson claims in 1935 as he drags proletarian literature into his discussion of English literature's handling of the pastoral. Class is always integral to the pastoral, whether in the feigned figures of shepherds and shepherdesses or the agricultural working class—cowboys, farmhands, villagers—as a synecdoche for the rural. It makes sense that Empson turns to proletarian literature: "good proletarian art is usually Covert Pastoral,"[18] Empson claims; proletarian literature "usually has a suggestion of the pastoral, a puzzling form which looks proletarian but isn't,"[19] even if it is not explicitly articulated. Empson further suggests that the "realistic pastoral … also gives natural expression for a sense of social injustice."[20] This tracks with *Queer Ecology*'s reading of *Brokeback Mountain*. Empson's treatment of the pastoral—and in particular framing the entire project of *Some Versions of the Pastoral* through this puzzling and queerer form of proletarian literature—serves to connect "the ways in which the pastoral process of putting complex ideas into the simple … and the resulting social ideas" that can be expressed through this mode.[21] What's important for us in turning to his versions is that Empson acknowledges the real social effects—particularly for articulating social justice—of the pastoral in literature. If the pastoral fuels how both English and American literatures, albeit in different ways, use the imaginative space of the pastoral to induce social change, to imagine more socially just relations, this raises the question of the political uses of the anti-pastoral. To grapple with this, we must consider how the anti-pastoral is positioned in relation to the pastoral— is it contained within the pastoral, as a mode of it, or is it outside of the pastoral and counter to it? Given that the pastoral has a social vision, does the anti-pastoral even offer a social vision of its own, or is it the negation of the pastoral's social vision?

To answer these questions we have to consider how the pastoral is taken to be a mode of thought enlivened by the fantasy of a lifeworld without negativity.[22] The pastoral is often encapsulated by three elements: a spiritual or political elevation of the human as central to taming and managing wildlife and the environment; an affective orientation toward nature based in good feelings of contentment, pleasure, or even utopian idealism; and an aesthetic tradition of harmonious balance, beauty, and purity that overwrites colonial and imperial acts of extraction, land dispossession, genocide, and extinction. This final feature suggests that any given pastoral may actually be an anti-pastoral for some, and indeed, our collection holds that the pastoral and anti-pastoral are not so much an antagonistic binary as they are coterminous and co-constitutive. For that reason we write anti-pastoral with a dash as a way of marking this oscillation.

Queer writers of color have often articulated this dual structure for anti-pastoral thought through their less sanguine observations of human labor and environmental organization in terms that are more material and geographic than they are metaphorical. Critiquing a sense of an idyllic past or fallen present, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga craft what Jorge Marcone calls "painful pastorals" in their respective concepts of the borderlands and queer Aztlán. On migrant attempts to cross the US-Mexico border, Anzaldúa observes, "As refugees in a homeland that does not want them, many find a welcome hand holding out only suffering, pain, and ignoble death."[23] A queer Aztlán, for Moraga, would eliminate such brutal exercises of power and gate-keeping "to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender," but such "circles of support and survival" can only be made possible through a reckoning with colonial histories of heteropatriarchy and their continuities within everyday life.[24] As Marcone shows, both of these authors ultimately depict "what the pastoral is supposed to conceal: the hardships, environmental problems, the threat of loss or eviction, and violence."[25] The structure of the pastoral, however, facilitates a concept of return, since the spaces to which the border-crossers turn or return are not home spaces, nor are they foreign spaces. In recognizing neither home nor foreign spaces within their pastoral returns, Anzaldúa and Moraga highlight how colonialism, racial capitalism, and forced migration underpin or even disrupt what might be taken to be spaces of retreat or pleasure. Yet what makes the return possible as well as painful are the changes in the returning subject herself, how her passage between spaces dislodges any grounding in an absolute identity and opens the subject up to contingency. In this issue Hanneke Stuit traces anti-pastoral return in a South African postcolonial context, examining how rural traditional male circumcision rituals complexly structure queer lives in contemporary times. We suggest that the anti-pastoral offers a way to navigate such contingencies of the subject and to use them to feel the bite of nature—that is, to work with nature's full range of activity, responsiveness, or forces in non-dominating ways.

In grappling with the question of how the anti-pastoral relates to the pastoral, the key, in our view, is how the anti-pastoral connects through its pessimistic vantage the relations it establishes within and among capital accumulation, labor alienation, and environmental destruction. We are mindful of how in a queer theory context, the anti- of the anti-pastoral evokes the anti- of the antisocial thesis, a theory of queerness that embraces negativity and that is often attributed to Leo Bersani's psychoanalytically inflected and aesthetics-oriented work. Scholars of the antisocial thesis, or queer negativity as it is sometimes called, have often approached the bad feelings and

bleak power relations endemic to colonial modernity as vantage points onto what is overlooked or what cannot be assimilated in neoliberal civil society. In Heather Love's terms, for instance, "feeling backward" indexes a range of bad feelings that counter the affirmative politics of gay pride, feelings including "nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, ressentiment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness."[26] The recent "feeling bad" turn in trans studies has further elaborated particular affects such as "fatigue, numbness, envy, rage, [and] burnout" as disruptive to teleological narratives of gender recognition, transition, or euphoria.[27] What these scholars and many more show is that queer or trans negativity does not simply illuminate the complex and contradictory processes of affect and psychic life; rather such concepts also direct us to a continuum of queer and trans suffering in ways that motivate political change and work to realize social justice.

Our reading of Bersani highlights how his work expresses a critique of the pastoral as much as it also transforms it. "Negativity in art attacks the myths of the dominant culture—the pastoral myth, for example, of sexuality as inherently loving and nurturing of sexuality as continuous with harmonious community," he writes in "Is There a Gay Art?"[28] On the other hand, as Brian Glavey has argued, what is striking about Bersani's thought is how "[t]he attempt to imagine forms of relationality that sidestep the violence inherent in the appetitive structure of selfhood has led our most eloquent critic of the culture of redemption to a view of art that appears surprisingly pastoral, a view dedicated to discovering our 'at-homeness in the world.'"[29] Bersani maintains that both psychoanalysis and art enable us "to see our prior presence in the world, to see, as bizarre as this may sound, that, ontologically, the world cares for us"[30] It is this care that the world has for us—or may have for us, whomever that "us" is—that we want to tease out in thinking of the resonances between these two queer antis, the antisocial and the anti-pastoral.

Refining what we prise as the Bersanian turn on the pastoral, Glavey continues:

> This aesthetic is a mode of interacting with the world that doesn't strive to master or obliterate otherness, but rather accepts 'the pleasure of finding ourselves harbored within it' (153). We are both in the world and of the world, and it is one of the constitutive tragedies of human existence, Bersani argues, that we find ourselves compelled to blot out this reality.[31]

Bersani has described this aesthetic self-finding as a "small n-narcissism"; it is significant because it is pleasurable, because "it still means a certain pleasurable renunciation of one's own ego boundaries, the pleasure of a kind of self-obliteration."[32]

From Bersani's point of view, recognizing ourselves in the world, through our shattered, piecemeal, nondominating selves, is distinct from imposing ourselves on the world—the face of Man inscribed on the surfaces of the natural world mentioned earlier. This entails, as Steven Swarbrick elaborates, working through a different Bersani essay, "to let live by letting go of life's snare: to will our own lessness in the world."[33] We would compare Bersani's renunciation of the ego, a rejection of the proprietary interests (or propertied self-possession) of Western humanism's individualist self, with Wynter's interest in exploring other genres of the human, which we connect with exploring other modes of the anti-pastoral. Bersani's career-long effort to undo the dialectic of internal and external nature that is essential to Man, to undermine the confidence of self-containment that grounds modern individualism, emerges in these readings by Glavey and Swarbrick as deeply, queerly ecological.

Swarbrick explicitly links this mode of self-loss to "what Bersani, at the end of 'Sociability and Cruising,' calls 'ecological ethics.'"[34] Swarbrick's call, "to think anima (life, spirit, becoming) and animosity (violence, aggression, hate) in the same breath" resonates with how we understand the anti-pastoral.[35] Through the anti-pastoral's complex intrication of seemingly antithetical impulses that are nonetheless essential to one another, like breathing, we can find a very different sense of our selves harbored within the world. In our view, the anti-pastoral is more than the *askesis* or willing our own lessness that Swarbrick rightly identifies as sourced in Foucault; the anti-pastoral rebalances the scales between human and nonhuman.[36] If the pastoral is a human space carved out and imposed on the landscape—and we mean that *if*—then the anti-pastoral might be said to be the land's imposition back on the humanscape. The anti-pastoral thus brings to light how the land should be understood as the vital network of nonhuman beings who have their own relations not mediated through us humans. Lessening ourselves, however queerly, will not enable us to fully dodge the blow of the anti-pastoral in that rebalancing. But we can learn from that unhomely reorientation.

The critical task of conceptualizing an ecological ethics that overturns the fantasy of the sovereign master-subject has likewise been pursued in trans theory. Moreover, trans ecologies intersect with the concerns that Moraga and Anzaldua have already shown trouble "home." Unsettling the notion of home in relation to her foundational essay on Frankenstein, Susan Stryker observes, "The enemy of my nature is a Nature that is home to Man, but not to me. I asserted then my sense of life as being filled with monstrous potential in which I acknowledged my 'egalitarian relationship with nonhuman material being'" (xviii). We find Stryker's anti-Man stance and the "monstrous potential" of trans embodiment to be in line with anti-pastoral thinking because it goes beyond questioning "nature" and aligns the body with other materialities; this looks monstrous to Man, but opens up non-hierarchical and self-determined ecocentric ways of being.

Since no life form is a bounded individual but is rather a porous container that comprises and informs several interrelated but also distinct ecosystems, Stryker proposes that encountering this vital network without diluting multiplicity or resolving ambiguity is a first step toward losing selfhood as a means to reconceptualize the self as a decentralized relational matrix. She reflects: "It hurts, and is dangerous, to be dehierarchized, to lose human status by falling outside of norms and thereby being subjected to violence, but decentering the tangled webs of trans-huManimality nevertheless offers a better ethical starting place for enacting our relationship to Being than trying to prop up a spurious anthropocentric privilege. This is where transecology begins for me" (xviii). In this sense, all life forms might be considered trans; however, as Stryker suggests here and as Nicole Seymour further cautions, "while we might all be trans (that is, porous creatures open to the world) some of us are more trans or open or porous than others, and detrimentally so" (198). Perhaps then for both queer and trans theory, ecological ethics must contend foremost with questions of home, asking not only what it means to be at home in one's body, but also how rethinking the body as a home for various life forms might inform more socially just ways of inhabiting the world.

Ethics, Stryker reminds us, "is derived from the Greek ethos, meaning character, habitat, and dwelling (and thus a close kin to *oikos*, a dwelling place or household, that provides the root prefix eco- in ecology)" (xviii). The etymological root of *oikos* also encompasses family and property within a given home or dwelling, and despite what these disparate terms mean, they all rely on an emphasis of ownership. What, then, might ecology mean for those whose status is rendered as property, or for those whose ownership is precarious? Drawing on Christina Sharpe's idea of antiblackness as climate, Joshua Bennett asks: "What sort of poetics rise to the fore when home is defined by an ongoing antagonism? By what Colin Dayan and others have described as an existential experience marked, and marred, by *civic death*, but also the myriad forms of life, of *living*, that are energized within its field of reach?" Anti-pastoral poetics—or what he also calls a "poetics of demolition"—do not simply register the breakdown of any given world order, for Bennett; rather, they solicit an ethical demand for rethinking ecologies anew.[37] What this suggests for queer and trans writers, especially writers of color, is that ecology does not appear as a neutral ontology of interrelations but one that originates through the violent theft or loss of home, kinship, belonging, and official records of personhood. If the antisocial thesis stands up against assimilative inclusion, then the anti-pastoral, for queer and trans studies, might grapple more closely with the ecologies of bureaucracy as well as of nature, the forces that organize life and livingness to varying degrees of survivability and displacement from any sense of home.

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We might take as our example of this unhomely reorienting, one that breathes anima and animosity into a blow from the nonhuman that exceeds the will-to-lessness, a reading of a more recent celebrated queer Western/pastoral film, Jane Campion's 2021 *Power of the Dog*. In many ways, *Power of the Dog* rehearses the classical aspects of the American pastoral as outlined by Buell. In demonstrating how the pastoral haunts American environmental writing—canonically understood as nature writing, though he challenges this nomenclature—Buell argues that Euro-American pastoralism "was conceived as both a dream hostile to the standing order of civilization (decadent Europe, later hypercivilizing America) and at the same time a model for the civilization in the process of being built."[38] The central character, Phil, certainly embodies this hostility to civilization, whether that is figured by George's refined ways—a wife, a house embellished with piano and fashionable furniture—or by the woman of the house herself, Rose, a doctor's widow with a near-grown son, Peter, who seems to be a burgeoning scientist. Phil keeps to the outside, a man among the men who maintain the ranch, aligned with nature and the outdoors not only through his emphatically rough ways but also his pastoral hideaway, tunneled to through a bower of bent trees, hidden from the rest of the world. Through Phil's anti-civilizing plot against Rose, combined with Phil's apparent seductive efforts towards the markedly fey Peter, *Power of the Dog* was widely bruited to be a queering the genre of the Western (as if, critics not uncattily noted, it wasn't already queer). This queerness is anchored by Phil's getaway bower, which the film resolutely marks as a homophilic space and which Peter finds when he tracks down Phil's traces there; it is a space that blatantly conforms to the first of the two kinds of queer pastoral that Schoonover and Galt describe as marking the interrelations of queer and trans life with the natural world: "the homoerotic pastoral and the queer eco-critical."[39] And yet, we argue, *Power of the Dog* offers at best a failed queerness and moreover a vexed approach to the antipastoral.

Phil's misogyny is all too familiar and unqueer. He might have a thing for men in magazines, or long-lost idols, but his reaching out to Peter slants more towards pure aggression than eroticism—if the two can be disentangled. Peter, framed as the willowy and effeminate son of Rose and a suicidal father, seems a likely target for Phil's, er, philandering. But Phil's incursions against Rose—psychological dominance gambits—raise Peter's ire in defense of his mother. The homophobic trope of mama's boy is turned lethally towards a patriarchal defense of a victimized woman as Peter seduces Phil to his death, allying himself with the natural world whose specimens he has been quietly and persistently cataloguing the whole film. Notably Peter's relation to the natural world is one of curiosity and knowledgeable collaboration, rather than dominance and performativity.

Jane Campion discusses the eroticism of the final scene between Peter and Phil, in the barn, the night of Phil's anthrax poisoning. And while there is unmistakable sexual tension in that scene, it's a decoy for how power is operating. This is not unlike how in Foucault, the farmhand's prosecution serves as a decoy for the unaddressed sexual aggression of village urchins whose power, though incidental to the sentence, is the one ultimately asserted to render them unscathed by the juridicoclinical gaze. The purpose this tension in the film serves is precisely the thing that has been core to Phil's modus the whole time—that is, aggression towards the other, rather than erotics.[40] The actual scene is ambiguous—we impose a same-sex desire scenario on it, because it fits a certain pedophilic paradigm that the film has been heavy-handedly marking the whole time: Bronco's pederastic relation to Phil (was that why Phil left Yale?), that Phil now wants apparently to replicate with Peter. And Peter seems to fit the bill: slender, fey, flower-making only son of Rose and the suicided doctor. Peter's deadly defense of the mother overcomes the aggressive and defensive pastoral of Phil's homosociality.

The charge between the two men in the barn is undeniable. What it means, however, is debatable. Consider, in this light, Audre Lorde's discussion of the erotic: "We tend to think of the erotic as an easy tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us towards living in a fundamental way."[41] If we go by this account, it's hard to see the tension between the two men as erotic when one is bent on death and the other on quashing life. One might object that the exchange of the cigarette—Peter rolls and lights and takes a puff before offering it to Phil, placing the cigarette between Phil's lips himself then taking it away—is an *echt* erotic act: phallic exchange, a cultural cliche of the post-coital drag flipped to pre-coital seduction. This would be a death-driven sexuality that is foreign to Lorde's erotic. But the other cultural cliche of a cigarette drag, especially one provided by another man placing the cigarette in the smoker's lips, is of the final smoke before an execution. Sometimes a fag is just a fag.

Our point is that the ostensible eroticism of *Power of the Dog* is not the erotic but rawer, more baleful power; it is not "a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way" but an antagonistic confrontation that aims to conquer, overwhelm, shut down. If we understand the queer or trans pastoral to be about life, then that struggle in *Power of the Dog* might seem to make it anti-pastoral. And yet, this anti- is not rooted in negativity, oriented towards an annihilation of Man (the colonialist, capitalist, Anglo-European individualist paradigm that dominates and fuels the Anthropocene). Oriented to the annihilation of one man, yes, but not challenging the system of Man.

What we want to raise from *Power of the Dog* is the point that the anti- of the queer anti-pastoral embraces the negative side of living—persisting or surviving not just

flourishing. It raises questions like: How does the queer anti-pastoral relate to moving towards living? Is the living of a bacterium like the anthrax that Peter weaponizes against Phil anti-pastoral? Is it queer? How does the landscape's activity in this film hold the film's queerness? The bacteria marks the non-emptiness of the land before us. If the conventional American pastoral is indelibly entwined with settler colonialism's denial of the vibrant occupancy of the so-called New World, such that ideologically it promotes the territorialization of purportedly "empty" land, the anti-pastoral insists on the always-already-occupied of any given quarter on earth.

In the actual landscape shots—Phil and Peter looking out at the hills, for instance, when Phil asks Peter what he sees—we are more likely to see the scene, disembodied, and not the men's relation to the scene. Notably, Phil and Peter's relation to the scene of the distant hills is established largely through montage rather than an over-their-shoulders shot. While there are a number of shots of Peter standing alone against the backdrop, the point of the shots seems to be more his separateness from rather than relation to—a kind of montage within the shot, a layering of disproportionate scales. The extreme long shots that do put the body in the landscape do just that by diminishing the body in favor of the vision. Meanwhile, Phil against the landscape tends to be him with others—the ranch hands, the cattle, the horses—except when he's in his hidey-hole or anal retreat.

Bodies are linked most closely to landscape in the crosscuts between horses and hills. Nonhuman bodies like the river of cattle being herded to market at the film's outset diminish the centrality of the human in the visual field but also cinematically display the sweep of landscape from the same domineering position that Phil takes towards Rose: sadistic, distant, encompassing. The conventional, even normative, separation of body from landscape in *Power of the Dog* holds back the film's formal queerness and returns us to the question of relating to nonhuman queerness, a question that is key among our concerns in this issue.

If not answered by *Power of the Dog*, the question of how a landscape can be queer leads us to Alize Zorlutuna's queer interdisciplinary art work that explores relationships to land, culture, and the more than human.[42] The visual genre of landscape depictions—another form, arguably, of the pastoral—reinforces how what they call an "ongoing representation as largely uninhabited, wild, and pristine is integral to a national mythology that erases the lived realities and histories of Indigenous people. It also elides the ongoing environmental exploitation wreaking havoc on the natural environment while packaging the nation's natural environment as a commodity for consumption and national pride."[43] Zorlutuna's own landscape-based video art aims to "posit other ways of imagining connection with land, nature and the non-human

in general that affirm intimacy with place as complex, multifaceted and specific" (46). Indeed, Zorlutuna opens with a reflection on Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic" to frame how their works confront us with the erotics of landscape. But is this erotics inherently queer? "The evocation of desire unsettles ways of being with the non-human; ways that destabilize normative western epistemologies, relationships to landscape, and land and nature while proposing a reconsideration of human and non- human subjectivities," Zorlutuna argues. How perverse of a human to desire the land in a nondominating way, a willed lessness in relation.

Zorlutuna's videos confront us with queer scales: an oversized hand caresses the ripple of a landscape's hills or limns a horizon. Queer touch, Zorlutuna says, is when "sensations of misplaced desire through touch transgress normative proscriptions and boundaries around what is and should be desirable" (47). Zorlutuna's tactile visual approach contrasts with—and, we argue, queers—*Power of the Dog*. What Zorlutuna's work more clearly elicits than *Power of the Dog*—although the latter is not without this, in its tensions between the smallest bacterium and the largest hills, its closeups and its long shots—is scale. In thinking or rethinking the queer anti-pastoral we should consider scaling across several dimensions or thicknesses. Zorlutuna's queerly erotic juxtapositions of human body fragments, and landscape unsettle our vision by perverting scale, rendering it mobile, shifting, unstable.

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The question of landscape, and particularly colonized landscape in relation to a queer body, a body that may find itself aligned with settler colonialism even if oriented to marginalization by being an outsider, comes to the fore in the first essay of our issue. Laying out versions of the anti-pastoral through her readings, Valerie Rohy deploys a decolonial lens to the decisively colonial poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and shows how her embrace of the ironic pastoral and dystopian anti-pastoral genres provide novel outlets to theorize queer complicity. Taking up Scott Lauria Morgensen's call to excavate the settler colonial logics that underpin queer theory, Rohy turns to queer identifications with fellow outsiders as a particular problem of relationality that complicates solidarity within the context of settler homonationalism, as Morgensen terms it. Through her analysis of two poems, "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "Crusoe in England," Rohy explains how attempts to forge queer relations or desires between a colonial speaker and either Indigenous peoples or the natural world are crossed with postlapsarian pastoral fantasies. This backward-facing temporality and its attendant myth of the "vanishing Indian" ultimately produces either ironic distance or elegiac nostalgia that "absolves colonial subjects of responsibility in the future." If queer theory is to deepen

its analysis of the resistance-complicity manifold, then Rohy suggests it must contend with settler colonialism and its concomitant pastoral imaginaries that separate nature from culture.

Where Rohy takes up the environmental connotations and complexities of the anti-pastoral, Nicole Seymour and Katie Ritson turn to the pastoral's social conventions as a mode of institutional care, ranging from animal husbandry to the liberal welfare state. For them, the critical import of a queer anti-pastoral lies in how it exposes biopolitical violence and trauma enacted in the name of state benevolence. They develop this understanding through an allegorical reading of the Swedish film *Border* (*Gräns*, dir. Ali Abbasi, 2018), showing how the experiences of its troll protagonists mirror the ostracization, medical violence, and sex-based normalization imposed on "groups such as asexual people, intersex people, and transgender people—in addition to disabled people, ethnic or social 'outsiders' (in the Swedish context, so-called '*tattare*') and Indigenous people (again in the Swedish context, Sámi)." Allegory, for them, provides a way of circumventing the problem of queer relationality that Rohy locates in the context of settler homonationalism. In fact, it is through allegory's queer method of "speaking otherwise in public" that Seymour and Ritson find novel modes of affiliation across subordinated or marginalized groups that highlight the unspoken violences at the heart of pastoralism itself.[44]

Extending the consideration of queer and trans approaches to the juncture of the pastoral and anti-pastoral, Jean-Thomas Tremblay and Jules Gill-Peterson deconstruct this binary by turning to depastoral; notably, changing the prefix changes the concept from noun to verb. As they consider "the ecologies we want and those we fear," Tremblay and Gill-Peterson take stock of what they call feminist and queer Darwinian pastorals that recuperate the nineteenth-century naturalist's evolutionary theories for a liberatory politics. At the same time, they attend to the eugenicist mobilizations of Darwin's theories in racist, ableist, and transphobic legislation. For them, the pastoral is not simply an aesthetic, ideological, or affective orientation toward nature, but it is also a critical method that subtends all efforts to extract a pedagogical mission from the accidental qualities of nature and sexual variation. Advocating for a depastoralized Darwin, which is to say neither a pastoral nor anti-pastoral method but one defused of moralism altogether, Tremblay and Gill-Peterson propose a new model of environmental politics where nature and sex are deidealized and thus neither problems to be solved, nor concepts that teach us how to organize life. Rather, embracing the sheer accidental quality of nature and sex for its very aleatory propensities opens up different ways to conceptualize the relations between the queer, the trans, and the antisocial.

While Tremblay and Gill-Peterson depastoralize Darwin, Laura Zebuhr does so to another nineteenth-century naturalist: Henry David Thoreau. First, she sketches an intellectual genealogy for the allegorical appearance of moles in Western philosophy, showing how these creatures burrowing in Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche's writings dig up questions on the very drama of thinking itself. She then turns to what she identifies as "weird moments" in Thoreau that denaturalize supposedly natural life cycles such as the circadian rhythms that compel roosters to crow at the break of dawn. Positing "being in the dark" and "going underground" as queer anti-pastoral methods for thinking, Zebuhr refuses to shed light on what nature may teach us, asking instead, alongside Thoreau, why we even need the concept of nature in the first place.

Turning from questions of critical method to issues of representation and returning us to the notions of care raised by Seymour and Ritson, Hanneke Stuit takes us to scenes of what she calls "pastoral wounding" in recent South African cinema and literature, namely *Inxeba* (dir. John Trengrove, 2017) and *Piggy Boy's Blues* (2015) by Nakhane Touré. In these scenes where the pastoral and anti-pastoral overlap, and where the general cleaving of city-country divides for Black queer life come into sharp focus, Stuit locates painful returns to the rural that distort perceptions of communal belonging within the context of South African gendering rituals. Both texts depict the Xhosa male initiation rites of *ulwaluko* as especially harmful for their queer characters, yet for Stuit, the anti-pastoral complexity of these environmental spaces open up opportunities where the supposedly irreconcilable differences among African custom, religion, and queerness may be renegotiated to posit different models for Black queer futurity.

We close out the issue with Cody Mejeur's elucidation of anti-pastoral thought in queer and trans video games. After first noting that many video game environments are often passive, non-agential backdrops for colonial resource extraction in game design, in which players must destroy objects in the surrounding milieu to accumulate goods, they then take to task LGBTQ games that over-emphasize a close bond between LGBTQ people and the natural environment. What happens, they ask, if we refuse "to romanticize ourselves as suffering, exiled stewards of the natural world with special access, knowledge, or kinship with it?" Two case studies compel their line of thinking here: *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter* (The Astronauts, 2014) and *Night in the Woods* (Infinite Fall, 2017). Both games depict environments that juxtapose pastoral beauty with post-industrial decay wherein their queer characters travel to the natural world for safety and security but also face death and negative affects therein. What's important for Mejeur is that queer ecological insights are not foreclosed in such games; rather, heterotopic alliances emerge through game play in ways that de-centralize queers and thus complicate some factions of the very field of queer ecology itself.

The array of essays hardly exhausts the possibilities of the anti-pastoral as they open other dimensions on queer and trans relations to the beyond-human world. In their parsing of representations that contest and critique the pastoral's colonial enclosures, these essays remind us that the limits of the human are the limits of genres. Turning from the social to how nature in various ways has been represented not merely as the antipode of culture but as its obverse and repressed, an anti-pastoral thesis aims not only to queer any saccharine or romantic notions of nature but to also deploy nature's threat to fracture dominant culture's sure footing, to threaten Man but not life. The anti-pastoral recasts how whiteness, maleness, and cis-heteronormativity circumscribe the limits of a certain genre of the human and disrupts historical conflations of land and the feminine, the perverse and "unnatural". The queer and trans representations that the anti-pastoral traverses find an alternative aesthetics, politics, and ethics for thinking environmentalisms beyond idealism, redemption, or sentimental romances of individualist connection.

Notes

[1] Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, *Queer Cinema in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2016): 246.

[2] Cameron Clark, "Grief, Ecocritical Negativity, and the Queer Anti-Pastoral," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 17.2 (2019): 221.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994): 387.

[4] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.3 (2003): 269.

[5] Leo Marx, "Does Pastoral Have a Future?" in *The Pastoral Landscape*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1992): 222.

[6] Brian Fone, "The Other Eden: Arcadia and the Homosexual Imagination. *The Other Eden: Arcadia and*8, no. 3–4 (1983): 13–34; David Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Jorge Marcone, "A Painful Pastoral: Migration and Ecology in Chicana/o Literature." *Pacific Coast Philology*, 46, no. 2 (2011): 194–209; Vin Nardizzi, "Shakespeare's Queer Pastoral Ecology." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 23, no. 3 (2016): 564–582; Nicholas Tyler Reich, "Queer Ecology in (Gay) Post-Pastoral Cinema." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 30, no. 1 (2023): 50–76; David Shuttleton, "The Queer Politics of Gay Pastoral," in *De-centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. R. Phillips, D. Shuttleton, and D. Watt (New York: Routledge, 1999): 89–102.

[7] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*. (New York: Routledge 2012): 37; Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995).

[8] Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, "Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies" in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010): 4.

[9] Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 4.

[10] Oliver Baez Bendorf, "Nature," *TSQ* 1.1–2 (2014): 136.

[11] Buell, 15.

[12] Buell, 22.

[13] Michael Bennett. "Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery" in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottseville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001): 1999; 197–1999.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage, 1990): 31.

[15] Foucault, 32.

[16] See E.L. McCallum "Technologies of Truth and the Function of Gender in Foucault" *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*. ed. Susan J. Hekman. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996), 77–97.

[17] A few years prior to *The History of Sexuality*, Marxist critic Raymond Williams identified nostalgia as characteristic to this mode of environmental thought in *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973). As Garrard notes, Williams suggested three possible temporal orientations of the pastoral: "the *elegy* looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia; the *idyll* celebrates a bountiful present; the *utopia* looks forward to a redeemed future" (42).

[18] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020): 8.

[19] Empson, 7.

[20] Empson, 14.

[21] Empson, 18.

[22] See, for instance, Buell, 32 and Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 1–12.

[23] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute): 34.

[24] Cherríe Moraga, "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe," in *Queer Cultures*, ed. Deborah Carlin and Jennifer DiGrazia (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004): 235.

[25] Marcone, 202.

[26] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007): 4.

[27] Hil Malatino, *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ of Minnesota P, 2022): 4; for more on the "feeling bad" turn in trans studies, see Jules Gill-Peterson, "Feeling Like a Bad Trans Object" https://post45.org/2019/12/feeling-like-a-bad-trans-object/ and Cameron Awkward-Rich, *The Terrible We: Thinking with Trans Maladjustment* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2022).

[28] Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: Univ of Chicago P, 2010): 34.
[29] Brian Glavey, "Leo Bersani and the Universe," *Criticism* 52.2 (2010): 318. The phrase "at-homeness in the world" appears in Bersani, 55 and 119.
[30] Bersani, 152–153.
[31] Glavey, 318.
[32] Bersani, 175.
[33] Steven Swarbrick, "Nature's Queer Negativity: Between Barad and Deleuze," *Postmodern Culture* 29.2 (2019): 3.
[34] Swarbrick elaborates an ecological ethics through Deleuze, a reading that explicitly counters Karen Barad's reparative approach to vital materialism and thus provides an alternative to the intellectual genealogy we sketch here.
[35] Swarbrick, 3.
[36] Swarbrick uses this phrase and cites in his note 8 Bersani's *Is the Rectum a Grave*, 62).
[37] Joshua Bennett, "Revising 'The Waste Land': Black Antipastoral and the End of the World," *The Paris Review*, last modified January 8, 2018, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/01/08/revising-wasteland-black-antipastoral-end-world/.
[38] Buell, 62.
[39] Schoonover and Galt, 246.
[40] Mekado Murphy, "Anatomy of a Scene: Watch a Seductive Moment in Power of the Dog." *New York Times*, 21 January 2022.
[41] Audre Lorde, *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall (University, MI: Univ of Mississippi P, 2004): 99.
[42] See alizezorlutuna.com
[43] Alize Zorlutuna, "Your Touch Unsettles How I See," *CSPA Quarterly* 19 (2017–2018): 46.
[44] Schoonover and Galt, 123.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.