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Queer, trans-species STS as intervention in ecological science

How does a multispecies watershed body, which refuses a binary between fragmentation and wholeness (Hayward), emerge from intimate encounters between people and nonhuman others? In this chapter, I consider ecologists' expressions of affection and love for their study subjects and grief at their untimely death and extinction. In conversation with transgender animal studies, I explore what 'funny kinds of love' (Weaver) shape the relations between ecologists and the species they encounter in the field. I also explore how these transgressive trans-species relations might re-shape ecology—with ecology considered both as a popular and literary environmental imaginary, and as a scientific field of practice.

Ecologists are on the front lines of the sixth mass extinction, watching intimates die at alarming rates. Can transgender approaches to making-monstrous (Stryker) via environmental degradation politicize the deaths of our 'companion species' (Haraway), as street protests have done for transgender people's untimely and violent deaths? What radical politics and transformative potentials can arise from publicly witnessing these transgressive intimacies, even or especially among more-than-human others who are dying because of human (in)action? How can such approaches complement and foreground indigenous multispecies ethics and relational practices that have contributed crucially to challenging settler scientific and environmental management practices (A. Simpson, TallBear, Todd)? In examining these questions, I search for signs of resistant 'world making' (Muñoz) in ephemeral moments where scientists were able to speak their grief at extinction and love for their study species. I explore three cases: (1) scientists' field photos and captions circulated during a twitter #cuteoff, (2) my own encounters with dead salmon during ecological field studies, and (3) "Tell A Salmon Your Troubles", an interactive performance in which scientists confessed their troubles about data, habitat loss, and extinction to a silent yet responsive salmon character.