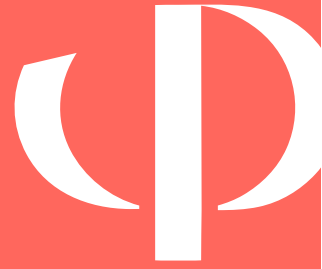


# LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy



FALL 2021

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy

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GRAYSON HUNT, EDITOR

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Grayson Hunt

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

The *APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy* began publication twenty years ago in 2001, the same year that other newsletters got started, including *Native American and Indigenous Philosophy*, *Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, *Philosophy and the Black Experience*, *Feminism and Philosophy*, and *Asian and Asian American Philosophy*. This cluster of newsletters has in the past twenty years contributed to the diversification of ideas and voices to the discipline of philosophy. This latest issue of the *Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy* continues that tradition with a book symposium on Perry Zurn's first monograph, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), and a review of Hil Malatino's *Trans Care* by Brooklyn Leo.

Brooklyn Leo's beautiful and lovingly written review of Hil Malatino's *Trans Care* offers an overview of and engagement with the central themes of this short but nuanced five-chapter book. These themes include "trans archival care," an ethic developed by Malatino out of Indigenous trans, queer, and TwoSpirit critiques of "white trans folks for claiming gender-deviant Indigenous bodies in the archive as evidence to either absolve one of their settler status or to appropriate such lineage directly or indirectly." *Trans Care*, Leo concludes, makes an important transgender contribution to care ethics.

The book symposium, a cluster of essays engaging Perry Zurn's book, *Curiosity and Power*, include philosophers Andrea Pitts, Amy Marvin, Syd Hanson, and Zurn himself. These authors all engage in Zurn's central claim that while the Ancient Greeks tended to pathologize curiosity, and the twentieth century psychologists naturalized it, curiosity is in reality *political*. For Zurn, curiosity is "a series of investigative practices that are informed by and constructive of political architectures." The three original engagements with Zurn's work each offer different directions that *Curiosity and Power* and curiosity more generally can take: queer Chicana/o borderland curiosities, transdisciplinary curiosities and crossings, and transecological curiosity. This was an exciting cluster to read, and I am proud to share it in this issue of the newsletter.

In their commentary, "Tracing Genealogical Ambiguities through Zurn's *Curiosity and Power*," Andrea Pitts maintains that having removed the concept from its affective-

epistemic dichotomy, Zurn can tend to curiosity's individual and collective power. Pitts' analysis turns to Chicana/x feminisms and borderland curiosities, offering a beautiful engagement with Zurn's work and, similarly to Malatino's ancestral care critique sketched in Leo's review, Pitts names the "limitations of colonial archives, including the confrontation with the manner in which many extant dictionaries of pre-conquest Indigenous Mesoamerican languages were produced through the violence of Spanish conquest and Christian missionizing practices."

Sid Hansen's essay, "Curiosity, Afield," begins and ends with Foucault's critique of the "ludicrous" sovereign attempt, "from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them what their truth is and how to find it." Hansen sees in Zurn's work the Foucaultian invitation to scheme about how philosophy might get free of itself, how resistant lineages, practices, and communities of questioning build space and power to move against sedimented systems and to move just because." Hansen's work invites philosophy, especially depressed and despairing trans and genderqueer/non-binary philosophers, to explore the coalitional power of curiosity as Zurn proposes.

Amy Marvin's engagement with Zurn's work is called "Transecological Curiosity" and is perhaps the most novel of the book symposium. In it, Marvin delves into the environmental inflections and implications of Zurn's work. Marvin calls our attention to transecological artists and poets, saying that while "these texts do not explicitly reference curiosity, but they connect with Zurn's emphasis on trans curiosity naming experience, experimenting, introspecting, and investigating beyond a narrowly prescribed vision of life that brackets out trans experience. They also begin responding to Zurn's question about the coalitional potential for trans curiosity as it extends beyond an exclusively human and unmalleable world."

It feels worth mentioning that last fall, just as the 2020 issue of the newsletter was released online, the third biennial Trans Thinking//Thinking Trans conference took place virtually. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trans Philosophy Project co-hosted its signature event with LGBTQ Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where I am the associate director. This was the first time this trans philosophy event has been held virtually, and the first time it has been hosted outside a philosophy department. First hosted in person in 2016 at the University of Oregon, and then again in person at American University in Washington, DC, for many, this conference was a chance for trans philosophers to come together to share ideas and community. Hosting this conference virtually in 2020

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was a boon for transgender communities. The conference became global, with people Zooming in and participating without the prohibitive and unsustainable requirement for conference travel. Over one thousand people registered for the conference, which was unheard of in its pre-pandemic iterations. Money that would have been spent on hotels and flights was redistributed as stipends to nearly all participants in need (students, independent scholars and activists, and underemployed people). While we were sad that we couldn't all convene in person and develop those life-sustaining conference friendships, we enjoyed the cyber community that we hope will sustain us until the next in-person conference.

On a final note, after serving for four years as the editor of the *Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy*, it's time for me to pass the editor baton to the next editor (to be determined). This has been a wonderful opportunity, and during my time as editor I am proud to have helped publish original philosophy essays and book reviews by queer and trans philosophers about queer and trans issues. I hope you enjoy this latest issue.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Hard Work of Gender: A Review of Hil Malantino's Trans Care*

Hil Malantino (University of Minnesota Press, 2020). 90 pp. Paperback. \$10.00. ISBN 978-1-5179-1118-8.

Reviewed by Brooklyn Leo  
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

"Surely there have always been bodies that move in the way ours do."

—Hil Malantino, *Trans Care*  
(University of Minnesota Press, 2020)

Hil Malantino's *Trans Care* pays witness to the networks of care that trans folks weave by way of survival. Maintained through the everyday mundanity of trans life, these care webs act as support when institutions inevitably continue to fail trans needs, reproduce trauma, and, then, force trans folks to wade through its aftermath. In five nuanced, accessible, and brief chapters, this book challenges ableist, racist, and heteronormative notions of care and labor work in the field of care ethics, offering trans practices of care as integral to trans survival and world-building. Drawing from personal, archival, and cultural history, Malantino highlights how trans lifeworlds are more than the "gaps" that institutions left us; they are worlds which can finally hold the complexities and diversity of expressions in trans joy, melancholy, longing, anger, and, even, our communal hauntings.

Perhaps, one of the central contributions of *Trans Care* to care ethics—among many others—is its introduction of the concept, "voluntary gender work." Coined by Ruper Raj, a trans activist and elder, Malantino expands this term to stand

in for the wide-spread phenomenon in which trans folks are overloaded with "mostly unremunerated advocacy work" in our respective fields (20). Work that must also fight barriers to success due to "the dearth of communal, institutional, and social support" for trans folks and our organizing (20). Voluntary gender work points to the institutionally underpaid, yet crucial support that trans folks organize in an effort to help others in our community. However, Malantino also highlights the involuntary or compulsory gender work of trans folks. From being followed home at night to the litany of misgendering by supposed allied-colleagues, the harassment, social alienation, and stigma that trans folks experience is "a laborious process. It is work" (38). It is work to be forced to serve as "the litmus test" by which cis-subjects enter into legitimate gender (38). Although trans flesh is used to legitimize the realhood of cis genders, trans folks are denied such recognition on a daily basis. No wonder we—trans folks—are exhausted; because, as Malantino points out, burnout does not begin to describe the ways that our social death is, actually, hard work. Work that is commodified, but does not cut us a check to pay for food, medical bills, rent, and the other accrued costs of living as a trans person in a transphobic world.

In fact, this book provides a sound critique of how social death dominates the literature on trans embodiment and experiences. While analyses of social death focus on the spectacularized murders of trans women of color, Malantino writes, "I'm interested in how we survive this, how we cultivate arts of living that make us possible" in the face of all the mourning, death, and violence that affectively circulate amongst trans discourse and spaces (5). "Some of us do and don't survive. There are many empty beds, many missing persons, many mourned bodies[;]" those who have passed remain beloved hauntings in our care webs as those who have made possible our adjacent-slanted-sideways movements, lovings, and relations (33).

In chapter four, "Something Other Than Trancestors: History Lessons," Malantino explores how these hauntings manifest in archives. Often, trans visitors to such archival locations bring with them deep longings to make legible a trans history through the traces of gender, genital, and sexual deviance that appears within its records, photos, and documents. How do we—trans scholars, thinkers, activists—take care of the images, stories, and information which come to us bubbling up forgotten, lost, or mistreated from the depths of the archive? This question is central to *Trans Care*. Malantino's ethics of trans archival care contributes to relevant concerns from Indigenous trans, queer, and TwoSpirit folks who critique white trans folks for claiming gender-deviant Indigenous bodies in the archive as evidence to either absolve one of their settler status or to appropriate such lineage directly or indirectly. Resources in Malantino's book points to wisdom that Black, Indigenous elders of color have been teaching for years about protecting ancestral stories through a refusal to share or make them known widely. It is an unwillingness to sell one's ancestors' histories of trauma to the industrial academic complex, rejecting the allure of the promise's exchange for these stories to build a legible "trans history." Resistant to the seductive lure of the idea of a "Trans History," Malantino instead offers the

idea of these archival ghosts as among a “spectrum of specters that undo and exceed it” and we, ourselves, exist on the continuum of this spectrum (59). While the concept of “transcestor” will remain central to Black, Indigenous trans and TwoSpirit wisdoms, *Trans Care* begins to grapple with the ethics of caring for the trans lives we encounter in archives, especially since the visibilization of trans folks in the archive may coincide with violence. As more trans of color, especially TwoSpirit Black, Afro-Indigenous, and Native folks take up this book, I hope that more discussion is had to the concept of “transcestors” as specific to animating and sustaining trans of color care networks and worlds.

*Trans Care* is a testament to the arts of survival that trans folks craft, weaving webs that are sustained by the everyday care trans folks enact. Abandoned, often, by conventional family structures and institutions meant to help trans folks, trans worlds continue to persist because of this care work. Hil Malatino’s timely book not only makes visible the disenfranchisement of trans folks from traditional networks of care, but also offers a hefty challenge to care ethics. One that tasks the field to reconceptualize its reliance on cis-centric and normative modes of care. In search of trans worlds, *Trans Care* begins from “a different set of location” and ends with the opening of a trans spectrum, a constellation of trans relations.

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## BOOK SYMPOSIUM: CURIOSITY AND POWER

### *Curiosity, Power, and the Forms They Take*

Perry Zurn

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

In 1942, Virginia Woolf published an essay entitled simply, “Why?” In it, she deftly dismantles the ill-fated airs of academics who assume their sort of inquiries are of the greatest import, despite their lackluster hue and faint pulse. Why the trappings of stone and lectern, of weighty minutiae and groundless prestige? Why the university, at all? Woolf throws down the gauntlet. As an institution of curiosity—perhaps even the paradigmatic instance of curiosity—the university is, nevertheless, precisely lacking its most basic component: questions. She writes:

Questions, being sensitive, impulsive and often foolish, have a way of picking their asking place with care. They shrivel up in an atmosphere of power, prosperity, and time-worn stone. They die by the dozen on the threshold of great newspaper offices. They slink away to less favored, less flourishing quarters where people are poor and therefore have nothing to give, where they have no power and therefore have nothing to lose.<sup>1</sup>

The university is a place of statements and of positions, of contributions and of questions with always already

hypothesized (or proselytized) answers. One goes to learn what others have learned and how others have learned. There is, then, a certain form of curiosity that dies on its steps, Woolf suggests. Perhaps an untrained, de-disciplined curiosity, an existential curiosity, even a fugitive curiosity.

Woolf is of course writing from outside of the university, having been excluded from it by reason of her sex. And yet, she consistently found her way onto the green or into the library or the lecture hall. She dramatizes a regrettable moment in which she attended a dull lecture on the French Revolution. Surrounded by people who gaze on “with the vacancy and placidity of bullfrogs,”<sup>2</sup> Woolf poses, by way of counterpoint, a series of questions about flies, one of whom (curiously having only three legs) she’s spied overhead. How do they survive? Especially an English winter? And what do they think, after securing a hard-earned new lease on life, of being trapped in a lecture hall, with some self-important man of letters droning on about nothing? These are curious questions indeed. The sort of whirring, scuttle-hopping questions so easily squashed in academic contexts. But here they are! In the hallowed halls! How did they survive? How did they live on (*sur-vivre*) after dying on the steps? Are they vampiric questions, wraith questions, ghost questions, or the walking dead? Or perhaps these diphtherous questions are signals of a different ecology. A kind of curiosity buzzing at the edge of the university. A kind of questioning within it that nevertheless works against it.

That same year, 1942, Zora Neale Hurston published her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. In it, she reflects on her anthropological work and muses, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell therein.”<sup>3</sup> Buried in these words are a number of descriptive claims. If research is formalized curiosity, then it must be the case that curiosity takes form, takes shape. And that curiosity can be formalized, or in fact that curiosity can become formulaic. But if it is formed, by what force is it formed? According to what logic and by what poetics? That is, what ways of making things and making one another lend curiosity its shape?<sup>4</sup> These questions then prompt a cascade of normative counterparts. What forms *ought* curiosity to take? And what shapes? What oppressions might those forms support or resist? Are formulas of curiosity the problem themselves or can they be liberatory? Hurston is talking here about research, but might her characterization have other applications? Is university education formalized curiosity? What about journalism or fiction? Or the abutments of stone to begin with?

In context, Hurston is remembering her own failed beginnings in anthropological investigation. Traipsing around the Black South, with her scholarly airs and “carefully accented Barnardese”<sup>5</sup> (hailing from Barnard College), she found herself alone; no one would talk to her, let alone share the folk songs and folklore she came to study. Demoralized, “with my heart below my knees and my knees in some lonesome valley,”<sup>6</sup> she went back to the drawing board and took a new tack. Hanging about town, she became integrated within it in order to learn from it. Whether folks were logging, mining, or philandering

during the day, or dancing, singing, or switch-blading at night, she entered deeply into the fabric of the community to discern its seams and catch its stories. There are, here, two competing formations of anthropological curiosity: traditional ethnography and participant-observation. But this bifurcation is hardly peculiar to anthropology, or to Hurston for that matter. What are the other competing formations of curiosity elsewhere in the university? But also well outside it, especially in “less favored, less flourishing quarters”? For Black Southerners, how did questions take form and take shape differently on porch steps than, let’s say, in the church or at the “jooks”? And what relationships and investments defined that divergence?

While formations of curiosity and indeed competing formations of curiosity exist, the precise nature of those formations are not always crystal clear. To discern them through the haze, it is helpful to turn to Michel Foucault’s discussion of discursive formations in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.<sup>7</sup> There he asserts the quite simple fact that discourse takes form, takes shapes. Discourse acquires formations, and even becomes formulaic. But how do you identify and diagnose those formations? How do you suss out their shapes?

By system of [discursive] formation, then, I mean a complex group of relations that function as a rule: it lays down what must be related, in a particular discursive practice, for such and such an enunciation to be made, for such and such a concept to be used, for such and such a strategy to be organized. To define a system of [discursive] formation in its specific individuality is therefore to characterize a discourse or a group of statements by the regularity of a practice.<sup>8</sup>

To ferret out a formation, you need to track its practices. In the case of discursive formations, Foucault asks: Who speaks? At what institutional sites do they speak? What is the relationship between who speaks and what is spoken about? How are statements that are spoken arranged? How are they ordered? By what procedures can one intervene in (or change) that arrangement or that order? And what function does a statement have in the discursive field in which it appears, but also in the material or non-discursive field? These questions help hammer out the shape of a discursive formation.

For Foucault, it is curiosity that unmasks discursive formations. Questions limn the edge of a discourse and illuminate the cracks where rupture and re-formation are possible. This suggests curiosity itself goes unformed, however, as if it were a context-consistent tool. But it isn’t, is it? Or so I argue. To ferret out curiosity formations, then, requires tracking curiosity practices. Here, similar questions might be posed. Who are the subjects who question? What concepts—and institutional contexts—frame what it is possible to question? What strategies of questioning are deployed in order to question the questionable? How are those strategies organized and how might they be reorganized? What styles of questioning are legitimated and which go unacknowledged? And legitimated how (whether discursively or materially)? In order to pinpoint

the patterning of curiosity, we have to ask not simply what is being asked, but by whom, when and where, and how? Whither do those questions go and from whence do they come? It is not just that certain things are questionable, but certain questions are posed and promulgated while others are not, in ways others are not. There is a thick grammar here to the formation of curiosity, a rhetoric and a poetics.

What forms, then, does curiosity take? And what are the curiosity formations of our time? Of our universities? Of our disciplines? Of our material lives beyond the discursive? *Where* one asks these questions—and *who* it is that asks—matters. When I ask these questions—from within the purview of Western intellectual history always already disrupted by feminist theory, critical race theory, disability studies, and trans studies—certain contours of curiosity become salient, even insistent. In sketching those contours elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> I have aimed to offer not statements or positions, contributions or already answered questions, at least not in any simplistic sense. Rather, I have aimed to offer lines of flight, charting out directions within which future questions about questions, future curiosities about curiosity, might take shape. Those contours are as follows:

1. *Curiosity is formed in and through politics.* Curiosity cannot be thought apart from the social values and political investments that in-form it. Sedimentations of power relations constrain in advance the shape curiosity takes and the work curiosity does. Curiosity is not individual, ahistorical, or universal. It is placed.
2. *Curiosity formations are always at war.* Curiosity appears on the scene of struggle. This means that questions, questioners, and methods of questioning are irrevocably pitted against one another. These struggles are dramatized in moments of political resistance, where transformations of curiosity propel advancements in social equity.
3. *Curiosity is formed in community.* This is a fact of the matter, but also an opportunity. It is a fact that we learn who is curious, how to be curious, and what to be curious about from our social milieu and context. It is an opportunity to join our curiosities, as we join our worlds, and sign up for being done and undone alongside others with whom we craft our futures.
4. *There are two curiosity formations common to social marginalization.* They are the spectacle-erasure formation (by which someone spectacularizes an object, but simultaneously erases its history, multiplicity, and relational depth) and the access-disclosure formation (by which someone assumes total access to the other but simultaneously demands the other’s disclosure).
5. *Curiosity’s form can be re-formed via companionate practices.* Western colonial forms of curiosity demand transparency, clean distinctions, and an independence of knower from known. Long

traditions of anti-colonial resistance insist that if curiosity is to be practiced, it must accept opacity, acknowledge ambiguity, and move only on the precondition of intimacy.

These vectors of analysis are indebted to and importantly constrained by the archives I have consulted. As such, the project's limitations are also invitations. More work needs to be done to investigate curiosity formations through poetry and outside the confines of the university (à la Woolf). And through oral traditions and unofficial records (à la Hurston). And outside of Western intellectual history (even if roundly disrupted from within) so that assessments of curiosity formations do not simply extend to but start from the Global South and the East. I am also sure my work has failed in ways I cannot see or appreciate. But I trust this project has failed in the way every good project must: to achieve systematic completeness and universal reach and hubristic self-conceit. If it succeeds, it will have succeeded in inviting further unfurling, in the directions I follow and many others besides. It will have invited other rivers and rivulets, other ways of following inquisitive formations.

This project is precisely not a project I can complete, however much I can contribute. It is a project for all of us. And it is perhaps especially a project for those of us who bear the brunt of oppressive curiosity formations—and nurture the capacity to resist. It is a project, then, for scholars and poets, artists and writers everywhere, especially those thinking on the edge of the academy—women creators, doers and dreamers of color, queer and trans rabble-rousers, world-builders with disabilities and without pedigree. It takes all of us to name the curiosity formations in which we function—and to dare to love some and to change others.

#### NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf, "Why?" in *Death of a Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942). Republished in Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Volume 2 (New York: Harcourt, 1925), 278.
2. Woolf, "Why?" 279.
3. Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942; New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 143.
4. Cf. Fred Moten, *A Poetics of the Undercommons* (Brooklyn: Sputnik & Fizzle, 2016), 24.
5. Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, 144.
6. Hurston, 144.
7. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).
8. Foucault, 74.
9. E.g., Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021); Perry Zurn, "Feminist Curiosity," *Philosophy Compass* 16, no. 9 (2021): e12761.

## Tracing Genealogical Ambiguities through Zurn's *Curiosity and Power*

Andrea J. Pitts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE

Perry Zurn's *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* is a welcoming invitation to the breadth and depth of the emerging field of curiosity studies. As a central scholar and curator of this interdisciplinary field,<sup>1</sup> Zurn offers a careful exploration of the deeply political features of curiosity in his recent book, including the concept's etymology, attendant genealogy across strands of German and Francophone philosophy, and the role of curiosity within forms of political organizing and resistance movements. Moreover, *Curiosity and Power*, as the author underscores, aims to address several historical and contemporary misconceptions about curiosity. Rather than viewing curiosity as a meddling, undisciplined "malady of the mind,"<sup>2</sup> as ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plutarch considered it, or as a merely natural facet of human cognitive development, as psychologists in the late twentieth century explored the concept,<sup>3</sup> Zurn argues that curiosity is itself political. He thus defines curiosity, in order to cover the vastly distinct and diffracted modulations of the concept, as "a series of investigative practices that are informed by and constructive of political architectures."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, Zurn wrests the concept from any simple affective-epistemic dichotomy, and seeks to unravel how curiosity functions both individually and collectively as a practice across differing historical and cultural sites of enactment.

Accordingly, the scope of the book is immense—traversing the racializing, ableist, and objectifying practices of circuses and traveling sideshows of the early nineteenth century, Medieval Christian condemnations of Eve and the serpent, and "shit-ins" (along with other forms of restroom resistance demonstrations) calling attention to the lack of accessible restrooms for disabled, trans, and nonbinary students on college campuses in the 2000s-2010s. In this way, as the book's final chapter attests, there are "unique genealogies and geographies of curiosity,"<sup>5</sup> each with differing permutations and shaping relations to forms of inquiry, knowledge production, financial and affective investments, institutional momentum, and embodied trajectories of influence. Thus, while the book's first half, "Episodes from Political Theory," focuses on the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, three prominent figures within contemporary European philosophy, Zurn readily admits that "a more expansive history [of curiosity] would extend the investigation beyond the Western philosophical canon."<sup>6</sup> Such an extended analysis, he writes, would also "track not only the word *curiosity* but also synonyms for curiosity, as well as the use of interrogative sentences."<sup>7</sup> In this way, Zurn concedes that the political history of curiosity that he provides inevitably confronts limitations with respect to the cultural and historical breadth of questions regarding curiosity and its associated concepts. He notes that the second half of the book, "Archives of Political Experience," which

offers chapter-length examinations of political resistance movements in the US and France, practices of curiosity within disability studies, transgender theory's engagement with forms of curiosity, and responses to the colonial dimensions of curiosity from outside the Eurocentric canon, seeks to "overcome this limitation."<sup>8</sup> Given the differing foci and emphasis between these two main sections of the book, the reason Zurn offers for an admittedly Eurocentric genealogy in the first half is that he seeks to identify the "the reigning interpretations of curiosity and politics" in order to "unsettle" them later in the book. As such, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, from within their own European philosophical enclaves, critique conceptions of curiosity as a touchstone of civilization/modernity (Nietzsche), as a institutional and institutionalizing force (Foucault), and as a sovereign display of the power to dissect and confine (Derrida). Against these forces each author develops liberatory (Nietzsche), resistant (Foucault), and deconstructive (Derrida) practices of curiosity, which, in turn, shape Zurn's framing of curiosity's political dimensions in the latter half of the book.

As the second half of the book demonstrates, these three important philosophical framings of the politics of curiosity nonetheless depict the insubordinate and liberatory aspects of curiosity as confined to individual action and self-transformation. Building from these frameworks but extending beyond their parameters, Zurn presents liberatory, resistant, and deconstructive formations of curiosity as *collective* praxes that exist within antiracist, disability activist, trans-affirming, and decolonial movements. For example, he demonstrates the ways in which authors within disability studies and activism, such as Eli Clare, Mia Mingus, and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, "crip curiosity" by disrupting the compulsory able-bodied norms of the "spectacle-erasure" formulation of curiosity. Such a formulation objectifies disabled people while simultaneously abandoning, confining, or otherwise erasing their "affective, intellectual, and social lives."<sup>9</sup> To "crip curiosity," then, he notes is a threefold process: 1) "to interrogate where and when the ableist construction of curiosity is reinforced," 2) [to investigate] how the reign of ableist curiosity . . . has ultimately failed," and 3) to reimagine "a curiosity whose strength and power lies not in its sanitation but in its multiplicity."<sup>10</sup>

This fundamental commitment to the multiplicity of curiosity found within disability critique then shapes the contours of the remainder of the book, including Zurn's analysis of trans memoirs and autobiographical writings in Chapter 7 and the final chapter of the book in which he turns directly to questions of intimacy, opacity, and ambiguity, and their relationships with the anticolonial potentialities of curiosity. This final chapter focuses on political engagements with curiosity from the writings of Édouard Glissant, Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Anzaldúa, and a number of Indigenous authors such as Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō), Doug Anderson (Métis), Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi), and Brian Burkhart (Cherokee). Here, Zurn seeks to explore how these authors have sought to "unsettle" the sedimented forms of colonial formations of curiosity, and to point toward worlds otherwise that exist beyond the objectifying, exploitative, and "hungry" curiosity of colonial desires for land and labor.<sup>11</sup>

In this sense, the last chapter returns readers to the ongoing formation of curiosity studies, presenting the authors, movements, and historical events discussed in the book "with an open hand," as Zurn phrases it early on.<sup>12</sup> The book is thus an invitation to expand the multiplicitous sites, sinews, and sensuous relations of curiosity and associated concepts that might likewise call to or brush alongside the terminological center of the Latin root word *curiositas*. Taking up Zurn's "open hand" and invitation to explore further genealogies of curiosity, in the remainder of this commentary, I turn more directly to some attendant concepts related to curiosity within Chicana/x feminisms in an effort to enrich some of the questions that Zurn poses in the final chapter of the book. There, he dedicates a few pages to the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, drawing largely on her notions of new mestiza consciousness and the borderlands, which Zurn reinscribes into a framing of "borderland curiosity."<sup>13</sup> From this, I would like to respond to Zurn's call for further "genealogies and geographies of curiosity" by teasing out a related concept that may pose additional questions regarding the book's framing through the Latin root *curiositas*.

To begin my comments on Chicana/x relations with curiosity studies, I want to turn to Cristina León's insights in her chapter published in Zurn and Arjun Shankar's edited volume *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020). In the chapter titled "Curious Entanglements: Opacity and Ethical Relation in Latina/o Aesthetics," León writes that "One of the major representative burdens outlined by contemporary Latina/o scholars is the interpellative demand for minoritarian subjects to be either transparent signifiers of culture or evidence of some demographic generalization."<sup>14</sup> León thereby points to the demands for authors and activists labeled or considered to be "Latina/o" to "present themselves as whole and transparent," and that such demands actually "reduce and deaden" the complexity of "an otherwise diverse, fragmented, and contestatory set of subjects."<sup>15</sup> Drawing from Cristina Beltrán's pivotal work *The Trouble with Unity* and Édouard Glissant's writings on opacity, León argues that curiosity plays a significant role within such representational demands, demands that seek to render Latinidad a homogenized, marketable, and bureaucratically neat category of analysis. Thus, against such demands, León poses opacity as an ethical relation to the probing demands of such a curiosity that desires coherence and unity for minoritarian subjects.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the aesthetic, she proposes, is one potential place to "curiously cultivate questions rather than seek static, demographically minded answers."<sup>17</sup>

In this vein, while Zurn's engagement with Anzaldúa's work is brief in the book, he turns to the author's work as exemplary of the kind of opacity that León describes. Such opacity, he states, "honors the fact of difference and different forms of knowing," which is a central tactic of Latina and Chicana feminisms.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, to elaborate how such processes have been operationalized by the plurality of writers and activists categorized under Latina/x and Chicana/x feminist labels, we can note other terms that resonate with León's call for an aesthetically-attuned project within curiosity studies. For example, within Chicana/o aesthetics, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto framed the notion of *rasquachismo*, but

noted that “to name this sensibility, to draw its contours and suggest its historical continuity is risking its betrayal.”<sup>19</sup> The reason for this, as Ybarra-Frausto notes, is because *rasquachismo*, although “alive within Chicano communities . . . is something of an insider private code.”<sup>20</sup> Noting the exposure and vulnerability present through rendering visible this Chicana/o sensibility, Ybarra-Frausto describes *rasquachismo* as “an underdog perspective—a view from *los de abajo*. An attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability yet mindful of stance and style.”<sup>21</sup> He continues:

In the realm of taste, to be *rasquache* is to be unfettered and unrestrained, to favor the elaborate over the simple, the flamboyant over the severe. Bright colors (*chillantes*) are preferred to somber, high intensity to low, the shimmering and sparkling over the muted and subdued. . . . Paradoxically, while elaboration is preferred to understatement, high value is placed on making do—*hacer rendir las cosas*. Limited resources means mending, refixing, and reusing everything. Things are not thrown away but saved and recycled, often in different context (e.g., automobile tires used as plant containers, plastic bleach bottles becoming garden ornaments, or discarded coffee cans reelaborated as flower pots). This constant making do, the grit and obstinacy of survival played out against a relish for surface display and flash, creates a florid milieu of admixtures and recombinations.<sup>22</sup>

Ybarra-Frausto locates this aesthetic sensibility within Chicano artists and art collectives of the 1960s and 1970s that turned “signs and symbols that those in power manipulated to signal unworthiness and deficiencies [into] markers of pride and affirmation.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, we could read *rasquachismo*, a textured, flamboyant, and innovative practice of *los de abajo* embodied in and through Chicana art and communities, as perhaps akin to curiosity studies. However, etymologically, the terms *rasquache* or *rascuache* are not traced to the Latin roots of Castilian Spanish. Rather, the term emerges specifically from Mesoamerican dialects of the Spanish language found in Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, with potential origins in Nahuatl.<sup>24</sup> Notably, the term retains derogatory connotations much like terms such as *polypragmosunē* and *periergia*, the Greek terms that were translated into the Latin *curiositas*, and the terms through which Zurn traces his genealogy of curiosity. More directly, *rascuache* is colloquially used as an adjective to describe people or objects of poor quality and little value, and while this shares in the negative connotations of the “meddlesome” origins of curiosity in the ancient Greek tradition, it also suggests a different set of relational valuations, including derogatory connotations attributed to or found within Indigenous Mesoamerican lifeworlds. In this sense, to trace the genealogy of *rasquachismo* confronts the limitations of colonial archives, including the confrontation with the manner in which many extant dictionaries of pre-conquest Indigenous Mesoamerican languages were produced through the violence of Spanish conquest and Christian missionizing practices.

Moreover, building on Ybarra-Frausto, Chicana artist and art theorist Amalia Mesa-Bains notes that alongside the

working-class aesthetics of survival that characterize *rasquachismo*, Chicana variations of this sensibility are often found through relations with the domestic sphere, finding both meaning and constraint within lifeworlds of creating home spaces. Mesa-Bains notes that such *domesticana* artists “use pop culture discards, remnants of party materials, jewelry, kitchenware, toiletries, saints, holy cards, and *milagros* in combined and recombined arrangements that reflect a shattered glamour” of domestic space.<sup>25</sup> This Chicana sensibility of *rasquachismo* offers “cherished moments . . . side by side with examinations of self, culture, and history in visions of the domestic chamber that is both paradise and prison.”<sup>26</sup> These constraints of Chicana femininity presented through *domesticana* aesthetic production, as both “paradise and prison,” thereby shape the aesthetic contours of *rasquachismo* as simultaneously beautiful yet profane forms of reinvention.

Also in this vein, the work of queer Chicana artist Alma López has been read as embodying the queer potentiality of *rasquachismo*, as a particularly “nonnormative,” “resplendent,” and “unrestrained” aesthetic sensibility.<sup>27</sup> This includes, for example, works like *Encuentro* (1999) and *Lupe and Sirena in Love* (1999), in which López depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe in erotic poses with the mythical *Sirena*, the siren or mermaid from Mexican folklore. As Luz Calvo notes, rather than “starting from something completely ‘new,’ Lopez’ art reworks (and reveals) the political-sexual desire that is latent in the omnipresent image of the suffering virgin.”<sup>28</sup> These queer potentialities of *rasquachismo* and *domesticana* (as seen through familiar home altars and dedications to the Virgin of Guadalupe and the iconic image of *la sirena* found in the popular Mexican game of chance *lotería*) are perhaps a formation that diverges from the Latin root word *curiositas* but that nonetheless demonstrate a desire to interrogate and to reenvision the worlds within which one finds oneself among *lxs de abajo*.

Accordingly, I pose the question of a genealogy of *rasquachismo* as part of what Chicana author and archivist María Cotera might consider a constellation of “Chicana memory praxes,” or what Cherokee-Thai Two-spirit scholar-activist and oral historian Maylei Blackwell might consider among the “retrofitted memory” practices found within Chicana feminist political organizing. As such, we can return here to the writings of Anzaldúa, considering her from within the cracks of these divergent genealogies of desire and knowledge. By moving through this specifically Chicana genealogy—this world-others of “underdogs,” queer saints, and the discarded remains of conquest—we can reread Anzaldúa’s invocations of feminine figures within Mexica (Aztec) origin stories and the venerated saints of Catholicism as narratological practices that likewise characterize her relations to *mestizaje*. In this register, Anzaldúa’s writings become illustrative of both curiosity and *rasquachismo*—of their entwinement and divergences within the lifeworld and aesthetics of the author. Following León’s call for an attunement to the multiplicity of minoritarian subjects and Zurn’s open-handed offering of an emerging field of study, we can then perhaps enliven Anzaldúa’s relations to curiosity studies by creating tensions with it, and thus maintain the ambiguities



of her work that slip past, beyond, and underneath the field's own scope of inquiry.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar, *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), and Perry Zurn and Danielle S. Bassett, *Curious Minds: The Power of Connection* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022).
2. Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 30.
3. Zurn, 157.
4. Zurn, 12.
5. Zurn, 219.
6. Zurn, 25.
7. Zurn, 25.
8. Zurn, 25.
9. Zurn, 149-50.
10. Zurn, 160-61.
11. Zurn derives this conception of "settler hunger" from the work of Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō), who notes that the Halq'eméylem word for settler, *xwelítem*, means "starving person." Zurn 2021, 213, citing Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 2.
12. Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 16.
13. Zurn, 210.
14. Cristina León, "Curious Entanglements: Opacity and Ethical Relation in Latina/o Aesthetics," in *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge*, edited by Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 171.
15. León, 170.
16. León, 184.
17. León, 184.
18. Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 208.
19. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Jennifer A. González, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega, and Terezita Romo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 85.
20. Ybarra-Frausto, 85.
21. Ybarra-Frausto, 85.
22. Ybarra-Frausto, 86.
23. Ybarra-Frausto, 88.
24. Laura G. Gutiérrez, "Rasquachismo," in *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, eds. Deborah R. Vargas, Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, and Nancy Raquel Mirabal (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 184. These origins are debatable, however, because classical Nahuatl contains no words beginning with *r-* and other Mesoamerican Indigenous languages likewise share some orthographic conventions with the term *rascuache*. Many thanks to Jim Maffie for the email exchange on this etymological question.
25. Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquachismo," in *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Jennifer A. González, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega, and Terezita Romo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 95.
26. Mesa-Bains, 95.
27. Luz Calvo, "Art Comes for the Archbishop: The Semiotics of Contemporary Chicana Feminism and the Work of Alma López," in *Our Lady of Controversy*, eds. Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Alma López (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 112-13.
28. Calvo, 113.
29. María Cotera, "Unpacking Our Mother's Libraries: Practice of Chicana Memory Before and After the Digital Turn," in *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era*, eds. Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 302.
30. Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 2.
31. For discussions of these narratological practices, see, for example, Anthony Lioi, "The Best-Loved Bones: Spirit and History in Anzaldúa's 'Entering into the Serpent,'" *Feminist Studies* 34, nos. 1/2 (2008): 73-98; and Andrea Pitts, "Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Crip Futurity in the Americas," in *Disability and American Philosophies*, eds. Daniel Brunson and Nate Jackson (New York: Routledge, in press), 1-22.

## Curiosity, Afield

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Whenever I'm depressed or despairing about the state of academic philosophy, or my position within it, I find myself returning to the introduction of Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*. In those prefatory pages, Foucault sets out to explain why the second volume is so different than the first, and why it is being published later than he had planned. The answer is simple. He was curious, and his curiosity led him on a long detour that changed himself and the project.

After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? [ . . . ] In what does [philosophical activity] consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?<sup>1</sup>

"Straying afield" is an apt description of the upheaval of passionate exploration. The way that a question or text, some twist or turn of the labyrinth, can rejuvenate things or offer a new vantage point. Of course, this is not always the result. In pushing against or skirting norms or logics, you might nevertheless be swallowed by them; in straying beyond boundaries, on another course or itinerary, you might get lost. As Perry Zurn puts it, "if curiosity can stir up, it can also sediment; if it is a technique of freedom, it must also have the capacity to serve as a technique of domination."<sup>2</sup> Like so much else, curiosity is dangerous.

In *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry*, Zurn argues that curiosity is political, a practice that always exists in a "network of relations."<sup>3</sup> While there is important inspiration to be found in the individual upheaval of thinking differently, Zurn insists that we not underestimate collective forms of curiosity, especially their resistant possibilities for LGBTQ people. Amidst surges of racist and capitalist violence, transphobia is becoming increasingly mainstream in US media and politics as well as US philosophy departments. For trans and genderqueer/nonbinary philosophers, in and beyond the academy, moments of depression and despair are more frequent. In this context, Zurn's vision of curiosities

that unsettle and connect is absolutely necessary. It is an invitation to scheme about how philosophy might get free of itself, how resistant lineages, practices, and communities of questioning build space and power to move against sedimented systems and to move just because.

In foregrounding philosophy a bit here, I mean to emphasize the ways that Zurn transforms field and afield, rejecting any division of theory and practice and resisting more streamlined or institutional modes of interdisciplinarity. In “Why the Politics of Curiosity?” and “A Political History of Curiosity,” Zurn argues that curiosity and politics are co-constitutive. The history of curiosity is not a story of curiosity becoming political, of theory becoming practical. Instead, Zurn shows that curiosity *is* political and has been “wrapped up in political exclusions all along.”<sup>4</sup> In the ancient and medieval periods, it appears as a disordering and then a destructive force, associated with women, slaves, and animals. In the modern period, curiosity links with projects of colonial expansion and nation building, as an ordering and constructive natural impulse *for some* and a vector of subordination and dispossession for dehumanized others.<sup>5</sup> By illustrating how “curiosity and politics ultimately define the forms and functions of one another,” Zurn’s history requires that we approach curious practices as embedded, social, and relational.<sup>6</sup> When later chapters turn to marginalized curiosities in political resistance movements, disability studies, and trans theory, his analysis is attuned to the complexity and subtlety of these curiosity-formations. The archives here are multifarious—from the many shapes of trans memoir and the interrogative styles of Eli Clare, to the activism of the Prison Information Group and PISSAR (People in Search of Safe Restrooms). Bringing these texts and practices into conversation, Zurn cuts across and challenges disciplinary lines (and empty interdisciplinary initiatives) that target non-normative bodies for isolation, confinement, and objectification.

An ethos of intimacy, opacity, and ambiguity emerges, informed by disabled and trans curiosity practices and the common phenomenon of transphobic and ableist curiosity. As Zurn recounts, there is a long history of disabled people being “displayed as novelties in hospitals, surgical theaters, medical journals and other research institutions.”<sup>7</sup> Today disabled folks continue to be treated as spectacles only to be abandoned, isolated, or eliminated when the show is over. Describing this as the “spectacle-erasure formation” of curiosity, Zurn observes how it intersects with trans experiences. There is widespread fascination with trans bodies, surgeries, femininity, and sexuality as well as a general obsession with debating the validity of trans identity. In philosophical contexts, Talia Mae Bettcher and Amy Marvin have explored how trans people are reduced to “curios,” “objects, puzzles, tropes and discursive levers on the way to somebody else’s agenda.”<sup>8</sup> Isolating trans thinking as non-philosophical or ignoring it as non-existent, the philosophical mode of spectacle-erasure treats questions about trans identity as if they were questions about “whether tables exist.”<sup>9</sup> But when philosophical debates include trans people, and when trans people are embraced as curious subjects of philosophy and of their own lives, the questions deepen with transformative possibilities. There are opportunities to reclaim

philosophical curiosity from ableist and transphobic gazes and query through more complex and personal worlds. To be sure, Zurn warns against the illusion that “any *savoir* can be a savior.”<sup>10</sup> We should not underestimate how opacity, intimacy, and ambiguity can offend sedimented systems and elicit reactionary formations. Opacity might set off the uncertainty of un-trackable movements, intimacy might provoke the vulnerability of feeling something a little too close, and ambiguity might stir paranoia about what resists control and containment.

In contemporary contests over trans identity, scientific discourses often proceed in these reactionary ways. Entrenched in the methods of sovereign and institutional curiosities, scientists like to insist that opacity is best investigated (or ignored) by the professionals. When trans people forge scientific discourses of their own, the knowledge is discounted by their intimate (read: unprofessional) connection to the area of study. From this perspective, ambiguous dimensions of trans experience deepen literature and art but only weaken scientific questions, hypotheses, and results. Scientific dismissals like these are now leveraged in wholesale attacks on trans rights in popular discourse, state legislatures, and the philosophy blogosphere. But resistant scientific curiosities exist and flourish, often at margins where Zurn encourages us to observe the mingling of opacity, intimacy, and ambiguity. Consider micha cárdenas’ “Pregnancy,” a poetry/bioart project exploring cárdenas’ exploration with sperm banking after having been on hormones for many years.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by Anzaldúa’s descriptions of being “an alien in new territory,” cárdenas experiments alongside other trans women. Her curiosity contributes to what she calls the “science of the oppressed,” a reimagining science in the interest of oppressed people.<sup>12</sup> Consider also historian Jules Gill-Peterson’s archival work on “Trans DIY,” the many ways that trans folks forge “inventive access to hormones, alternate routes to affirming transness, and spiritual and magical care for others.”<sup>13</sup> A trans “science of the oppressed” or “trans DIY” connect powerfully with Zurn’s discussion of the “rarely remarked or theorized fact that curiosity is practiced within trans communities—in rich, multivariant, and perhaps unexpected ways—in the shadows of spectacular erasure.”<sup>14</sup> Although he does not focus on it specifically, Zurn’s analysis of curiosity as relational and embedded moves afield of philosophy in ways that challenge these highly sedimented and deeply reactionary scientific curiosities. Both philosophers and scientists are guilty of that “naïve positivity” that Foucault mocks in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*. The “ludicrous” sovereign attempt, “from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them what their truth is and how to find it.”<sup>15</sup> In a Foucauldian spirit, Zurn emphasizes that it is not just individuals but also collectives and fields that might “get free of themselves” and “stray afield” in curiosity.

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume Two* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 9.
2. Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 74.
3. Zurn, 12.

4. Zurn, 44.
5. Zurn, 42.
6. Zurn, 24.
7. Zurn, 150.
8. Talia Mae Bettcher as quoted in Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 184; Amy Marvin, "Transsexuality, the Curio, and the Transgender Tipping Point," in *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge*, eds. Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 190.
9. Talia Mae Bettcher, "When Tables Speak: On the Existence of Trans Philosophy," *Daily Nous* (blog), May 20, 2018, <https://dailynous.com/2018/05/30/tables-speak-existence-trans-philosophy-guest-talia-mae-bettcher/>.
10. Zurn, 218.
11. micha cardenas, "Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3 (1-2): 48–57.
12. cardenas, 56.
13. Jules Gill-Peterson, "DIY Trans Studies," July 31, 2018, <https://www.jgillpeterson.com/diy-trans/2018/7/31/diy-trans-studies>.
14. Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 175.
15. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 9.

## Transecological Curiosity

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### PERRY ZURN AS ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHER

In *Curiosity and Power* Perry Zurn draws out the historical, political, and collective dimensions of curiosity, adding texture to a widespread mode of engagement that has required more attention and care. Though he begins by discussing curiosity in its fetishizing and colonial mode, he soon moves towards a reparative practice of curiosity that seeks to undo spectacularization and objectification.<sup>1</sup> Zurn thus calls our attention to the bivalence of curiosity, aligned with both "the side of conquest, sovereignty, patriarchy, and marginalization" and "dissent, counterinformation, resistance movements, and social justice."<sup>2</sup>

Despite this acknowledgment of its bivalence, Zurn's book aims to create more space for curiosity as a collective political practice aimed at amelioration and a more open engagement with the world. In his chapter on trans curiosity, Zurn gives substantial attention to curiosity as it is used against trans people to reduce and ostracize.<sup>3</sup> He also looks at trans people engaging in a different kind of curiosity that "opens up the possibility of nuance, change, and transformation coincident with their who-ness."<sup>4</sup> By drawing attention to this, Zurn intervenes in the existing literature by calling for an increased focus on trans curiosity as a source for embodied subjugated knowledge. Such a focus "challenges trans theory's almost exclusive concern with the curiotization—and the Frankensteinian spectacle—of trans people."<sup>5</sup> While the bivalence of curiosity remains in operation, Zurn reveals his goal to weaken the sway of objectifying curiosity by looking at how curiosity is practiced differently.

Zurn's project of focusing on the collective potential of curiosity for social transformation coincides with his move towards a collective vision of curiosity as it links humans, animals, other organisms, and the environment as a connected whole. In an earlier chapter titled "A Political History of Curiosity," Zurn links the disparagement of curiosity in the history of philosophy to the disparagement of women, colonized people, disabled people, and poor people as linked with animality and nature. Zurn points out that one of the most maligned figures in the history of curiosity is the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve, a contagious and dangerous force linked to the curiosity of women while also evoking anxieties about disability.<sup>6</sup> With the redemption of curiosity across modern philosophy, Zurn finds that animals were now largely denied the capacity for curiosity while curiosity itself came to be seen as "crucial to expanding sovereignty, dominating the natural world, and ordering human life."<sup>7</sup> This included not only Hobbes but also Rousseau, who conceptualized colonized people as incapable of curiosity in contrast with Europeans.<sup>8</sup> Zurn thus traces the history of curiosity as a history of the use of curiosity against collectivity, nature, the environment, and people associated with these.

Refusing such a limited understanding of curiosity, the concluding chapter draws from decolonial and indigenous philosophies to argue for a more expansive use of curiosity as ecological curiosity. Echoing the forbidden serpent, one of the aspects of curiosity that Zurn draws out is its opacity, capable of complicating and opening up new passages "between organisms, entities, languages, and worlds."<sup>9</sup> This curiosity not only brings opacity to inquiry but also ambiguity, emphasizing "the bothness and betweenness of knowers and knowns."<sup>10</sup> Finally, the intimacy of curiosity refuses to isolate but instead emphasizes interconnection and enmeshment within environments, likened to curiosity's breathable air, swimmable water, and pollinatable plants.<sup>11</sup> Zurn fittingly concludes the book with a passage on curiosity and ecological connection, writing,

I hope for a curiosity alive to the things I do not know and perhaps cannot know. A curiosity attuned to the oscillations within and between things. And a curiosity conscious of its own stickiness, its embedded presence.<sup>12</sup>

The arc of Zurn's work on curiosity thus marks him as an environmental philosopher and eco philosopher, attentive to a broader practice of curiosity that is collective, enmeshed, and complicated by a teeming world. In the rest of this essay, I connect Perry Zurn's work on curiosity with trans history, activism, and art to bridge his attentiveness to both trans curiosity and eco curiosity, emphasizing the prevalence of a rich transecological curiosity.

### TRANS ECO-CURIOSITY

Drawn out together, I find Zurn's call for a richer topography of trans curiosity and the arc of his book towards an environmental philosophy of curiosity to be intriguingly interdigitated. Looking at trans history, activism, and writing suggests both a longstanding and contemporary engagement with curiosity as it is practiced with Zurn's vision of an alive, oscillating, and embedded curiosity.

In his essay for the anthology *Trap Door*, Abram J. Lewis looks at archives of trans activism in the 1970s as a resource for thinking contemporary trans politics differently, describing them as “at once expansive, unruly, and at times (perhaps at its best) downright strange.”<sup>13</sup> While acknowledging the distinctness of 1970s trans activism, Lewis emphasizes the connection between this past and the present as trans people responded to unprecedented and unpredictable attention to trans lives much like during the “tipping point” of the 2010s.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the abolitionist and intersectional coalitional visions of organizations such as STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) and TAO (Transsexual Action Organization), Lewis notes an affinity between 1970s trans organizations, terrestrial life, extraterrestrial visitors, and the expansion of consciousness through psychedelics.<sup>15</sup> One image he shares produced by the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) features a painting of a large grasshopper being ridden by frogs and small mammals with the text, “DON’T SACRIFICE COMPASSION FOR SCIENCE, WE ARE ONE.”<sup>16</sup> Another image titled “UFOs, TSs, and Extra-Ts-” and illustrated by Suzun David describes the advantages of an alliance between marginalized people and extraterrestrial visitors.<sup>17</sup> By looking through archives, Lewis thus draws out the historical richness of trans curiosities as they forge radical connections with the earth, the sky, and the malleable world of perception while eluding demands for mainstream trans intelligibility.

In an interview from the *Trap Door* anthology artist Juliana Huxtable adds further nuance to this collective practice of trans curiosity through enhanced perception by discussing spaces of intoxication and her work deejaying. Describing the “states of intoxication” she discovered while getting into deejaying, Huxtable explains,

I think intoxication is a space where desire is able to operate in a way that’s much more liminal. I started deejaying at my own parties, so I was both creating the sound and throwing the party. It was a really intentional way to engender a dynamic. And it felt *possible*. So many things felt possible.<sup>18</sup>

Huxtable explains how the “experiment” of deejaying guided her from her unfulfilling job as a legal assistant to her life-long dream of becoming an artist who could “create a world.”<sup>19</sup> Through her musical curiosity and participation in nightlife through deejaying, Huxtable found a way into a creative and collective space of altered perceptions and transgressive world-making. Huxtable’s engagement with nightlife scenes of collective intoxication is also temporary and tempered, as she asserts, “At a certain point, I want the option of operating during the day.”<sup>20</sup> Referring to the limits and traps of nightlife scenes, Huxtable emphasizes that making connections with older trans women and Black trans women who have navigated nightlife scenes was key for avoiding these pitfalls,<sup>21</sup> care and collectivity becoming a means to both enter intoxication and set limits when needed.

Connections between trans curiosity, environments, and altered collective perception persist in trans literature. In 2019 writer Callum Angus founded the journal *Smoke and*

*Mold* that publishes writing by trans and two-spirit people on nature, the environment, and climate crisis. When describing the most recent issue published April 2021, guest editor Charles Theonia unpacks its theme of fungi as a means of thinking through enmeshment between selves and their environments, writing,

In these pieces, rock-eating lichens generate poems from debris. The singular plurality of a slime mold undoes our edges. An interstellar mycelial network offers a model for accepting that the capacity for being apart is a necessary condition for coming together. Spore dispersals trace lines of inheritance and germination: one teaches us to forage, one creates the environment for our impossibility, one shows us how to metabolize our surroundings to remake ourselves.<sup>22</sup>

Joss Barton’s poem “THREE SHROOMS ON PAINTED WOOD” in this issue exemplifies an engagement with the environment and collective intoxication, including references to “THE PSYCHOTROPIC REALM A COSMIC / WILDERNESS,” “CHEWING THE BLUE VEIN STEMS AND BLACK BELLIES OF PSILOCYBIN / CAPS,” and “AUTOEROTIC EGO-ASPHYXIATION / AS THE WALLS BEGIN TO BREATHE AND THE SOUL MELTS INTO SPORES OF / TRANSSEXUAL GERMINATION.”<sup>23</sup> Barton’s erotic and intoxicating ecopoetics exemplifies the characteristics of fungi described by Theonia, fruiting from debris in a dizzying plurality that includes self-fashioning from within and without.

Barton’s poem is also political, interweaving the erotic, psychedelic, and dizzying transsexual fungisphere with visions of racism, homophobia, and transphobia permeating the meaning of home. The psychedelic descriptions of a transsexual environment are prefaced by warnings from Grandma of a poisonous otherworld that will “MAKE YOU GO PLUM OUT YOUR / MIND.” This warning galvanizes curiosity by marking a space for enticing departure, leading “CLOSER TO THAT PERFECT STATE OF TRANSGENDER / NATURE” even while the multivariance of “HOME” continues to echo as a series of “SPORES.” As Katie Hogan argues, environmental thinking in trans literature can include both an ambivalence and affection for home.<sup>24</sup>

In an essay for the recent *trans | fem | endurance* section of the *Brooklyn Rail*, Barton reflects on trans knowledge and loss, citing the negative spiral through which the endurance of growing up also involves “hiding away so much of the inherent joy of being a transgender little child.” In addition to the “displacement of life” caused by poverty, racism, abuse, and survivor’s guilt, Barton writes, “I mourn because my childhood was trans as fuck and I wasn’t allowed to name it for what it was.” While reflecting on the complexities of endurance, loss, and movement into the forbidden fungal woods, the poem also references moments of freedom, including “CUTTING THRU THE FUNGAL BODIES OF FACISM AND SELF-DESTRUCTION.”<sup>25</sup> At its conclusion her poem packs these complexities into a condensed image with the line, “HER / HEART AS SIMPLE AND FULL AS THREE SHROOMS ON PAINTED WOOD.”

Isobel Bess's poem from an earlier issue of *Smoke and Mold* titled "Idyll 7 / A History Of The St. Johns River" similarly links environmental thought with reflections on history and home. Describing her experience on the waters of the St. Johns River, Bess connects this with liturgy, the theft of land and memory from indigenous people, climate change, and her experience of getting ejected from the academy, emphasizing "there are no pristine landscapes." She ends with a reflection on home understood through the mode of the river, writing,

When I first touch the waters of the St. Johns River I have not been home in years. I would not recognize the people who live there and I do not think they would recognize me. It is the nature of rivers to separate one bank from the other.

Environmental experience is thus marked as historical, complex, and opaque, the river standing as more than a river with each of Bess's refrains of "When I first touch the waters of the St. Johns River. . ." <sup>26</sup>

These texts do not explicitly reference curiosity, but they connect with Zurn's emphasis on trans curiosity naming experience, experimenting, introspecting, and investigating beyond a narrowly prescribed vision of life that brackets out trans experience.<sup>27</sup> They also begin responding to Zurn's question about the coalitional potential for trans curiosity as it extends beyond an exclusively human and unalleable world.<sup>28</sup> Though more can be asked about transecological curiosity, *Curiosity and Power* begins this conversation by centering transecological experience as it ranges from river reflections to collecting mushrooms.<sup>29</sup>

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**NOTES**

1. Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 2, 5-6.
2. Zurn, 3.
3. Zurn, 182-85.
4. Zurn, 190.
5. Zurn, 196.
6. Zurn, 34-35, 155.
7. Zurn, 38-39.
8. Zurn, 41.
9. Zurn, 201.
10. Zurn, 210-11.
11. Zurn, 217.
12. Zurn, 220.
13. Abram J. Lewis, "Trans History in a Moment of Danger: Organizing Within and Beyond 'Visibility' in the 1970s," in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 57.
14. Lewis, 60.
15. Lewis, 64-65.

16. Lewis, 79.
17. Lewis, 66.
18. Juliana Huxtable, "Existing in the World: Blackness at the Edge of Trans Visibility," interview by Che Gossett, in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 52.
19. Huxtable, 51.
20. Huxtable, 52.
21. Huxtable, 53.
22. Charles Theonia, "Fungi," in *Smoke and Mold* 4.1, ed. Charles Theonia (2021). Available at <https://www.smokeandmold.net/issue-4-special-fungi>.
23. Joss Barton, "untitled," *The Brooklyn Rail*, Critics Page, ed. McKenzie Wark (May 2021). Available at <https://brooklynrail.org/2021/05/criticspage/untitled-521>.
24. Katie Hogan, "Transplacement: Nature and Place in Carter Sickels' 'Saving' and 'Bittersweet,'" in *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on the Environment*, ed. Douglas A. Vakoch (Routledge, 2020), 134.
25. Joss Barton, "THREE SHROOMS ON PAINTED WOOD," *Smoke and Mold* 4.1, ed. Charles Theonia (2021). Available at <https://www.smokeandmold.net/joss-barton-4-1>.
26. Isobel Bess, "Idyll 7 / A History Of The St. Johns River," *Smoke and Mold* 1, ed. Callum Angus. Available at <https://www.smokeandmold.net/isobelbess>.
27. Zurn, *Curiosity and Power*, 188, 190.
28. Zurn, 192.
29. Zurn, viii.

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

*The APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy* invites members to submit papers, book reviews, and professional notes for publication in the **fall 2022** edition. Submissions can address issues in the areas of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender, and sexuality studies, as well as issues of concern for LGBTQ people in the profession. The newsletter seeks quality paper submissions for review. Reviews and notes should address recent books, current events, or emerging trends. Members who give papers at APA divisional meetings, in particular, are encouraged to submit their work.

**DEADLINE**

The deadline for submission of manuscripts for the fall edition is May 1, 2022.

**FORMAT**

Papers should be in the range of 5,000-6,000 words. Reviews and Notes should be in the range of 1,000-2,000 words. All submissions must use endnotes and should be prepared for anonymous review.

**CONTACT**

Submit all manuscripts electronically (MS Word), and direct inquiries to Grayson Hunt, Editor, APA Newsletter on LGBTQ Issues in Philosophy, [graysonhunt@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:graysonhunt@austin.utexas.edu).

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