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Reviews

Moveable Gardens: Itineraries and Sanctuaries of Memory. 2021. Edited by Virginia D. Nazarea and Terese V. Gagnon. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 301 pp.

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Moveable Gardens: Itineraries and Sanctuaries of Memory shows us networks of mutually constitutive relationships between plants and people that carry with them a sense of home, even if one is displaced from it (p. 4). Many tend to these relationships with love and care, catalyzing joy and counteracting "disruptive intrusions of modernity" that construct displacement's many faces (p. 3): physical relocation from one's homelands, inability to participate in traditional lifeways due to economic or other pressures, or culturally mandated ideological separation from our network of other-than-human kin.

The book is divided into two parts, each chapter providing a window into a different cultural ecology categorized either as an *itinerary* or a *sanctuary*. *Sanctuaries* are places or practices in which traditional networks of multispecies relationships are rooted and actively flourish. *Itineraries* are traditions or ecological processes that ensure plant-people relationships survive in movement or diaspora. There are examples of both in nearly every chapter, making the book's organization slightly confusing. For example, *Mead Circles as Roving Sanctuaries of Celebration, Communion, and Learning* (Chapter 5), a chapter about resurgence of communal brewing and drinking of mead in the United States, is in *Part I: Itineraries*, despite sanctuaries appearing in its title. Appalachian mead circles are sanctuaries for "complex assemblages of bees, plants, landscapes, communities, rituals, supernatural beings, and many other facets of nature-culture" (p. 111). The itinerant aspect of this chapter is the reemergence of mead-based assemblages despite their presence waxing and waning in China, Northern Europe, Africa, and Mesoamerica over millennia.

While these concepts provide frameworks for understanding how our relationships to plants can be preserved through space and time, what struck me more strongly throughout the book was the application of ontological theory in every chapter. "The ontological turn," as described in the introduction, "challenges notions of directionality and questions the separation and dominance of humans vis-à-vis the rest of the natural world" (p. 9). Ontology, in the anthropological sense, is about providing an alternative to human exceptionalism, characterizing the world as assemblages of many species in dynamic relationships, each experiencing those relationships in their own way. I was introduced to this kind of thinking through Anna Tsing's (2015) *Mushroom at the End of the World*, Donna Haraway's (2017) "Cyborg Manifesto," and Eduardo Kohn's (2013) *How Forests Think*. *Moveable Gardens* expands upon these writings, especially Tsing's, and applies ontological concepts in a concrete way.

"Affective ecologies," a phrase coined by Gagnon early in the book, applies Kathleen Stewart's (2007:1) notion of affect, or "a deeply embodied form of emotion that also exists between bodies, often as a product of structural or social forces," to assemblages of human *and* non- human bodies, "encompass[ing] the myriad ways in which our daily means of carving out a living influence our relationships with those

around us—people, animals, plants, insects, fungi bacteria, and so forth—as well as our embodied perceptions of the world." She continues, "All these things are…constitutive of ecologies: ones of care and ones of destruction" (p. 25). The term itself encourages recognition of both affective ecologies in which it may be painful to participate, and ones that are joyful. I have found the term especially useful in a re-orienting of well-being towards something larger than the individual; it's turned over in my thoughts far more than itineraries or sanctuaries.

Gagnon states (p. 25), "In contemporary discourses of economics and conservation alike… entanglements of love and dependence are often elided". Not so in this book. In *Ontologies of Return* (Chapter 11), Virginia D. Nazarea speaks of the many implications of potato (*Solanum* spp.) conservation and repatriation in Peru. While Peruvian activists view potatoes as a symbol of Peruvian heritage, managers of seedbank specimens view them as genetic material to be preserved, and Quechua farmers view potatoes as "their *wawas* (infants) – to be fussed over, passed on, and celebrated in myth and ritual, and in everyday life" (p. 257). The chapter contains an anecdote about a Quechua woman accompanying Peruvian potatoes to the Global Seed Vault in Norway, and singing to them: "I leave my family to walk this journey… My beautiful potatoes, please don't cry… I will return to make sure you are safe, and you will be joyful again" (p. 265). Reading this was the first time I have cried over potatoes. Nazarea's case for conservation partially informed by love is balanced in its emotion and methodical practicality.

Tracey Heatherington's *Havens against the Blight* (Chapter 9) also speaks to the importance of emotion in tending to or reestablishing sanctuaries of biological and cultural diversity. In her analysis of seed saving—both in actuality and its portrayal in the media— she invokes the term structural nostalgia to describe the motivation behind saving seeds in order to protect webs of relationships that sustain bodies and traditions. Heatherington, in a delightfully cheeky way, hangs her ontological analysis on a comparison of two post-apocalyptic films: *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and *The Ultimate Warrior*. Released thirty years apart, the films have a lot in common… violence due to scarcity, hope found in the existence of a lost sanctuary, and the saving of seeds in response to its destruction. I haven't seen *The Ultimate Warrior*, but *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a silly movie. Heatherington's analysis, though, is no joke. She conveys the gravity of structural nostalgia through popular fascination with it, evidenced by box-office draw. Gagnon summarizes it perfectly: "We mourn the loss of… our more-than-human litter, or cohort" (p. 11). Our tendency to save seeds in apocalyptic scenarios, both fictional and emergent, indicates human dependency upon and desire to maintain our affective ecologies. I find the use of structural nostalgia as an informed rallying cry for intersectional conservation beautiful.

Moveable Gardens would shine in college-level anthropology courses, especially those concerned with foodways or multispecies ethnography. I'm a relatively recent college graduate with a predominantly biological background and feel very lucky to have read the ontological literature mentioned above to contextualize this book. This volume can stand alone, however. While the language is tough to chew through at times, this book would be a great introduction to ontological thinking.

Born of a panel discussion, *Moveable Gardens* retains a conversational quality. A group of twelve contributors, consisting of anthropologists, ethnobiologists, food and environmental scientists, and a somatic psychotherapist, weave a common thread through their ethnographic and ontological explorations using shared vocabulary. This vocabulary's ability to be applied to and embodied in a wide variety of affective ecologies bestows it with validity and contributes to the reader's understanding. I included chapters I felt best conveyed the overall message of the book in this review, but I had a few more favorites. I'm excited for future readers of *Moveable Gardens* to experience all this book has to offer.

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