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## Book Review

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Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens with Jennie Klein, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth as Lover* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 250 pp., \$29.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-5179-0019-9.

*Assuming the Ecosexual Position* is the long-awaited publication that details the origin of the ecosexual movement. Founded by art and life partners, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, ecosexuality is a combination of art, sex, and environmental activism that encourages humans to see the Earth as a lover, rather than a mother. Ecosexuality aims to raise awareness and instigate action to counter the destruction of the planet through joy, celebration, and love, in contrast to the overly serious and depressing attitude often evident in other branches of the environmental movement. Through encouraging embodied, sensual, immersive, hyper-aware, pleasurable physical interaction with the Earth, Sprinkle and Stephens seek to ground humans within the natural world and help them perceive opportunities to relate to other human and nonhuman entities with love. As they explain ‘this book is an invitation to collaborate and a call to deepen our relationships with the Earth’ (p. xiv).

In the 2011 issue of their *Journal of EcoSex Research*, Sprinkle and Stephens defined ecosexual as ‘a person who finds nature romantic, sensual, erotic, or sexy, which can include humans or not’ (p. xi). Ecosexual is proposed as a new sexual self-identification for a person that takes the earth as their lover. But why Earth as lover rather than the traditional Earth Mother? As they make clear in *Assuming the Ecosexual Position*, while appreciating the ecofeminist conceptualisation of the equation of women and nature, both of which are oppressed by patriarchy, as queers Sprinkle and Stephens want to go beyond the gender binary in regard to the anthropomorphisation of the planet (p. 17). To this end, their formulation of ecosexuality uses the sex-positive feminism of the 1990s as a lens through which to focus on the environment, and a queer feminist approach that recognises the multiplicity of ways of relating – in this case, to the planet. While fully aware that assigning human qualities such as the idea of ‘a lover’ to the planet is a metaphorical tactic, Sprinkle and Stephens see it as a method whereby humans can relate emotionally and empathetically to the Earth, and which also highlights the agency of the Earth within the relationship:

The lover assumes a relationship based on romance, sexual attraction, and sensual pleasure... Our metaphorical and material shift to Earth as lover holds the potential to create relationships between humans and non-humans that might lessen destructive and controlling practices such as taking resources (mining) or domesticating (damming rivers and streams). The lover archetype evokes pleasure or *jouissance* based on mutual needs and desires. Earth as lover has the potential to inspire humans to give as well as receive love and support from the Earth.... A lover is someone

we want to get to know better, treat well, pamper, romance and pleasure. Most to the point, if one does not treat a lover well, the lover can leave for someone else who will treat them better. While Earth can't really leave us, it can become so inhospitable that we have to live in radically different ways on it – or leave it (p. 18).

While the Earth is imagined as a lover, ecosexuality is not all (or only) about genital sex – although it both raises awareness that sex is happening constantly all over the planet and expands the human-centric notion of sex. Sprinkle and Stephens' conceptualisation of ecosexuality is inextricably connected to art, particularly performance art. Sprinkle comes from a background in pornographic film, burlesque performance, and art, and Stephens is a sculptor, photographer, performance artist, and academic. As both romantic and artistic partners, they have been collaborating with each other for twenty years and the book details their vibrant international art career that involves, among other things, designing and participating in what can be described as 'happenings' which raise awareness about the environment through ecosexuality. These large public art events are collaborative experiments that have incorporated thousands of other artists, musicians, and creatives.

One of their most well-known types of happening is the wedding. Initially begun with the *Red Wedding* in 2004, which was a protest against war and anti-gay marriage sentiment, by 2008 they had married the Earth. This was followed in subsequent years by weddings to the Moon, the Appalachian Mountains, the Sea, the Sky, the Rocks, Coal, Snow, a Lake in Finland, and the Sun [capitalisation as proper nouns in the original]. These marriages may seem whacky and whimsical, and ecosexuality has been criticised by both environmentalists and queer activists for not being sufficiently serious or respectful and even bringing those movements into disrepute. As this book deftly shows, however, Sprinkle and Stephens' apparently light-hearted work is grounded in sophisticated academic understandings of post-humanism and new materialisms which problematise human exceptionalism and creatively reimagine human relationships with the many other sentient and non-sentient beings that exist on the planet. The ecosexual wedding vows, whereby participants promise 'to love, honour and cherish the Earth until death brings us closer together forever', are serious expressions of commitment to environmental activism (p. 15).

With its conversational, frank, funny tone, *Assuming the Ecosexual Position* is extremely easy to read. It is also eloquent, informed, moving, and inspiring. The book is an academic text with useful endnotes and bibliography, but it is also an art book with a bright flashy cover that is interspersed with many black and white images, 32 pages of colour photographs, along with clear artists' statements and manifestoes. Like ecosexuality itself, the book is a three-way marriage between sex, art, and the environmental humanities. It is also an invitation to participate, to immerse oneself in the planetary sensorium, to ecstatically express love beyond human boundaries, and to act up for the fate of the Earth.

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