

GHOST COWS, LEATHER SKIN, MAN MILK

On the Bovine and Queer Men

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Through leather and milk, this study sets out to map queer masculine American entanglements with cattle by thinking in line with these two bovine products, each represented in different social and sexual practices of queer men. Through leather—most notably leathersexuality, an aesthetic that came with its own social ecology among queer men, constructed second skins; and milk—most notably sexual roleplay that trans-feminizes the penis into a fertile udder, transubstantiates semen to milk; queer men disrupt the dominant binaries of man/woman, human/animal, nature/culture, and many more, building for themselves speculative bodily ecologies unrestrained by the worlds they are socialized into.

This research is split into two parts, each exploring the bovine multispecies rhetoric of queer men: a historicization of leathersexuality, with special attention paid to its roots in American pastoralism and the mythologized American “virgin land,” itself engrossed in metaphors of bodily penetration, environments inherently entangled in colonialism and empire. This historicization leads to a theorizing of leather culture that challenges the permeability of the membrane of the term “environment,” imagining the leather bar itself as home and ecology.

The second part follows pornography that portrays submissive men being milked by cattle milking machines, tracking the rhetorical strands that link these men and their bodies to maternal bovines. This piece asks how imagining kinship and utilizing multi-species language might allow us to disrupt the strands of thought that essentialize heterosexuality as “natural.”

Thinking in tune with Donna Haraway’s assertion that there can be no nature/culture, only naturecultures, combined and inseparable, this study asks how American cattle naturecultures breed themselves into queer masculine life, building queernaturecultures, and what horizons of potentiality they offer the queer subject, entangled in and playing with a colorful palette of aesthetic and biota. I am grateful for the feedback from the conference, which has greatly informed the paper’s development.