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Evangelina Aguas: Queer Interruptions: Temporality in Femslash Fandom

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Book Review

Evangeline Aguas: Queer Interruptions: Temporality in Femslash Fandom

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Miriam Fiala & Sarah Heinz

Book Review

**Evangeline Aguas: *Queer Interruptions: Temporality in Femslash Fandom*
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In 2016, fans of the pairing Clarke and Lexa of the television series *The 100* (called Clexa fans) harshly criticized the abrupt death of Lexa, the major lesbian character of the show, accusing *The 100* (2014–2020) of queerbaiting and treating its LGBTQ+ characters as expendable. This critique became a key point in broader discussions about the ‘bury your gays’ trope and its emotional toll on queer audiences. Using the queer Clexa fan community as a representative case study, Evangeline Aguas zooms in on queer temporalities as a means to explore how the ongoing patterns of LGBTQ+ death on screen can activate “time-traveling wounds” (p.5) in queer fans, her main interest being how queer fan experiences differ from those of their heterosexual peers.

Aguas’ key argument is that this specificity of queer fan experiences can be understood through the concept of queer time, “a sense of being out-of-sync, delayed or in stasis” (p.11). In contrast, their heterosexual peers live in ‘straight time,’ passing socially accepted milestones such as marriage or reproduction as markers of their alleged ‘maturity’ and linear ‘growing up’ (cf. pp.43f.). This binary framing of ‘queer time’ as out-of-sync and traumatic vs. ‘straight time’ as chromonormative is central to the book’s argument (cf. p.44), but this structure raises questions. While Aguas frequently describes queer temporality as “painful memories” (p.6) filled with shame, self-hatred, despair, depression, and loneliness, it remains unclear whether this framing is endorsed by the book itself or whether it is a critique of dominant media narratives of queer lives as either not growing up or growing “sideways” (p.44; cf. Stockton, Kathryn Bond: *The Queer Child: or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009, p.6). In effect, the book explores how queer fans experience temporal dislocation rather than whether or how far they do so, thereby taking a painful or even damaging experience of ‘queer time’ for granted—despite mentioning that this delay can also be liberating, turning into an opportunity for alternative queer life rhythms (cf. p.11), as well as pointing out (with Halberstam) that “not all gay, lesbian, and transgender people live markedly different lives from their heterosexual peers” (p.45)—also in terms of temporalities.

Proceeding from the claim that queer theory is too abstract to capture the “realities of everyday queer experience” (p.9), the book combines concepts from queer theory with fan studies and an ethnographic approach, offering an interesting critical and methodological framework that opens up new ways of understanding continuing marginalization while debunking the claim that “a homophobic past has been overcome by a liberated present” (p.5). In order to gather data for her study, Aguas first conducted an online survey with 72 participants recruited through existing online Clexa fan networks on Tumblr and X (cf. p.32). In a second step, Aguas conducted nine in-depth, in-person interviews with Clexa fans (mostly selected from the preceding online survey sample and prioritizing fans travelling to a ClexaCon fan convention, where most of the interviews were recorded [cf. p.33]). These nine interviews were then published through what Aguas calls “a queer transmedia project,” (p.9), i.e., an online documentary

available through a [website](#). However, Aguas pre-screened the research participants “to identify those who continue to experience alienation and backwardness” (p.14). This limited sample, combined with the use of stimulus material (cf. pp.34-37), may have shaped responses in ways that risk confirming the study’s own prior assumptions. This is not unproblematic because Aguas implies a certain universality in the experiences of these hand-picked fans for queer fan studies more generally.

The study utilizes a wide range of relevant concepts and terminology but often lacks clear definitions. For instance, the central term ‘femslash,’ which commonly refers to a specific fan fiction genre, is never clearly defined but rather used to refer to lesbian pairings in mass media more generally (cf. the short footnote on p.9). Similarly, when describing the fan community she is interested in, Aguas seeks to re-contextualize terms like ‘LGBTQ+ community’ and ‘queer fandom’ as heterogeneous and critiques fan studies for often assuming the ‘ideal fan’ to be white and male (cf. p.21). However, the book does not explicitly engage with theories of intersectionality, despite using established related terms, such as “multiple identity axes” (p.23). This limited engagement with the complexity of critical discourse is also reflected in the book’s presentation: Although its focus on queer fans of color is one of its strongest aspects, this emphasis is not visible in its title, abstract, keywords, or table of contents.

Aguas is transparent about some of the limitations of her study, though, particularly in terms of gender diversity, but tends to discuss these rather late. An earlier engagement with these issues could have strengthened rather than weakened the book’s arguments. This was particularly noticeable in Chapter 6, in which the documentary and website are termed a “Queer Archive of Feelings” (p.93), yet established archival practices are inaccurately and superficially critiqued. In this context, the claim for the documentary and website to be “a tool for social justice storytelling and cultural activism” (p.93) is rather ambitious, especially considering that Aguas does not reflect on her own role as “media gatekeeper” (p.94). The author may not be in the same position as a journalist, but the research and its presentation in the academic genre of the book-length study nevertheless affords her relative power over representation, e.g., through the hand-picked selection of the in-depth interviews.

Overall, with *Queer Interruptions*, Aguas offers an original contribution to both queer theory and fan studies. Its focus on queer fans of color is especially significant, as it brings attention to voices that are often overlooked in fan scholarship. However, the book would have benefited from clearer definitions, earlier acknowledgement of its limitations, and a more nuanced engagement with the ambivalences of its binary temporalities. Despite these issues, the book provides interesting insights into the ongoing conversations in both queer theory and fan studies. The book’s multimedia documentation, included as QR codes, makes its data accessible to both fan communities and academics.

