

## Not-knowing (in) the flesh

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has brought bodily relationality, vulnerability, and the limitations of matter to the foreground in ways simultaneously new and utterly predictable. Ecologists have long argued that denials of materiality, bodily limitation, and vulnerability fuel the rapacious human consumption of the earth that sustains us. In the pandemic, limitation and vulnerability were tested from different angles than those often presumed as starting points in left-liberal discourse: the failure of good political solutions in many countries in the global North generated public sentiments that individualized and moralized responsibility for the virus's transmission. 'Pandemic deniers' joined 'climate change deniers' as incarnations of the careless, amoral other whose indifference to the lives of others leads to death. Scientists vociferously disagreed on the costs, economic and otherwise, of various solutions, despite a shared recognition of impending disaster. Models of various possible futures became not only helpful heuristics but responsibility-denying tools in the hands of politicians whose gestures at 'the science' simultaneously obscured both their relative capacity and incapacity to direct the development of something as complex and contingent as the course of a global respiratory pandemic.

It seems that every aspect of the ongoing climate disaster is being mirrored, on a much smaller scale, in the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, suggesting that whatever strategies we have been using to transform human agential relations to other agencies have not given us what we have wanted from them. Among the many problems this confronts us with is the challenge of how to develop a lived ecology of not-knowing that can tolerate and engage inside uncertainty and conflict in relation to urgent problems, without falling into moralism and ineffective denunciation. Returning to perspectives from the (other) pandemic that is not over—especially queer theory's emergence from the HIV/AIDS pandemic—this paper asks about practices, religious and more than religious, that enact the not-knowing of flesh in relation to vulnerability, conflict, and sociality. Can analysis of failures in the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic help redirect trajectories of action toward effective engagement with climate change? What social ecologies are needed to make such redirection possible? The paper ends with a case study of (the religion of the) dancefloor and its relations to sex, death, and time.

### Bio:

Linn Marie Tonstad is associate professor of theology, religion, and sexuality at Yale Divinity School and affiliate faculty in religious studies, LGBT studies, and WGSS at Yale University. She is the author of two books, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* and *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics*. She is currently completing a book tentatively titled *The Impossible Other: Theology, Queer Studies, and the Politics of Human Redemption*.