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“I have practised art since a very young age. I have started illustrating magazines and newspapers at my time at The University of Oxford. My artistic interests and techniques are very varied, but the one factor that is essential is precision and quality”.

EDITORIAL

Queering ecopsychology

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The three of us are excited to introduce this first special issue of the European Journal of Ecopsychology which opens up a dialogue between queer and ecopsychology. Both are committed to transformational practices without drawing clear lines between personal and political, social and ecological. They both blur other boundaries, questioning taken for granted borders (e.g., between heterosexuality and homosexuality or self and ecosystem). Both have roots in feminism, psychoanalysis, social movements and counter cultures. Both invite us to expand our experiences of intimacy and relationships, releasing tendencies towards domination and control and nourishing capacities to connect.

A particular challenge for us as editors has been that both areas are also notoriously slippery to define. ‘How close to ‘traditional’ psychology is/should ‘Ecopsychology’ be? We encountered this time after time. I (MM) even got bored of my own voice, asking Meg and Jamie “Where is the psychology in this submission?”, or saying “I loved the paper but is it psychological enough?” There were times when this was shared as, in relation to one submission, MB was also curious, wondering whether a submission was “eco enough, or psychology enough for this journal”.

Jamie’s astute response was often to provide a reminder of why there was a need for ecopsychology and for an exploration of the links with queer. As we reviewed papers JH said: “Again, I don't think the papers need to conform to the standards of the British Psychology Society as, in my view, ecopsychology is a process of becoming something different from normative psychology – especially when we queer it!” Ah, yes: one of the key links between the two domains was an intellectual and embodied realisation that there are significant problems with disciplined and disciplining science and other practices. Ecopsychology, like any other area of thought, has the potential to develop borders, orthodoxies; to become unhelpfully disciplined. In what ways might those be softened, crossed, queered?
What does queer theory, queer politics, have to offer to the tasks of radicalising ecopsychology, of keeping it vital?

For those who might be tempted to say about any given article, “This isn't ecopsychology!”, we invite you to consider Robert Greenway's approach to the ecopsychological project:

I work towards an ecopsychology that will find within language an accurate articulation of the human-nature relationship. This will of course be based on experience, but will be couched in language, and perhaps deepened by ritual and art. It must take up the deepest meanings of relationships in general and relationships between “mind” and “nature” in particular. It will be based on a variety of “modes of knowing” (neither ignoring nor privileging science). It must not be within the constraints of a particular psychology nor within a specific natural history discipline, but will be “integral” in that it will draw insight from all past and current attempts to depict “nature” from the human perspective (Greenway, 2009: 50).

Drawing on different experiences – of social movements, queer autonomous spaces, indigenous lands and community gardens; of reading, teaching, partying and organising – the contributions to this collection offer resources for articulating the challenges and wonders of relating to those which are imagined Other in the dualist mentality which imagines human/nature, hetero/homo, man/woman to be ‘natural’ divisions.

For those unfamiliar with queer theory, this is its heart. The nature of domination is not simply that heterosexuality, masculinity and whiteness (and more) are valued over and above homosexuality, femininity and racialised otherness – it is the creation of division itself, declared natural and normal, which enables the domination. By looking at the ways in which division is declared and categories naturalised, and finding ways to undo these doings, queer theory addresses the roots of domination. In particular, queer theory (and activism) attempt to highlight the ways in which a politics of gender and sexuality, intersecting with other socially constructed hierarchies, may be found in unexpected places.

This special issue offers a taste of the great possibilities of bringing together queer, eco and psyche in theory and in practice. Contributors come from a range of (inter)disciplines – including human geography, environmental planning, English, dance studies, anarchist studies, sociology and clinical and counseling psychologies. Margot Young's paper opens the issue by asking to what extent the psychological heritage of ecopsychology leads to the production of normative
categories of ‘human’ and ‘human nature’, potentially undermining the ecopsychological project of healing “the wound [of] the dualistic illusion that humans are ‘above’ or ‘separate’ from the natural world” (Greenway, 2009: 49). In particular, she calls for a critical ecopsychology which questions normalising divisions of sanity and madness, human and animal by exploring the ways in which these divisions are linked and potentially reinforced in (eco)psychological discourse.

The second two papers offer ecopsychology questions and commentary about links between space, mentality and wider social and ecological relations via recent engagements referred to as queer ecology (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010). Joshua Sbicca’s paper on eco-queer alliances addresses the vital issue of just and sustainable food production and distribution. Gordon Brent Ingram’s piece asks what Gregory Bateson's queer theories might bring to directly democratic forms of ecological planning. Both look to finding ways of undermining patterns of social and ecological domination and to the ways in which people are working with other forces of life to produce vibrant and radical spaces of freedom. Where Sbicca looks to autonomous queer experiments in food production for inspiration, Ingram examines three contested Canadian spaces to consider how relations might be queered to make space for minoritised people (human and otherwise) and practices. Both papers invite an ecopsychological engagement with new areas of radical social theory and movements which might contribute to healing the intertwined illusions of hierarchy, separation and normality.

The roundtable continues the theme of queer ecology, a major source of inspiration for this special issue. Jamie invited seven contemporary thinkers exploring this rich margin – Jill E. Anderson, Robert Azzarello, Gavin Brown, Katie Hogan, Gordon Brent Ingram, Michael J. Morris and Joshua Stephens – to introduce their own perspectives and then engage with the differences and commonalities among them. The result is a powerful piece of work examining challenging topics of human population, the nature of ‘nature’, queer- and eco-friendly political economies, personal and collective suffering, human exceptionalism and everyday material relations and practices. Not only does the roundtable introduce some of these scholars to each other, it introduces ecopsychology to queer ecology and vice versa. The issue concludes with two Insight pieces. In the first, Kirk Shepard looks at duck sex, clothing-optional beaches and more to examine the ways in
which certain forms of sexuality are constructed as natural and how nature itself welcomes a reconsideration of those categories. In the second, Deborah Anapol provocatively explores the possibilities of viewing the earth not only as mother, but also as father and as genderqueer polyamorous lover.

We hope that readers learn as much as we did in the work on this project and welcome reactions, engagements and debates for future issues of the European Journal of Ecopsychology. Perhaps this collection will be a spark for further fruitful discussions and other forms of action.

Acknowledgements

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References

Queer mad animals
Foucault, eco-psychology and the de-humanised subject
Margot Young

Abstract
This paper reviews the eco-psychological field in the contexts of recent queer ecological work, and of Foucault’s History of madness. I propose that psychology’s normative presuppositions about ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’ could constrain its capacity for ecological application unless self-reflexive, critical or queer theoretical approaches are applied. Morton’s and Mortimer-Sandilands’s queer ecologies use Butlerian notions of ‘gender melancholy’ to suggest a human subjectivity characterised by foreclosed ‘environmental melancholy’. This is considered in the light of Lynne Huffer’s claim that Butlerian queer theory’s reliance on ‘psychoanalytic Foucauldianism’ is based on a misreading of Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis. Whilst sympathetic to Huffer’s view that psychoanalysis institutes psychic interiority through self surveilllance, I conclude that she doesn’t adequately account for Foucault’s theorisation of resistance to power, which was evident within psychoanalytic discourse from the outset. Further, I argue that History of madness not only traces the coming into being of the modern psychologised subject, but also reveals a history of animality through the shifting conceptions of the sexual, the bestial and the natural. The mad and the sexually deviant, initially equated with animals at the time of the great confinement, were later, through the instatement of psychological treatment regimes, associated with specifically human psychopathologies. I conclude that the ejection of animality from madness was coterminous with the coming into being of human interiorised subjectivity, and that psychoanalysis constructed the Freudian heteronormative human family at the site of the primal scene, through the exclusion of meanings relating to nonhuman others.

Keywords: Foucault, eco-psychology, subjectivity, animality
Scene of encounter

I begin by explaining my hyphenation of eco-psychology in this piece. Thinking about the queer(y)ing of ‘ecopsychoology’ I found myself wanting to separate the eco from the psychology; their being conjoined in this way perhaps camouflaging a gap; prematurely closing the space between eco – from the Greek for ‘house’, and psyche – from the Greek for ‘life’, or ‘breath’, (in Latin, ‘animalis’). I hope that preserving a space within this ‘life-house’ will allow something of their separate trajectories and histories to emerge, as well as the potentialities that arise from this meeting of eco and psyche. I admit that I am perhaps also fearful here for the fate of the ‘eco’ half of the partnership; having recently become reacquainted with Foucault’s History of madness, via Lynne Huffer’s meticulous reading in Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the foundations of Queer Theory (2010), I am feeling rather attuned to her resolute view that psychology is a particularly pernicious, modern and all too human affair, amounting – from a Foucauldian viewpoint – to the fulfilment of a progressively more imprisoning dominance of reason over unreason, through which the ‘self’ has been brought forth. For Foucault this was a project of morality, initiated by the great confinement of the mad in the classical age and culminating in the discourses of psychology and psychoanalysis which have produced sexualised and psychically interiorised human subjects.

In this piece I hope to sketch some zones of intersectionality between ecology and psychology and to suggest that the concerns of queer theory, and the recent advent of queer ecologies, illuminate the terrain of such a meeting, and query the sustainability of eco-psychology unless the critique of normalisation at the heart of queer theorising is applied self-reflexively within eco-psychological theories and practices. Of particular relevance here is the queer adoption of psychoanalysis, creating a zone of commonality with psychoanalytically derived eco-psychologies, especially given the recent deployment of psychoanalysis within ‘queer ecologies’ (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010; Morton, 2010). Queer theories and ecologies are themselves also brought into question through Huffer’s dispute with ‘psychoanalytic Foucauldianism’ which she proposes is founded upon an incomplete reading of Foucault, creating a dilution of his views on the position of psychoanalysis, initially and extensively articulated in History of madness. She argues that this widespread misreading has led to the deployment of Freudo (Lacanian)-Foucault hybrids within queer theorisations of subjectivity and identity.
I will evaluate the significance of Huffer’s critique for the proliferating psychologies of queer psychoanalysis, psychoanalytically inflected ecologies and eco-psychology, but also supplement her account of madness’ history with some observations on the associated history of animality in psychologising discourse. The work of Judith Butler is also of particular significance here, in terms not just of its centrality to queer theory’s identity critique but also of its subsequent application within Morton’s and Mortimer-Sandilands’ queer ecologies. Further, her account of the psychically-constituted heteronormative subject is a singled out for particular criticism by Huffer, who feels that Butler obscures the primary trajectories of Foucault’s work relating to the role of all psychology in the production of the human subject.

Eco-psychological perspectives, whilst representing diverse orientations in terms of the psycho-therapeutic positions and practices from which they arise, are in fact largely psychoanalytically derived. Indeed, until very recently, much eco-psychology involved the direct transposition of pre-existing models of psychic structure, such as Kleinian (e.g., Weintrobe, 2010), or Attachment (e.g., Jordan, 2009), adhered to by the author in their clinical practice, onto various ‘ecological’ fields of concern, ranging from the question of apathetic attitudes towards climate changes and experiences of alienation from ‘nature’ to the newly invented ‘nature deficit disorder’ (Louv, 2011). Often these transpositions have been made without questioning the inherent suitability of the (usually) clinically derived concepts for application onto the social field, or without reference to the history of attempts to apply psychoanalysis to culture. This can be explained in part by the differences between the institutional or clinical contexts of the talking therapies and academy-based applications of psychoanalytic theory. Further, there is an activist base amongst practitioners, creating an imperative to ‘do something’; to apply knowledge and experience for the environmentalist cause of mitigating the effects of climate change and/or the eco-psychological aim of alleviating human alienation from ‘nature’. As I have discussed elsewhere (Young, 2012), ecopsychology has not, until very recently at least, preoccupied itself with questions about what is meant by the idea of ‘nature’ in discourses of ecology and environmentalism. Indeed, Tim Morton in his book about the notion of nature characterises “ecopsychology, pioneered by Theodore Roszak” as “a form of romantic ecology” (Morton, 2007: 185).
However, since this issue has become subject to critical attention from environmentally-oriented scholars in the humanities, eco-psychological authors have begun to question whether we can assume we know what is meant by the term ‘nature’ and, following Morton, to question whether ‘nature’ can any longer be said to exist. So having taken for granted the notions of both ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’, as \textit{a priori} known and/or knowable categories, Morton’s propositions regarding the illusory character of such delineations have now begun to permeate the eco-psychological field (Dodds, 2010; Jordan, 2012). Bringing together queer theorising and eco-psychology creates an encounter with even greater combustive potential than Morton’s staging of a meeting between queer theory and ecology; a meeting which he characterises as both a “fantastic explosion” and a “pervasive Frankensteinian meme splice” (2010b: 273). The striking contrast here with Paul Hoggett’s view that we need to establish new categories of psychopathology, due to the cultural ‘perversity’ which gives rise to climate change denial (2009; 2012), exposes the polarisation between a normative eco-psychology produced through the lens of the psycho-pathologising Anglo-American psychoanalytic clinic, and the celebration of queer ecological perversity emanating from the humanities (or post-humanities) of the American academy.

Eco-psychology is, however, a young and diverse field, as demonstrated by some of the papers in the 2012 anthology \textit{Vital Signs} (Rust & Totton, 2012), which express a desire to engage with postmodernism. Others are attempting to forge new approaches to eco-psychological practice, some of which challenge established notions of clinical space and therapeutic boundaries. These authors propose, for example, out-of-doors practices and work with nonhumans (Jordan & Marshall, 2010; Kerr & Key, 2012; Hall, 2102; Totton, 2010). By contesting the boundaries which physically constitute the psychotherapeutic frame, they present a challenge to the normalising power relations that structure the therapist/analyst/doctor to patent/client relationships which are central to the concerns of queer theory. However, without self-reflexivity in relation to the application of existing psychological concepts and models to ecological concerns, it may prove impossible to prevent the formation of new normalisations, as the example of Hogget’s enthusiasm for expanding the classificatory arsenal to include eco-psycho-pathology suggests.

Eco-psychology appears to have contained from its inception a tension with regard
to the normalising inherent to psychology on the one hand and its environmentalist aspirations on the other. Roszak, in his 1994 proposal for the development of eco-psychology, argued that psycho-therapists were too focussed on interpretative strategies relating to sexuality or childhood, to the detriment of ecological meanings relating to experiences of alienation from the environment (1995: 2–3). However, at the same time he suggests that ecologically-based definitions of ‘mental health’ be developed, revealing that his challenge to the conventions of urban- and human-oriented psycho-practices does not extend to questioning whether classificatory pathologies of (human) mental health themselves might be part of the problem.

The question of developing a critical eco-psychological account of nonhumans is of particular relevance in terms of ‘queering the human’ as category, to which end I will address the shifting conceptions of animality and bestiality which, I will argue, have come to constitute an obscuring of the relation to nonhumans within the psychological field. When the deviant and mad were confined in the period prior to the development of knowledges about and treatments for madness, the mad were seen as indistinguishable from animals – their animality being synonymous with their madness and this ‘bestiality’ being the signifier of uncontrollably raging, violent and/or sexually depraved natures, as well as their possessing the then perceived physical characteristics of animality which included an immunity to feeling hunger or cold (Foucault, 2006: 145-8). However, by the time Freud (1918) was constructing the source of repression at the site of the wolf man’s primal scene in the early twentieth century, animals, rather than being synonymous with madness and deviancy, were all but excluded, interpreted away as signifiers of human sexuality, a mere foil for the construction of the oedipalised family and its disavowed incestuous impulses.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their account of Freud’s ‘Wolf Man’ case, argue that when Freud assumes that animals are signifiers of the parental sexual scene he cements the anthropocentrism of psychoanalysis, through an obsession with establishing the law of the castrating oedipal father, which they scathingly characterise as Freud demonstrating a ‘genius for brushing up against the truth and passing it by’ (1987: 30). In relation to his patient’s terrifying dream of gazing white wolves, likened by Deleuze and Guattari to ‘anti-oedipal hybrids’, Freud’s interpretative trajectory explains every element in terms of incestuous oedipal anxieties, which – they argue
– signifies Freud’s inability to developing a ‘truly zoological vision’ in which the there is a recognition of nonhuman multiplicities. This is despite, as Genosko notes, Freud’s repeated concern with the symbolism of the animal ‘other’ in psychoanalysis (1993: 608-10).

We shall later examine in more detail the significance of Freud’s treatment of this case in the context of the history of psychology’s exclusions of the nonhuman, and of the reclamation of Foucault’s early work for our project of queer psycho-environmental theorising. It is worth noting here though that while Foucault, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, did not specifically situate psychoanalysis in an ecological context, in his 1972 preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s first volume of Anti-Oedipus he is particularly uncompromising with reference to psychoanalysis’ limitations, arguing that it ‘would subjugate the multiplicity of desire to the twofold law of structure and lack’ (Foucault in Deleuze & Guattari, 1983: xiv). He proposes that limiting binaries be cast aside in favour of ‘multiplicities’ and ‘mobility’.

It is striking that Foucault, in particularly expressive mood here, speaks in terms not dissimilar to those of Tim Morton, who also critiques the effects of binary thinking, specifically in relation to the artificial delineations that re-iterate the fantasmic notions of ‘nature’, ‘environment’ and ‘the animal’. While animality seems largely incidental to Huffer’s Foucauldian treatise, I will propose that the fragments of a genealogy of animality revealed in Foucault’s History Of madness suggest that psychologised human subjectivity cannot be disengaged from the exclusionary delineations that came to define our relation with nonhuman others.

**Foucault’s unnatural ecology**

Neil Levy wrote a piece in 1999 entitled “Foucault’s unnatural ecology” which addressed the intersection between environmentalism and poststructuralism, of which eco-psychology and queer theory respectively can be seen as offspring. Levy illuminates the terrain upon which a meeting of queer theory and eco-psychology might take place, and at the same time suggests a Foucauldian perspective which addresses, at least in part, the problematic that such an encounter throws up. He notes the position of environmentalist idealism, which can conceive of nature as either unsullied and pure or – as it increasingly has been conceived of late, I would suggest – as sullied and tragically damaged. He then
goes on to outline the contrasting critical theoretical view, following Soper, that constructions of both ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’ act as positions utilised in the legitimation of normalising practices (Levy: 203). Following Foucault’s account in *History of Sexuality 1* of the appearance in the nineteenth century of the homosexual as a ‘species’, Levy notes that this ‘naturalisation' allows the constitution of perverse individuals as categories of the natural because they have been ‘discovered’ rather than ‘constructed’ (Levy: 205). He contextualises the production of sexualities as a form of biopower; the technologies which intervene at the level of population to develop “a form of power which operates on life itself … that endeavours to administer, optimise and multiply …subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulation” (Foucault in Levy: 211). Power intervenes within all members of a population – but what, ecologically, does a population consist of? If it is impossible to demarcate life from non-life, and if some life exists, or is made, in order to sustain other life, then these processes surely also come within the sphere of biopower’s regulatory discourse, and the notion of population should thus extend to the multiplicity of nonhumans. As Levy notes, it is the nonhuman as much as the human who has “entered into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques … [and] passed into knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention” (Foucault in Levy: 211).

**Psychoanalysis and queer ecologies**

Tim Morton, in his critique of how humans construct ‘nature’, argues that fantasmic conceptions of ‘nature’ as a separate, often idealised othered entity are preventing us from “thinking ecologically”. Further, he argues that the human/nonhuman duality is also artificial, rendering ‘nature’ unsustainable as a construct when the presumed divide separating human from nonhuman is recognised as illusory (Morton, 2007, 2010a). Idealisations of nature impede the capacity to think ecologically because all constructions of nature as ‘other’ set up non-existent boundaries. Morton notes that even the boundary between life and non-life is blurred, and thick with ‘paradoxical entities’ (Morton, 2010b: 276). Creating artificial boundaries which form categories of ‘the natural’ functions as normalisation, by also constructing that which deviates from the natural. Further, these delineations prevent us from dealing with the real and multiplying effects of all of the collisionary interrelatednesses of life forms, which include the virtually
incalculable ecological complexities arising from anthropogenic global warming (Morton, 2010b: 274-5).

Morton’s work operates as a critique of romanticism and idealism, and thus also of eco-psychology inasmuch as it has been heavily invested in both modes of thought. So wherever it idealises or conceives of nature as ‘other’, eco-psychology undermines its own aims of healing alienation from ‘nature’ and trying to deal with environmental damage; its own presuppositions actually reinforce that which it seeks to undermine.

The contestation of categories of the natural, which has from the outset been a central concern for queer theory, also matters for the psychological field as a whole since it queries the integrity of a human subjectivity which only arises in relation to the fantastic separate other of nature. Following Judith Butler’s conception of foreclosed homosexual attachment resulting in ‘gender melancholy’, Morton speculates that subjectivity is structured by an environmental melancholy caused by unimaginable and ungrievable loss because the environment actually is that from which we can never be separate. This is a ‘dark ecology’, a ‘melancholic ethics’, which conceives of melancholy as an introjected and ‘irreducible’ component of subjectivity, saturated with unrequited longing for that we never had, because subjectivity itself is structured as radically separated (Morton, 2007:186).

Morton is here specifically drawing on Butler’s account of the psychic constitution of the human subject, which she feels addresses a lack in Foucault’s account of the subject’s coming to be as an effect of normalising discourses of sexuality, heath, medicine and the human sciences – in all of which psychology is deeply implicated. And Butler’s work, along with that of others who have similarly engaged with both psychoanalytic and Foucauldian ideas, is some of the most influential in queer theory. So it not surprising that recent critical and queer ecological accounts, which perhaps offer particular potential in the queering of eco-psychology, use Butlerian conceptions of melancholic psychic construction.

Mortimer-Sandilands uses both Freud and Butler to forge a queer ecology which argues that homosexual and environmental loss are bound together and foreclosed together. Like Morton she evokes melancholy as environmental as well as queer ethic. For Mortimer-Sandilands internalised melancholy is precious – for it holds the tracks and traces of losses and separations. Emerging from the devastation of AIDS, queer culture reveals a politicised understanding of a melancholia that
refuses pathologisation, expressed for example in Derek Jarman’s tenacious attachment towards lost beloveds. She describes his garden as a site for a “specifically queer” acts of memory, with nature not overwritten as wilderness but constituting, from its windswept shingle, a barren and unlikely refuge, shadowed by the Dungeness nuclear power station, a site “for extraordinary reflection of life, beauty and community” (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010: 343-4). This is in stark contrast to what she sees as the commodification of nature in forms of eco-consumerism, which includes environmental destruction itself having become commodified in the form of dramatic broadcasts staging the losses of nature couched in pseudo-objective environmentalist-scientific terms, yet producing scopically fetishised human consumers who are ‘poised to watch’ the destruction (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010: 333-340).

Mortimer-Sandilands’ trajectory, like those of Morton and Butler derives, from a non-pathologising interpretation of certain aspects of Freud’s thought, epitomised in *Three Essays* in which he asserts that “No healthy person … can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim; and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach” (1905: 160). She also emphasises the aspect of Freud’s work on mourning that suggests acceptance rather than treatment (Freud 1915). Although many have focussed on Freud’s proposal that incomplete mourning can become an ‘abnormal’ melancholia (Freud 1917), Mortimer-Sandilands opposes those who propose ‘progressive’ conceptions of mourning involving temporally situated ‘stages’ leading to resolution, or ‘moving on’, and takes up Freud’s lesser-known suggestion that it may not be possible to recover from some losses (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2010: 334-6).

Her eco-melancholia emphasises the idea that profound loss should not, or need not ever be, recovered from but should be re-embraced again and again; when what is most precious is lost, why should one ever want to completely get over it? So this is a queered mourning, an eco-psychological practice which, through its context beyond the clinical frames of psycho-practices, establishes mourning as ethical practice; a psycho-politics of love and loss, where social marginalisation of queerness, and personal and environmental losses, are brought together within a language of the out-of-doors (Mortimer-Sandilands: 340).

Mortimer-Sandilands is poignantly anti-normalising in her vision of queer
melancholic eco-psychological practice, and offers potentially productive convergences with eco-psychological narratives on loss that emphasise commemorative practices (e.g., Randall, 2005). Nonetheless she does turn to the language of psychopathology when making her cultural critique: while I am inclined to be sympathetic to her analysis of capitalism’s appropriation of ecological concerns, when she refers to the environmental consumer’s “scopic fetish” Mortimer-Sandilands lends legitimacy to a psychoanalytic categorisation which clearly contains – in Foucauldian terms – a form of moralising, and an implicit positing of a non-consumerist non-scopically-fetishistic norm. Paradoxically, this is precisely the sort of position she seeks to undermine in her queer melancholic ethic. Recalling the contradictoriness of Roszak’s vision for ecological psycho-therapies, it strikes me that one of the dangers in putting psychoanalysis to use in cultural critique is that it occupies a paradoxical position as a site of both resistance to and re-iteration of norms. Its critical analytical power can act seductively to those seeking to use it to develop antinormative critique, inadvertently rendering innovative contexts a field for psychological normalisations. The history of psychoanalysis reveals its location as a site of contestation; the struggle between resisting and normalising forces, evident from the outset in Freud’s relations with resistant hysterics, suggests that the subjects of psychoanalysis, whether analyst, analysand or cultural critique, may end up, as Foucault ironically notes, not with a promised ‘liberation’ but with a new set of delineations and category constructions which ever incline to the separation of deviancy from norm.

So what of Morton’s engagements with psychoanalysis? These are multiply and promiscuously interwoven with other trajectories from the spectrum of critical, aesthetic and philosophical thought that broadly characterise the post-humanities. Always tethered to ecological ontologies, there are endless uncanny replications, and concerns with place and time, which he applies in his critiques of human fantasmic categories relating to the separateness of ‘nature’, the ‘animal’, the ‘human’ and ‘the environment’. Morton’s references to psychoanalysis often relate to the uncanny character of ecological awareness, as a psychological dimension of ecology, particularly the propensity of the uncanny to reveal the psyche’s compulsion to repeat (2010a: 53-4). Morton locates the uncanny as that which has potential to disrupt our delusional views not just of ‘nature’, but also of ‘the present’, evoking here the endless replications of life forms, insistently and
uncannily undoing the present by simultaneously, and on an unimaginable scale, unmaking and remaking the past and the future (Morton, 2012: 8–10).

Morton’s account of what we think of as being on the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ links queer theory to ecology through the contestation of limits and boundaries; for Morton it is queer work to contest the borders of what is and isn’t life (2010b: 276–7). This also brings into question the notion of ‘the environment’ itself, which implies a bordered zone that it is possible to be outside of. This fails because it is impossible to be outside of everything; rather one is always simultaneously inside and out. This relates to the issue of psycho-therapeutically constructed ‘psychic space’, which is brought into question because psycho-practices construct a physically and temporally bounded ‘therapeutic space’, which effectively re-enacts the fantasies of separation between inner and outer, especially as that space is usually constructed as specifically exclusionary of ‘others’ of all kinds.

No Foucauldian as far as the psyche is concerned, Morton is happy with the language of the unconscious, repression and trauma (2010a, 2012). The suggestion of a place of psychic origin which produces constructions of the ‘othered’ environment is paradoxical here in the sense that it posits a kind of ‘inside’. However I am not sure that the manner of Morton’s incorporations and traversals of psychoanalysis represent an acceptance of the psychic in quite the way it is conceived of in psychoanalysis. Morton interrogates the boundary between psyche and place, and latterly between psyche, place and time (2012: 7–20). Indeed at moments it seems more like an exteriorised psychic geography, with experience of self and place becoming indissociable as what is ‘in here’ and ‘out there’ “fold and redouble and entangle and cross over themselves” (2007: 178).

Common to both Mortimer-Sandilands’ and Morton’s accounts is the idea that humans are ‘foreclosing’ their interconnected-ness with nonhumans and environment. Relying on Butler’s account of a psychic subjectivity characterised by foreclosure and disavowals which produce irreducible melancholy, Mortimer-Sandilands and - at least in part - Morton, reflect queer theory’s reliance on psychologised interiority, which is precisely the issue that concerns Lynne Huffer. For her, psychology and psychoanalysis are not tools for the analysis of the psyche, but rather vehicles for its constitution as an historical emergence.

Butler though has made no grand claims for her theory, describing it as speculative, the outcome of a desire to find ‘productive convergences’ between the
Foucauldian and the psychoanalytic subject (Butler, 1997: 138). However, her account has proved compelling, a fact attested to by its foundational status in queer theory and its continued application, including recently – as we have seen – in environmental critique. Here my concerns are with the implications of this specifically Butlerian take on the concept of foreclosure within the context of the psycho-ecological work discussed above. This is because, firstly, I intend to consider Huffer’s claim that psychology and psychoanalysis are constitutive, rather than descriptive, of normalising subjectivity. And secondly, following from this, I will propose that psychologising theories and practices are constitutive of a *specifically and exclusionary human* subjectivity which, I will argue, explains at least in part how and why the human *separativity* that Morton describes has arisen and persisted. In relation to foreclosure I will also suggest that Butler is not applying the term in a strictly psychoanalytic sense, but that the manner of her usage may actually render it more applicable in accounting for human separations in relation to the multiplicities of ‘not human’ others.

**What Butler said (an all too brief account!)**

Butler theorises the coming into being of the psychic human subject in the context of both Foucauldian conceptions of discourse¹, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In her 1990 *Gender Trouble* and subsequent works (1993, 1997) Butler uses psychoanalysis to investigate the psychic operation of heteronormalising discourse as well as to suggest that psychoanalysis could be used in the subversion of normativity. She suggests that psychoanalysis operates both as a practice through

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¹ The term ‘discourse’ underwent revisions and was used in different contexts during the course of Foucault’s career. Butler’s usage derives primarily form Foucault’s later works, notably *Discipline and Punish* and *Sexuality 1*. Broadly, she uses the term to denote the means though which power relations and regulatory practices produce speaking subjects. This includes the systems of rules and authorisations which operate through institutions and practices including legal, penal, educational, medical and welfare systems, as well as psychoanalysis and the whole psychological field. In *Sexuality 1* Foucault says the following of discourse: “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform or stable…we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (Foucault, 1998: 100).
which the coming into being of the subject is ‘re-iterated’, and through which normative positions and hierarchies can be powerfully contested and disrupted (Butler, 1990: xxxiii).

Butler argues that heteronormative discourse produces the gender identities of masculine and feminine which give rise to ‘gender melancholy’. Using Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to theorise how a subject produced through normalising discourses becomes *psychically* constituted, she observes that the taboo on incest marks the initiation of the repression of desire, presumably ‘into’ the ‘unconscious’ although she does not precisely specify this. She then proposes that because the taboo on incest is also – simultaneously – a taboo on same sex desire, the oedipal repressive injunction is central to a discursive practice producing heterosexuality and heteronormalised subjects (Butler, 1990: 78-89). So for Butler, inherent in the oedipally-derived taboo on incest is homosexual prohibition, which sets up binary identities of masculine and feminine which structure and regulate sexual aims. We become psychically melancholic because of the repudiation of homosexual attachment, leading to an internalised identification with an unnamable loss. Added to the displacements of culture, this produces an exclusionary heterosexual code, the melancholy of which permeates *both heterosexual and homosexual identifications* – as it delineates “the legitimate from the illegitimate, the speakable from the unspeakable” (Butler, 1990: 89).

Butler re-works the Freudian oedipal scene by disputing the incest prohibition as a foundational or ‘natural’ human given, because if it were so this would already presuppose an originary and exclusionary heterosexual desire. So she is saying that psychoanalytic oedipalisation is itself a normalising effect – of a heteronormative discourse of sexuality. This means that the foreclosed homosexual attachment, and its loss, remains always unacknowledged, and as it cannot be grieved it gives rise to a culture of “melancholy heterosexuality” which obscures “a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss” (Butler 1997: 35). The Oedipus complex serves to prohibit the child’s familial heterosexual attachment as incest, but not to prohibit heterosexuality itself; thus Butler argues that heteronormativity is constructed by allowing heterosexual attachments beyond the oedipal family, whereas for homosexual attachments both the object of desire and the desire itself must be relinquished. Butler accepts Lacan’s theorisation of the human subject as irrevocably divided, through having been structured by the
prohibitive paternal law operating through the prohibition on incest, which allows entry into the symbolic register of linguistic signification. However, she sees this process of division and subjugation as an effect of the law rather than an ahistorical or immutable aspect of its operation; the latter having often been the basis of criticisms of Lacan. In Butler’s version of Lacan there is no prediscursive reality (1990: 74). She objects to the idea that there could be a law which always and in the same way secures the “borders of symbolic intelligibility”, and instead takes the view that the law is not fixed, rather it “congeals” (Butler 1993: 206-207). Effectively, viewing the Lacanian notion of a psychically-structuring paternal oedipal injunction through a Foucauldian lens enables her to see Lacanian psychoanalysis as representing a challenge to normalising disciplinary practices: “The rendition of Lacan that understands the prediscursive as an impossibility promises a critique that conceptualises the law as prohibitive and generative at once” (1990: 75).

Butler’s account has been subject to many criticisms, especially in relation to her use of psychoanalysis (e.g. Campbell, 2004). My account of her perspective and the debates it has generated is focused on the issues relating to the use of Butlerian notions to theorise queer ecologies, and the relevance of Huffer’s critique for the viability of Butler's account of human subjectivity in relation to queered psycho-ecologies. In particular, there are difficulties with Butler’s use of foreclosure in the positing of psychic interiority. Butler doesn’t explain how interiority itself comes into being, or by what processes the internalisations that constitute homosexual prohibitions psychically permeate the pre-oedipal infant or young child. While heterosexual prohibitions are for Butler internalised psychically through the incest taboo, her notion of a pre-existent pre-oedipal taboo on homosexual attachment, which constitutes Butlerian foreclosure, appears to be construed as a regulatory norm, denoting a Foucauldian discursive rather than a psychic construction. Rather than explaining the intra-psychic effects of foreclosure to account for the mechanisms by which discourse produces heteronormative subjects, she attempts to account for psychic internalisations by using Freud’s account of melancholic identifications, which leads to the incorporation within the psyche of the ‘disavowed’ lost object. However, the problem here is that there is a slippage between her use of the term ‘foreclosure’, which implies a radical inaccessibility, and Freud’s less absolute term ‘disavowal’, which is more akin to a denial leading to the repression into the unconscious of those losses too painful to acknowledge.
Repressed contents of the unconscious can become accessible; this is one of the primary aims of psychoanalysis. But foreclosure, according to Lacan – who introduced its psychoanalytic usage – is radically inaccessible. It denotes a repudiation of oedipal psychic structuring, beyond symbolisation, and constitutes a failure in the institution of repressive mechanisms; a failure which Lacan saw as initiating psychosis (Lacan, 1988: 42–44). The problem for Butler is that Lacanian foreclosure can never be pre-oedipal because it is always a radical refusal of oedipal psychic structuring.

However, the idea of a radically inaccessible foreclosure, notwithstanding its original Lacanian context, is nonetheless more apt than the notion of disavowal as an explanation of the radically separative human subjectivity that Morton proposes, in that it represents a kind of expulsion of that which lies beyond the ‘all too human’ Freudian oedipalisations and, perhaps through the lack of access to the realm of human linguistic signification, foreclosure can even be said to represent a form of resistance to the coming into being of the specifically human subject. In Butler’s conception, foreclosure is bound up with normalising discursive effects whose operations are entirely hidden from the subject through whom they manifest. Because foreclosure here represents a kind of hidden psychic deletion, rather than a repression into the psyche’s unconscious, it does not necessarily imply the instatement of psychic interiority. Neither does it preclude the discursive production of subjectivity being characterised by losses; as Morton has argued, our separativity is itself an “environmental melancholia”. And Huffer in her account of the history of interiorised subjectivation, suggests that it leaves an inaccessible and inarticulable residue which she characterises, here echoing Butler, as saturated with “unspeakable loss” (2006: 176).

**Return to Foucault**

Huffer argues that Foucault’s theorisation of the production of sexualities began with *History of madness*, and that the critique of psychoanalysis associated with *History of sexuality 1*, was already fully articulated in *Madness*, in relation to which *Sexuality 1* can be conceived of as a kind of supplement (2006: 20–2, 34–6). The lack of association of *Madness* with Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis is attributable partly to the unavailability of the whole of *Madness* in English until 2006, which had encouraged this misconstruing of *Sexuality 1* (xii–xiv). Huffer
argues that Foucault’s work must be taken as a whole, and that viewed as such it renders the reading of his position as one which both critiques and supports psychoanalysis unsustainable, in that it misunderstands his thesis that psychoanalysis was pivotal in the production of the psychically interiorised subject. This process of subjectivation which had begun over 200 years before, with the great confinement of the mad, was the first mass social normalisation, representing “Reason’s confinement of Unreason”. It saw numerous categories of the undesirable, including the poor, the venereal and the sodimitalical, being confined alongside the mad. Huffer describes the alery of madness as establishing the social body through the creation of an exception (those confined as, and with, the mad) in relation to the normal “universal” of the non-mad (pp. 144–5).

This “tragic fall”, for Foucault, consists of madness being mastered through being “known” as the first figure of man’s objectification as truth (Foucault in Huffer p. 147). This truth was secured through the modern technique of psychological cures, with psychiatry coming into being with the “birth of a myth of a medical and objective recognition of madness, the production of knowledge, and the reorganisation of internment into a world of healing” (Foucault in Huffer, p. 147). With the focus of science on healing mental illness, knowledges developed that combined internment with the possibility of a cure. Foucault writes that for the first time “an idea is formulated that will weigh heavily on the history of psychiatry up until the psychoanalytic liberation” (Foucault in Huffer, p. 147). Through scientific and moral truth telling – from the asylum, to Charcot then to Freud; medicalised “caged freedom” gave way to the “liberated language of psychoanalysis” (pp. 147–9).

Huffer goes on to challenge what she sees as the unreflective amalgamations of Freud and Foucault, which she thinks have invisibly come to permeate queer theory. She believes that there has been a turning away from Foucault’s archival methodologies, which along with a collapsing of his “uniquely generative” work into Freudo-Lacanianism, lead her to conclude that queer theory has not properly digested Foucault’s consistent critique of psychoanalysis as articulated in History of madness. She accuses Butler in particular of effectively authorising psycho-practices whereby “disavowed truths” are uncovered (pp. 164–172). Explicating this further with reference to Rose, she stresses the seductive reversal in queered
psychoanalysis whereby that which is identified as pathological becomes a signifier of resistance: “The unconscious constantly reveals the failure of identity... there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved”. This does not represent a deviancy from the norm; rather it is:

... endlessly repeated and appears not only in the symptoms, but also in dreams, in slips of the tongue and in forms of sexual pleasure that are pushed to the sidelines of a norm ... There is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life (Rose in Huffer, p. 175).

Huffer opposes the positing of an interiorised psyche that both constitutes the subject and at the same time destabilises it with an “unconscious that guarantees identity’s failure” (p. 175). She argues that the violence inherent to internalisation itself remains unacknowledged, and that the “other failure, the unspeakable loss that haunts Madness is more explicitly social and more deeply historical” than the symptoms and signs that characterise Butlerian identity failure. For Huffer psychoanalysis fails to account for that queerest from of radical alterity called madness (p. 176). She writes of Butler’s *Psychic life* that it:

... does not attend to the historical cost of subjectivity itself [but rather] to the ‘injury’ of identity ... which produces political agency as a subject in the form of a 'traumatic and productive iterability’... rather then attend to the ongoing injury that is subjectivity (p. 179).

Huffer’s complaint is that Butler uses a psychoanalytic account of the ubiquity of the failure of the subject to cohere as a stable identity as a springboard for a politics of resistance, as articulated in Butler’s theory of performativity, which Huffer believes both misreads and misrepresents Foucault. She argues that Foucault’s concern was with the psychologisation of the subject itself, and because this has become disguised, the opportunity to challenge subjectivity is being missed. For Huffer psychoanalysis, and Butler’s appropriation of it, seems to be almost, if not quite, beyond redemption. For although she views psychologising interiority as synonymous with normalisation, she does concede that resistance to psychoanalysis can only come from within psychoanalysis. And ultimately resistance is what concerns both Foucault and Butler (and presumably Huffer too).

Butler shares Foucault’s conception of discourse and power as multiply located, including within the subject, as well as in the institutions and practices which bring the subject into being, and thus for Butler psychoanalytic discourse contains within
itself the potential for resistance. The subjects of psychoanalysis are themselves the sites of resistance, even as psychoanalysis operates to instate their subjectivity. Huffer rejects Butler’s view of resistance in psychoanalysis due to its association with repressions that result from the failure of normalisations, on the grounds that this presupposes psychic interiority. For Butler these repressions act to generate symptoms which can reveal the traces of that which has been lost and allow resistances to – and subversions of – normative identities to arise. It is not inconsistent with Foucault’s view of resistance to suggest, as Butler does, that the human subject is not formed into a stable or static entity, but rather one whose becoming is ongoing, and re-iterated through discursive practices. Therefore psychic interiorisation itself can be seen as a transitory formation within which discursive resistance may arise. On this specific point Huffer fails to offer us her Foucauldian version of resistance to and within psychoanalytic discourse, even though for Foucault resistance is always present, and multiply located within any discourse. He writes that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power … points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network [and] there has never existed one kind of stable subjugation” (Foucault, 1990: 95–97). What is significant here for Huffer’s critique of psychoanalysis is that the instigation of the self monitoring interiorised subject does not for Foucault necessarily imply a closing down of the possibility of resistance to and within that subjectivation. Indeed, resistance to and within psychoanalysis was evident from the outset. Freud, in his early attempts at psychological treatments in the context of the doctor/patient couple, was repeatedly thwarted and resisted by his late nineteenth century hysterical patients up to and including the famous case of seventeen year old Dora, who can be seen as an initiator of a queer contestatory relation to psychoanalysis, and also arguably as one of its founders (Bernheimer & Kahane, 1990). This is not resistance as heroic struggle, but nor does the doctor always triumph, even though many times Freud’s wielding of patrician and medicalised power is both breathtaking and heartbreaking. But at other moments Freud himself is undone by the challenges, resistances and refusals of these women (Breuer & Freud, 1895; Freud, 1895, 1905). And Huffer herself acknowledges her own psychologised subjectivity even as her work is a monument of resistance to it. I suggest in this regard she shows that a queered eco-psychology can preserve the integrity of its queer trajectory by operating resistively to psychology, and I will further argue later that resistance to and within psychology is also necessitated by
its ecological constitution.

Huffer points to the irony, but also the specificity, of Foucault’s statement regarding the “psychoanalytic liberation” in that it was the pinnacle of psychology’s pervasive yet violent colonisation. Whilst I am deeply sympathetic to Huffer’s identification of subjectivation as violence, my ecological concern about her position relates to its scope: its implicit positing of Reason’s effects upon the ‘human’. My question here would be: Does Huffer believe that this is the extent of those upon whom this violence is visited? Even though Madness reveals an intimate and enduring relation between the excluded animal and bestial mad others, Huffer does not follow through the implication of the effects, beyond the human, of the production of psychologised subjects. This theme will be taken up in the remainder of this piece; calling forth resistance in the form of the excluded other of the “animal”.

Animal trouble: Sexuality or bestiality?

Tim Morton writes in Ecology without nature that he sometimes wonders whether the question of “animals” is actually the question, due to its having the power to radically disrupt:

any idea of a single independent solid environment … the beings known as animals hover at the corner of the separation of inside and outside generated by the idea of world as a self-contained system. Strangely enough thinking in terms of ‘world’ often excludes animals – beings who actually live there (Morton, 2007: 98–9).

Decrying the term “animal” as disastrous, Morton argues that the notion is artifice, because in addition to the separation and elevation of the human in relation to nonhuman others, it supposes an erroneous distinction at the boundaries of what is and isn’t life, which he likens to the binary coupling of norm versus pathological deviant that it has been queer theory’s business to undermine. He suggests therefore that queer theory can bring notions of “ politicized intimacy” to the queering of ecology so that the human becomes “humiliated”. Such intimacy necessitates “thinking and practicing weakness rather than mastery, fragmentariness rather than holism” (Morton, 2010b: 276–278).

Morton and Mortimer-Sandilands both want to expand the borders of Butlerian theory to include that which is beyond the human, and indeed Morton here directly
equates a queered ecology with Humiliation, suggesting a subversion which my proposal below for “de-humanisation” echoes. Despite their identifying the fallacious assumptions of human exceptionalism, insofar as their queer psychologising rests on a specifically human psyche it remains problematic, not just in terms of positing an interiority, as Huffer charges, but also in the use of a psychology whose boundaries are exclusionary of the nonhuman. As we have seen, Huffer locates – following Foucault – the objects of psychology’s exclusions as being those denoted “mad”. But animality, like madness, has a history – which could reveal as much about the ‘human’ as about the ‘animal’ were a genealogy of the term to be undertaken. Here however I will concentrate on its specific construction in relation to psychologising theories and practices. For if we are to attempt to ‘ecologise’ psychology, we have to interrogate its borders; its inclusions and exclusions in relation to categories of the natural, as well as the forms taken by its subjectivations and confinements.

The conception of the ‘animal’ underwent a reversal as the great confinement was superseded by the ‘confined freedom’ that resulted from the development of knowledge about the mad. At the outset of the great confinement, madness was equated with animality and both were characterised as wild, violent, ‘bestial’ and in need of taming or training (Foucault, 2006: 148–9). Indeed, as Foucault recounts, the mad were kept in conditions almost identical to those of animals, and similar expectations were placed upon them and assumptions made about them: they were put to work in the manner of “beasts of burden” and presumed to be immune to illness (Foucault, 2006: 149). At this time the notion of ‘bestial’ could refer either to a nonhuman ‘beast’, or to humans having sex with animals. Bestiality in this latter sense was not distinguished from sodomy, which meant all non heterosexual penetrative acts, and hence the association of madness and animality was further compounded by the association of the sexually depraved with animals. It is interesting to note that remnants of the association of animality with sex persisted; and can be seen some two hundred years later in Freud’s description of children’s perceptions of adult humans having sex “in the manner of beasts”, indicating that for Freud sexual acts signify a crossing point from being human to being animal (Freud, 1918: 41).

As confinement of the mad became “confined freedom” in the context of the initiation of treatments for madness as illness in the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, notions of ‘nature’ as ‘wild’ were giving way to the idea of nature as ‘tamed’ and harmonious, and as a ‘place’ in which animals formed part of the ‘natural world’, conceived of as a source of rest, recuperation, peace and wholeness (Foucault, 2006: 373). This romanticised ‘othering’ of nature was equated with the ideals of reason and health, and was normalising especially in relation to women who were associated in their true ‘natures’ with the pastoral (Foucault, 2006: 370–1). These shifting conceptions of a peaceful othered ‘nature’ belied the significant changes that were underway in the organisation and mass exploitation of the constituent parts of this “whole nature”: the industrialisation of the natural and the nonhuman, with all of its ensuing and dramatic effects on life forms, including on the fortunes of ‘wild’ nonhuman ‘animal’ beings, (e.g., wolves, bears, birds), as well as on those billions who became intensively farmed.

It is striking that the mass confinement of the mad in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while unprecedented, was followed by the initiation of the mass containment and confinements of nonhuman ‘animals’ on a even greater scale in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While human control and domestication of animals had existed for at least ten thousand years (see for example Bruford et al, 2003), the past two hundred years have been characterised by an extraordinary biological and organisational intensification of the production, reproduction and exploitation of nonhumans. Foucault’s account of the institutionalised processing of the living, in the form of human prisoners (1991), has informed recent Foucault scholarship on animal confinement as a biopolitical relation which connects the mass-scale confinement of humans by humans with that of nonhumans by humans (Cole, 2010; Thierman, 2011). My focus here, however, is specifically on the discursive context – including the biopolitical implications – of psychology’s trajectory in relation to the figuring of animality. The establishment of psychology as a disciplinary discourse which initiated treatment regimes for the mad and deviant necessitated the ejection from madness of all of its former meanings associated with animality. The fragments of a genealogy of animality which can be traced through History of madness thus reveal psychology’s instatement of madness as a category of the specifically human and its simultaneous deletion of the equation of madness and animality. Further, the more subdued and idealised nineteenth century characterisations of animality both supported the romanticised constructions of nature which Morton critiques, and disguised the realities of the increasingly industrial exploitation of animal bodies: in biopolitical terms the great
confinement of the nonhuman.

Psychology’s exclusion of animality not only furthers the subjectivation of the human, but by disassociating ‘human-ity’ from ‘animality’ it contributes to a biopolitical discourse which legitimises and takes for granted a mastery of the nonhuman characterised by institutionalised and industrial instrumentality. Psychoanalysis is further implicated in the delineation of separative human subjectivity through the ascription within its theoretical constructs of particular psychic characteristics to the human, from which nonhumans are excluded.

The calling forth of the ‘animal mad’ and their subsequent deletion in psychologising theory suggests that Foucault’s critique of the modern psychologised subject also implies a critique of the modern and specifically human subject. Further, if discourses of sexuality as biopolitical regulatory forces are re-figured in terms of a biopower that simultaneously summons into being populations of specifically human subjects, and produces, excludes and confines populations of nonhuman others, the non-subjects, then the study of biopolitics must surely include the effects of biopower on the interrelationships of all life forms.

Huffer makes the case that Foucault’s identification of the homosexual as a ‘species’ in Sexuality I does not imply that this first arose in the nineteenth century but was initiated at the time that those who were deemed sodomitical were confined with the mad, and were associated with animality. My argument however, is that the identification of the homosexual as specifically human relates to later demarcations of forms of animality, when medicine and psychology identified sexuality with what had previously been seen as bestial. The moment when the homosexual as a ‘species’ becomes human is thus marked by the specific identification of sodomy with the psychologised categorisations of sexuality rather than its former generic associations with bestial animality.

Psychology’s project of human/animal differentiation was, according to Derrida, also furthered by Lacan, who demarcates the human in terms of their alone having access to the ‘symbolic’ – the register of the linguistic. Lacan here instates the divide between the animal and the human by ascribing particular qualities only to the human, including those of speech, awareness of death, mourning, culture, lying, guilt, laughter and crying (Derrida, 2008: 134–5). By construing the human as linguistic and capable of symbolisation, Lacan confirms within psychoanalysis
the notion of the human specificity of the psychic interior. Derrida questions the assumption of ‘right’ by which Lacan, a human, can describe the qualities which a nonhuman lacks. Further, in doing so, ‘animals’ become denoted as a singular oithered grouping; their almost unimaginably diverse range of differentiating attributes overlooked as they are, as a whole, those who are “other than human”. For Derrida this relegation of ‘the animals’ collectively is nothing short of a violence against ‘them’ and one which makes permissible the industrial, hormonal, genetic and chemical violences to which they have been increasingly subject for the past two centuries (Derrida, 2008: 26).

The argument here is that the psychic human has been “brought forth” through the positing of a non-interiorised ‘animal’ other, whose former union with the mad and the deviant needed to be expunged for psychology to complete humanised subjectivation. If we consider psychology as a discourse that normalises through exclusions then we can also reconceive of foreclosure in this context as representing an inassimilable exclusion, a negation, through which our separative and specifically human subjectivity is constructed. However, in terms of the history of psychoanalysis, this ultimately hinges not on Lacan’s symbolic register but on the Freudian oedipal moment, represented by the ‘primal scene’ that precipitates for Lacan, the entry to the symbolic order. The linguistic and associative binds that conflated, within psychoanalysis, the sexual with the bestial, and also the animal and the cannibal, have however proved difficult to completely unbind. And perhaps this was especially so for Freud, who associated the ‘animal’ with bestial sexuality even as he sought to separate them, as we shall see below, in his theory of incestuous oedipal desire. My thesis is that oedipalisation itself is a house of cards and, as Huffer says, part of psychology’s patrician progeny, but not only in the form of a heteronormatively conceived psyche policed by an oedipally structured psychoanalysis. The primal scene, the site on which this Freudian version of the oedipal drama is brought into being, has an ‘altern’ – a radically other construction – which represents a further challenge to psychoanalysis in terms of revealing its anthropocentrism, as well as representing a supplement to Foucault’s and Huffer’s construals of human psycho-normalising subjectivity. This alternative account re-calls the ‘animal’ other to the primal scene through the visions and dreams of a late nineteenth century Russian child – who was to become Freud’s famous patient – known as the ‘Wolf-Man’.
The humanisation of the primal scene

In his 1918 ‘Wolf-Man’ case Freud elaborates the operation of the Oedipus complex at the site of the ‘primal scene’, in which a child is faced with the traumatic sight of his parents engaged in sex. Freud retrospectively constructs this scene, never recounted by his patient, from a dream, which took place some 30 months after the time of the alleged primal scene. The dream, of an altogether other scene, reported by the adult patient as having taken place at age 4, consists of an image of several white wolves upon a walnut tree, looking in at the terrified child through his bedroom windows – which have uncannily opened of their own accord. The dream is systematically mapped by Freud onto an oedipal schema, whereby by all of its features, along with numerous nonhuman and fairy tale associations, are denuded of their beastly characteristics in favour of interpretations relating to the child’s incestuous longings and anxieties. Freud thus insists on inscribing the primal scene with the specifically human construction of the incest taboo, even though he knows that children identify with ‘animals’ (Freud in Genosko, 1993: 610), and that the wolf-man had seen adults having sex ‘in the manner’ of animals. Freud, rather than elaborating the apparently more obvious relations of sexuality and animality, manages, through a series of reversals – which are after all in psychoanalysis characteristic of how the unconscious works – to construct the oedipal heteronormative family at the site of the primal scene. It is as though Freud is compelled through oedipal inscription to erase from, and incorporate to, the human all traces of the presence of nonhuman otherness. In doing so he occludes the young Russian’s actual relations to wolvish others, as well as to multiple significations of the fairy tales and folk histories densely populated by boundary crossing encounters with wolves, and wolf human hybrids (Kelly, 2007; Young, 2012).

In psychoanalysis another human/animal hybrid emerged which better suited its purpose of demarcating the properly human psyche - that of the ‘primitive’. Primitivity haunts psychoanalysis; the concept is extensively used to denote a being or a psychic state that is neither human nor animal but lies somewhere in the middle. As well as implicit and explicit relegations of non-Western cultures, the notion of primitivity in psychoanalysis works conceptually to exclude the nonhuman other by ascribing qualities to a primitive human or primitive aspect of the psyche, whose proximity to animality necessitates this intermediate
Young

Queer mad animals

designation. This further masks psychology’s artificial demarcation of human from animal, through primitivity becoming the receptacle for the ‘animal’ within the (sub)human. One of the human-ising functions of primitivity in Freud, visible particularly in Totem and taboo, is the ascription to the primitive individual of a lack of moral sensibility, denoted for instance by the retention of the capacity for cannibalism (Freud, 1913: 2–3).

For Freud, the establishing of oedipal norms requires the psychic installation of erotic transgressions. These of course include the transgression of sex with a nonhuman, evoked but then excluded by Freud in his account of children’s bestial perceptions of the primal scene. The figure of the domestic ‘pet’ – one of Haraway’s “companion species” (2003), which has recently been queered in conceptions of both erotic and companionship partnerings (e.g., Kuzniar, 2008) – serves to illustrate the fragility of human constructions of who is lovable, and who – or what – is killable and eatable. And as these taboos are neither confined exclusively to humans nor are humans entirely susceptible to either of them, they cannot in any case work in an absolute way to define the boundary of the human; they have points of failure or resistance, as the construction of primitivity demonstrates.

The privileging of the incest taboo both inscribes specifically human subjectivity through sexualised psychological discourse, and preserves forms of demarcation that support and disguise the biopolitical aims of the multiple forms of confinements of those ‘not human’ others, including the farmed, the displayed, the domesticated, the wild, the observed and recorded, the protected and the hunted. In relation to our contemporary ecological predicament this brings into question, as I speculated at the outset, the partnering of ecology and psychology, unless of course the terrain of the coupling can become sufficiently contestatory – in other words, queered in such a way that biopower’s discourse of psychology can become self-reflexively unmasking.

De-humanising eco-psychology

The exclusion of nonhumans, and the disguising of the confining positions to which these ‘others’ are consequently relegated, raises questions as to the trajectories of any ecological psychology. Thinking eco-psychology queerly requires nothing short of the subversion of our ‘human-ity’ – our de-humanisation.
We need to go further than Foucault’s subjectivisation, to account for the subject as humanisation. Queer theory is well placed to theorise and imagine some of the contestatory boundary crossings that might enable us to de-humanise, to en-joint with our not human companions. Further, within Foucauldian queer scholarship, if biopower’s psychologising normativity is construed as applying to its discursive operation in relation not only to human populations, but to life forms as populations, it is properly the subject matter of de-humanised queer ecology. With regard to eco-psychology, its de-humanisation may yet be possible despite psychology’s trajectories being so thoroughly implicated in the normalising and exclusionary discourses of the human. Resistance to and within discourses will always arise, and if eco-psychology, already mounting challenges to the institutional and spatial contexts of the psycho-therapies, becomes further characterised by queered de-humanising boundary crossings and contestatory self-reflexive positions, then that which psychology subjectivates and humanises might be recovered; re-calling the life and breath which is psyche to its ‘eco-house’.

References


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Eco-queer movement(s)
Challenging heteronormative space through (re)imagining nature and food

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Abstract
In an era of ecological degradation and sexual inequality it has become increasingly clear that these problems are complex. The complexity arises from the intersecting contributions of our institutions, cultures, collective imaginations, personal cognitive processes and ecological systems. At the same time, there is growing recognition among activists and scholars fighting for sustainable and socially just alternatives that nuanced analyses of society and nature’s interrelatedness is needed. Building off of queer ecology, this article furthers understanding of the blurred relations between ecology and human sexuality, with specific attention to the emerging eco-queer movement. This article contends that the eco-queer movement entails a loose knit, often decentralized set of political and social activists identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (lgbtq) or an ally of these groups, that challenge binary notions of ecology and sexuality, while simultaneously transforming material and symbolic space(s) into more just, autonomous, and sustainable forms. After conceptually and historically situating this social movement, an exploration of lgbtq food and agriculture based struggles is provided. Given the centrality of food to social and biological (re)production, struggles over/based on food provide a unique window into the theory and praxis driving eco-queer movements.

Keywords: Queer ecology, space, normativity, food, sexuality, social movements
Introduction: Towards integrated ecological and sexual social movements

The social, political, and economic relationships between human sexuality and nature are entangled. Therefore, unraveling these relationships is needed to show how the ongoing intersections between sexuality and nature are contested, redefined, and resolved. Scholars steeped in queer theory and some feminist theory are critical of categories essentializing the “naturalness” of people’s gender and/or sexuality (Butler, 2004; Gaard, 2004; Sandilands, 1999). Some of these scholars also work in tandem with activists wishing to challenge society on a cultural level to reconsider notions of sexuality, gender, and nature. The struggle is largely one of challenging dominant discourse as a means to deconstructing hegemonic knowledge systems. On the other hand, many scholars are critical of governments, corporations, or other groups whose actions often lead to the material degradation of both ecosystems as well as human bodies (Shiva, 1994; Gould, Pellow & Schnaibeg, 2008; Foster, Clark & York, 2010). At the same time, scholars such as those studying the environmental justice movement are working with local communities to resolve cases of environmental inequality (Bullard, 1993; Roberts & Toffolon-Weiss, 2001; Pellow, 2004). This article sits at the intersection of two broad scholarly and movement traditions: studies and movements focused on sexuality, and those focused on the (human) environment. More specifically, this article seeks to couch the burgeoning eco-queer movement within the framework of queer ecology. My goal is to contribute to budding scholarly explorations of the intersections between sexuality and nature by showing how the eco-queer movement “includes considerations of the natural world and its biosocial constitution, and an environmental politics that demonstrates an understanding of the ways in which sexual relations organize and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences, and constitutions of the world” (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010: 5). Attending to this social and ecological complexity helps link a series of disparate conversations and contested politics.

While there have been myriad forms of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (lgbtq) and environmental social movement activism in the United States over the

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1 The eco-queer movement entails a loose knit, often decentralized set of political and social activists identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or an ally of these groups, challenging binary notions of sexuality and ecology, while simultaneously transforming material and symbolic space(s) into more just, autonomous, and sustainable forms.
past forty years, it is less clear where there has been an explicit linkage between these two social movements. Snow and Soule (2010) provide a helpful definition of social movements, which I will use as a springboard to find and better understand what I am calling the eco-queer movement: “social movements are collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, partly outside institutional or organizational channels, for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in such systems, in the organization, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded” (6). Thinking about social movements as collectivities helps to better understand lgbtq identified groups working to confront heteronormativity/straight privilege/oppression and environmental degradation/environmental inequality. Moreover, locating the decentralized spaces and places partly outside institutional and organizational channels that are occupied by the eco-queer movement may help to draw connections between collective identity and space (Leitner, Sheppard & Sziarto, 2008). Specifically, I use the environmental justice movement’s understanding of the environment to include where people live, work, and play, which expands notions of the environment beyond a utopian idealized wilderness devoid of humans (Bullard, 2000; Di Chiro, 2010). To bridge the cognitive/identity and ecosystem/place divide I build off some insights from ecopsychology and ecosociology by showing that direct human experiences of sexuality are intimately related to biophysical systems, yet mediated by individual and collective understandings (Stevens, 2010, 2012)

Any attempt to draw boundaries around a social movement necessarily includes and excludes various peoples, histories, spaces, and places. This is especially true when one begins to attempt to trace the historical roots of those engaged in queer ecological politics. Taken separately, both queer and environmental social movements are incredibly diverse. Examples of such lgbtq social movement diversity include struggles to raise awareness of those dying from AIDS, fights for gay marriage, and battles for sexual reproductive rights. Examples of the diversity of environmental social movement activity include wilderness preservation and conservation campaigns, anti-toxics conflicts, and environmental justice activism among poor communities and communities of color. Taken together, the intersection between queer and environmental concerns may seem unwieldy. To tame such an endeavor this article focuses on tracing the history of experiments in and fights for queer autonomous spaces and the history of queering “natural”
physical and built environments, social boundaries, and queer bodies.

More specifically, this article uses this history as a way to frame that part of the eco-queer movement fighting for embodiments of and decentralized collective efforts for just and sustainable food spaces. Such struggles are often premised on similar efforts by the food justice movement, which consists of those seeking to transform economic, political, and social relations from farm to table. At a minimum, such transformations would require a radical restructuring of dominant institutions in terms of the distribution of goods and bads, and a process requiring open participation in decisions that impact specific groups of people. However, Pulido (1994) contends that the following three issues must be addressed: “a lack of democracy over private production decisions, uneven development, and material and social inequality” (p. 921). This then requires challenging the structures that contribute to this inequality beyond just including marginalized people in decision making. Moreover, there must be recognition of cultural diversity and a fine-grained understanding that facilitates relations across spatiotemporal differences. This notion of justice brings together the concerns of those that seek to rectify injustices tied to identity, whether on the grounds of racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual differences, with those who seek to challenge political, economic, and cultural institutions that (re)produce myriad inequalities.

Like eco-queer efforts, food justice efforts draw attention to the enmeshed and often contested struggles within eco-social relations. However, most scholarly and activist attention is given to institutionalized racism and white privilege within the agrifood system and alternative food spaces (Alkon & Agyeman 2011; Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007). Recent critical investigations also contend that gender relations need to be highlighted in studies of or social movements involving food (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Carney, 2010; Perdue, Holcomb & Sbicca, 2012; Probyn, 2004; Scholsberg 2004) argues for “critical pluralism” which “necessitates engagement across differences. Getting others to understand your experience and framework, and vice versa, is how pluralistic notions are learned, understood, recognised, and accepted. This is the difference between a pluralism based in simple acceptance and toleration and a critical pluralism based in more thorough recognition and mutual engagement” (p. 536). Sbicca (2012) argues that an anti-oppression praxis provides a way to integrate understanding of myriad entangled inequalities within the agrifood system, and a discourse and set of strategies needed to create unity within diversity. Thus, there are efforts underway to transform economic, social, and political relations through a lens of food justice premised on anti-oppression ideology.
2000; Van Esterik, 1999). One promising feminist project argues for a “visceral politics” that takes seriously how ideologies involving food are embodied (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Similarly, the ecopsychology view argues that our well-being and notions of health and illness are tied to our embeddedness in the environment (Stevens, 2010). There is thus a relationship between where and who we are. This fusion of symbolic and material, mind and body, human and non-human, social and ecological, provides a springboard to investigate how such complex embodiments are (re)produced. In short, critical food studies theorizing can be expanded by attending to sexuality and eco-queer theorizing can be deepened through engaging with the economic, political and social relations of food.

**Tracing the history and context of queer autonomous spaces**

**The space of new sexual politics**

Attending to the spatialities engaged in and contextualizing queer environmental social movements, highlights how contestation over space reflects, reproduces, and challenges in an ongoing matrix of relations, identity work among activists. While the embodied experience of identity is important to pay attention to, this embodied experience is by no means static; it is experienced, and constantly reformulated in specific places. For example, Enke (2007) argues that certain groups of women in three Mid-Western cities did not have preformed identities. Rather, their identities were formed in the spaces within which they lived and moved. Specifically, “a spatial analysis shows that conflicts within feminism gained form and name within tangible spatial contestations over environments already laid through with race, class, and sexual hierarchies...feminist spaces emerged in just such embedded environments” (Enke, 2007: 11). Moreover, activism with(in) nature (i.e. the place-based context of activism) has a direct impact on groups of activists and their individual embodied cognition (Stevens, 2010; Harris, 2011). This article takes a similar approach, paying attention to spatial organization while highlighting the fluidity of different social actors within urban and rural green spaces, and self-identified queer spaces. While not denying that identity construction may be important to queer activists developing autonomous spaces, this article emphasizes why space matters in the context of sexual oppression and environmental exploitation: sexuality “has been used historically as a site of resistance, as women
and men of varied sexualities wield sexual/reproductive decisions that challenge the colonization of their peoples and lands, that subvert enslavement, genocide, and heterosexism” (Stein, 2004: 7). Space and identity are entangled, and while eco-queer activism often takes place in interstitial spaces, it also publicly challenges dominant modes and forms of thinking, behaving, and organization.

A politics of recognition permeates many threads linking queer activists to intersections between ecological concerns and concerns about sexual oppression in its myriad forms (Fraser, 1996; Bell & Binnie, 2000). This politics of recognition “highlights the importance of different kinds of knowledge, rationality, values, and social standing that fundamentally affect how political agents are positioned in the public sphere and in the polity; these in turn affect the kinds of goals agents might work to achieve and the capacities of these agents” (Staeheli, 2008: 562). Queer activists engaged in such a politics of recognition are cognizant of the importance of space. Public displays of sexuality that challenge heteronormativity are regularly policed by the straight patriarchal gaze. This is one of many reasons why queers have sought autonomous urban and rural spaces where they can collectively experience their sexuality while simultaneously striving to create more democratic, just, and sometimes sustainable alternatives to white hetero-patriarchal norms. To understand, then, the experience of LGBTQ communities traversing dominant heterospaces, and their attempts to develop queer autonomous spaces, attention needs to be turned to contestation over material space. Staeheli (2008) notes three issues regarding space that I will use to help ground the activism/actions of the eco-queer movement:

- first, it often seems that politics of recognition emerge in the liminal spaces between public and private realms…
- second…is that political movements intended to bolster recognition often emerge in spaces that seem marginal to the centres of state and institutional power…
- (third) the politics of recognition…(is played out) in real, material spaces in which rules governing access and behaviors matter (567).

A politics of recognition is sometimes viewed as an assimilationist form of politics anathema to queer politics because it can be reduced to concerning itself with stratified power relations only to the degree that it seeks to move from the social and political margins to having a seat at a pluralist political table. However, as Staeheli (2008) shows, such a politics largely rests on actions grounded in transgressive, deconstructionist, and autonomous values that blur the lines between public and private space, and that challenge “normal” liberal politics with radical
forms of participatory democracy. In this way, a politics of recognition also challenges what Duggan (2003) calls “homonormativity,” which is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 50). Articulated in queer activist language, “We're Here! We're Queer! Get used to it!” and “Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you.” Both homonormativity and the heteronormative, capitalist, and ecological assumptions and institutions of eco-social life, then, began to be challenged by different segments of the lesbian and gay community in their experiments with rural and urban separatist movements grounded in the budding ecological ethic of the 1970s.

**Space fights: Inklings of the budding eco-queer logic**

At a time when sexual oppression was visibly being challenged, ecological problems were part of the mainstream discourse, and a war was raging in Vietnam, many lesbians felt the need to leave urban spaces, believed to be patriarchal spaces where sexual and environmental rights were not highly valued. These women believed that the “root causes of America’s problems were the result of male greed, egocentrism, and violence…(and) that only a culture based on superior female values and women’s love for each other could save the nation” (Unger, 2004: 40). These lesbian separatists wanted to more closely live in communion with the natural world, so they lived in places such as rural Oregon, or northeastern Alabama. It is believed that there are around 100 lesbian rural communities in North America (Unger, 2010). Sandilands (2004) notes that communities such as the Womanshare Collective have a notion of “ecology framed by the spatial-discursive power relations of nature and sexuality and by an active cultural politics to displace the interstructured power relations of heterosexism and ecological degradation” (p. 111). These women grow their own organic food, recycle scrap materials to build and maintain their homes, collectively decide how the space is to be managed, share cooking and cleaning responsibilities, and create a safe environment to sexually experiment and discuss issues relevant to lesbians. The major elements of this lesbian separatist-ecology culture are the following: opening rural land to all women by transforming relations of ownership; withdrawing the land from patriarchal-capitalist production and reproduction; feminizing and
rearticulating the landscape, symbolically and physically; developing a holistic and gender-bending physical experience of nature; experiencing nature as an erotic partner; and politicizing rurality and rural lesbian identity (Sandilands, 2004).

While not explicitly framed as a back-to-the-land movement, other lesbians have also sought out autonomous spaces where environmental concerns play an important role. Unger (2010) talks about the lesbian residential and retreat space, Pagoda, located in the sleepy beach town of St. Augustine, Florida. This intentional community “represented an effort to live simply and more in conscious harmony with nature. Residents sought to celebrate and protect the area’s wild beauty and to create a supportive sisterhood of like-minded lesbians…” (Unger, 2010: 185). The Pagoda community, much like the Womanshare Collective has largely disbanded, but there are other spatial forms that lesbians have created with similar values. For example, there are women’s festivals such as the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, where women of different races, ethnicities, ages, physical abilities, and sexualities come together to celebrate their connection to each other, and their connection to the natural world (Unger, 2010). These transitory utopian autonomous spaces are meant to empower and invigorate women to bring back queer and environmental values to their respective communities. While this exposition of separatist(-like) movements has largely focused on women, Herring (2007) notes that rural gay men are challenging metronormative gay politics through “critical rusticity,” which is “an intersectional opportunity to geographically, corporeally and aesthetically inhabit non-normative sexuality that offers new possibilities for the sexually marginalized outside the metropolis as well as inside it” (p. 346). Rupturing sexual and ecological norms in rural areas is paralleled by similar efforts in urban spaces.

In the Western historical context, urban spaces are often deemed cesspools of degeneration associated with homosexuality, pollution, and dirty immigrant populations. Such discourse and its ideological and institutional scaffolding are used to reinforce heterosexual masculinity through the creation of urban green spaces such as parks, and rural wilderness areas (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010). These spaces are in some respects created as a means to carve out space away from the “corrupting” influence of gays and lesbians, a “natural” space meant for recreational pursuits (e.g. hiking, walking, running, swimming, and playing sports) that reinforces sex and gender roles. The homosexual, then, much like the
urban spaces they live in are often deemed “unnatural”. Moreover, there are historical moments when public displays of homosexual behavior are legally prohibited, thus further entrenching control over what is deemed acceptable behavior while walking through a park, or camping at a family campsite in the woods. However, these spaces are not fixed. Instead they are reflections of normative discourses around sexuality and space, which are contested by the LGBTQ community in an ongoing process of (re)producing queer social space(s) (Conlon, 2004).

One common form of everyday resistance by gay men to the social construction of public parks as straight spaces is public sex. Such sexual acts heighten the heteronormative social anxiety tied to constructions of nature that perpetuate male/female sex as the “natural” standard, which often becomes reflected in the policing/criminalizing of gay men in parks (Gosine, 2010). Such “heterosexist arguments are usually about preserving and reproducing particular forms of family, social power, and economic practice” (Sturgeon, 2010: 106). By engaging in sexual acts within public green spaces such as parks, gay men are engaged in a sort of “democratization of natural space, in which different communities can experience the park in their own ways”, which challenges what are otherwise “disciplinary spaces” (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2005, emphasis in original). In addition, there are groups of gays, lesbians, and other queer-identified people who rupture notions of natural/straight urban spaces through cruising.

However, Ingram (2010) notes that “any utopian anticipation of a planetary lustgarten would be premature and naïve. Instead, we are in an era where any space (and associated ecosystems and landscapes) capable of supporting consensual intimacy is increasingly vulnerable to violence or privatization or both, and thus becomes a site for contestation” (p. 255). The right to the city has not yet been fully attained by all, but is actively fought for by those seeking a more socially just and sustainable world (Harvey, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). One example of eco-queer contestation over space is in the neighborhoods of West End, Vancouver, BC that were queered due to the material conditions of the urban landscape in the neighborhood. Through a process of contestation beginning after World War II, gay men successfully carved out a safe, public, and democratic neighborhood space where their sexual identities were largely protected from homophobic outsiders. Until the 1980s, lesbians were largely excluded from this
neighborhood due to a variety of social and economic factors, but they eventually created similar spaces in the West End and now share this quasi-autonomous queer space with gay men (Ingram, 2010).

There are similar attempts to create autonomous spaces by anarchist queers who draw connections between sexual oppression, sustainability, and global capitalism. A number of queer anarchists groups in London have “engage(d) in ‘people-oriented constructive actions’ that attempt to unleash the potential for sustainable ways of socialising as queer people which are not overly mediated by the commodity” (Brown, 2007: 2686). This explicit recognition by queer activists that there are numerous cultural, environmental, and economic layers operating to produce social relations tied to strict binaries between straight/gay, man/woman, and natural/unnatural, grounds their activism. Brown (2007) notes that a network of queers called Queeruption engage in anti-capitalist politics whereby they create non-hierarchical modes of praxis interested in small, modest attempts to reengage their ‘power-to-do’, which is always part of a social process of doing with others...‘queer’ within these networks functions more as a relational process, rather than as a simple identity category. A queer positionality...is produced through...working collectively to create a less alienated and empowered space in which to explore a multiplicity of sexual and gendered potentialities (p. 2687).

This autonomous ethic is based on solidarity and affinity instead of rights claims more common among the mainstream middle-class white gay culture. Thus, there are tensions in eco-queer movements between those wanting to claim rights to an identity and a space to be that identity, and those forgoing institutional channels in order to create spaces of liberty, equality, solidarity, and sustainability.

These more radical queer activists are queering the boundaries between sexuality, environmental concerns, and anti-capitalist politics as a means to challenging the commodification of gay culture (Jeppesen, 2010). Reflecting a queer autonomous ethic, the actions often include squatting abandoned buildings, collective cooking and dumpster diving, creating safe spaces for queer sex parties, and hosting alternative non-commodified queer parades, which are more important as a process towards transforming the world into a more just and sustainable place, than as an ends (Brown 2007). There are also many radical queer activists in urban spaces throughout North America who similarly challenge heteronormativity and homonormativity through anti-oppression politics. The interactions that reflect
such a politics “develop sustainable social relations and value-practices, based on mutual respect, consent, sexual liberation, and non-normativity, in which people engage in open-ended processes of developing alternative ways of being, feeling, thinking, engaging, acting and becoming-liberated” (Jeppesen, 2010: 477).

The aforementioned struggles, resistances, and quasi-utopian alternatives are usually uncoordinated. However, over the past forty years they have opened up new discursive and material space for more robust efforts aimed at blurring the lines between sexuality and nature. Specifically, there are growing efforts to create new social, political, and economic relations within the shell of the old. Having now traversed the various threads of what I believe to be the antecedents to the contemporary eco-queer movement, I will turn my attention to a queer ecological politics of food. I believe that queer farmers and gardeners are in many respects the quintessential expression of a queer ecology in that they are using/creating autonomous sexual and ecological spaces. Such efforts reveal the intimate connections between resistant forms of sexuality and ecology.

**Finding the eco queer movement: embodied and collective food spaces**

To understand the eco-queer movement it is helpful to first link struggles against sexual oppression and struggles for environmental justice. For Stein (2004), “by reframing sexuality issues as environmental justice concerns, we can argue that people of differing sexualities have the human right to bodily sovereignty and the right to live safely as sexual bodies within our social and physical environments” (p. 5). I concur. Moreover, “since both queer and environmental justice perspectives assume that nature and environment are not neutral ahistorical categories, and each practice looks at how the very language of nature and environmentalism can often mask harm to humans and nature, this…could serve as a basis for coalition” (Hogan, 2010: 236). While many environmental justice struggles focus on fighting environmental bads (e.g., toxics), less attention is paid to environmental goods, such as food.

The following descriptive analysis furthers calls in ecopsychology to recall the unity of humanity and nature, while still maintaining a critical approach to how dominations of nature are intimately related to forms of psychosocial domination (Fisher, 2002). Providing insight from ecopsychology, Fisher (2012) argues that there are movements resisting the social forces that obfuscate the relations between
mind, body, and environment:

This is happening, for example, in the current movement that protests the relentlessly immoral and ecodestructive logic of the industrial food system and its manufacture of ugly denatured food (food being a social relation that is dense with ecopsychological meaning). Whereas the cognitive-instrumental and wholly quantitative character of capital (and much science) leaves a world without bearings or depth of meaning, the aesthetic-expressive and moral-practical orders are those within which the beauty and unity of life are beheld (pp. 104–105).

Recognizing such interconnections some poor communities and communities of color are working toward alternative food based economies that provide healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. While queer farmers, homesteaders, gardeners, and/or food lovers may not be experiencing the same kinds of injustice, they may not feel comfortable in an alternative food movement that is largely led by middle-class, straight, white men. In this respect, some urban and rural queers are working on food related issues. They are linking concerns over the degradation of the environment from industrialized agricultural, bodily sovereignty (in terms of gender and sexual expression, and in terms of ingesting healthy non-corporate foodstuffs), and the binary discursive constructions of urban/rural, gay/straight, male/female, natural/unnatural that reproduce sexual and environmental inequality. I now turn my attention to queers organizing/participating around issues pertaining to food.

First, there are queer-food movements that occupy urban spaces. In 2007, in San Francisco, CA, the collaborative Queer Food for Love (QFFL) was founded by queer artists, activists, and cooks who create food on a semi-regular basis for community, not profit. According to their website, they “are part participatory pop-up restaurant, part secret-cafe, part eat-in, part community dinner, part DIY grassroots affinity group for sustainable solutions to social, environmental, and food justice issues”. This description points to many of the queer political principles covered earlier. These principles can further be seen in the reasons behind QFFL existing. QFFL is seen

as a solution to issues facing our community but which speak to the alienation many people experience in cities – how can we each contribute our individual skills and talents to serve a larger community; how can we bring a little of our love for food, plants, and animals into an urban setting; how can we collaborate with one another instead of competing with one another in the capitalist marketplace; how can we nourish our emotional needs and heal our community from inside, against the prejudice we experience in our jobs and daily lives outside our chosen families?
I quote this at length to show that there is a clear relationship viewed between the environment, food, and sexuality. Moreover, there is a clear goal of developing solidarity among the various sexual orientations and gender presentations around the experience of food and eating.

There is another coalition of queers working on food related issues in the San Francisco Bay Area called the Rainbow Chard Alliance (RCA). The seeds of the RCA were planted in 2008, with the founding of a Google Groups listserv to act as a networking tool. According to a posting on their Google Group listserv they are “a cooperatively organized network of queer farmers and LGBT gardeners. We organize mixers and workday events to create community for like-minded “eco-homos” in the Bay Area and California as a whole”. While this loose coalition has a broader purpose than the QFFL network, they do see themselves as “something that creates community and works to further both the Agroecological/Organic Farming Movement and the LGBT/Queer movements”. RCA has acted as an inclusive medium through which a diversity of queer food activists can host events such as mixers at Eco-Farm in Northern California. To get an idea of the framing of these events, the following promotion language was used to gather people to a 2009 mixer:

Calling all Queer and supporting farmers. Join fellow Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and supportive farmers/agriculturalists for an evening of music, food, spirits and fun. This mixer is a space for Queer farmers to come together to network, share experiences, share skills and perspectives in farming, cultivate Queer community in the Organic Farming Movement, and cultivate the Sustainable Food Movement within our Queer communities. Gather your friends and help us cultivate a Farm System free of homophobia!

It can be seen that food provides an adhesive by which queers can develop community, challenge heteronormativity, and create sustainable alternatives to capitalist modes of industrialized agriculture. While the first two representations of the food queer movement were urban groups, there are also individuals creating spaces that fuse environmental/food and queer concerns.

In a blog called *Grow and Resist*, maintained by a queer woman living with her partner and child in Seattle, Washington, many of the posts talk about food and queerness. She notes that queerness lies at the center of why she gardens:

My queer politic around urban farming is one of resistance. By tearing out my lawn and replacing it with space for food production, I am resisting… By refusing to use chemicals, I am
resisting. By sharing knowledge, seeds, tools and skills: I am resisting. By growing enough food to eat, preserve and share: I am resisting. By engaging in local food justice projects, I am resisting. Resisting the agro-industrial complex. Resisting systems that multiply oppress [sic]. So, while I grow, I also resist.

This resistance is also seen in the urban outskirts of Seattle by two partnered queer women of color who started a company called 2 Brown Chicks Family Farm. According to their website the company “seeks to supply working-class people with sustainable means to care for their families. Our products include high quality recycled rain barrels for home gardens, chick starter kits, worm bins and more!” While not as explicitly focused on providing space for queer/food intersectional activism, nor as explicitly critical of capitalism, these women are nonetheless drawing connections between sexuality and food. Moreover, they seek to ground their work in the principles of environmental justice, sustainability, education as a vehicle for social change, and fair business practices. This has led them to provide space for people to learn about how to raise their own chickens, and collect their own water. In this way, they are working towards empowering people to develop more just and sustainable food spaces.

The above discussion has focused on efforts to blend queer and food activism/action/change efforts within urban spaces. While most people concerned with environmental, food, and sexual oppression tend to live in urban locales, many groups of people within the food segment of the eco-queer movement are located in rural spaces. A recent endeavor in the United States undertaken by queer filmmaker, Jonah Mossberg, interviews queer farmers for a project whose central question is: “is there space for queerness in agricultural communities; and, if so, where and in what form does it manifest?” Specifically, the project is focused on participants who want to share their experiences, histories, understanding and knowledge as queer members of the agrarian community…(with an openness to) self identified queer farmers anywhere along the LGBTQI spectrums – and specifically: people of color, older folks, those from many generations of farmers, CSA farmers, urban farmers…

Thus, there is recognition of the diversity within both the alternative food movement and within lgbtq movements.

I point to this project because it is a catalyst for building relationships and alliances between groups of queer identified people who care about environmental and food issues. The following is a list of some of the people/farms/food groups in rural
spaces who are linked together through this project: 10 Speed Farm in Brattleboro, Vermont; community gardeners Justin and Jackie, and Montview Neighborhood Farm in Northampton, Massachusetts; Beltane Farm run by gay farmer Paul Trubey in Lebanon, Connecticut; the queer community Idyll Dandy Arts and Little Short Mountain Farm in rural Tennessee; the collectively run Common Ground Farm in Olympia, Washington; a farm managing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in Falkville, Alabama; Homestead Ranch in Lecompton, Kansas; and Delta Sol Farm in Proctor, Arkansas. What can be seen from this non-exhaustive list is the regional diversity. Moreover, there is incredible gender and sexual diversity among those running/living/working on these farms/collectives/projects.

One more detailed example of eco-queer rural spaces is found in West Marin County, California at the queer land project otherwise known as Raven’s Crossing. According to their website, they are:

- devoted to alternative agriculture, primitive skill-sharing, and radical social/political projects.
- The land is available for use by queers for retreats (e.g., the SF Needle Exchange), events (e.g., fuck for forest) or general involvement in on-going projects. The current focus for Raven’s Crossing right now is to expand the existing infrastructure, with two priority areas: the longhouse project & revamping their bio-intensive garden.

This collective endeavor seeks to carve out an autonomous space for queer identified people to not only work on environmental and food issues, but other issues impacting the queer community. A similar example can be pointed to in the woods of Humboldt County, California, at a place called Fancyland, located on twelve acres and home to one person who turned the land into a larger land project. Inspired by social justice, feminist, and anti-authoritarian principles, Fancyland is:

- interested in fostering queer and radical communities and individuals by being a small-scale rural resource in the following ways: acting as a site to plug into homestead projects; providing a feminist environment for learning and sharing useful rural living skills such as alternative building, appropriate technology, gardening, and land stewardship…giving people a chance to live with simple technologies that put direct control into our own hands and challenge disengagement, consumerism, and isolation…

These examples are illustrative of queer identified people who care about the intersections between environmental, sexuality, and gender issues, and use food either centrally or peripherally as a way to build community, fight oppression,
and/or take better care of the planet and the human body in all its diversity.

**Conclusion: The ongoing process of eco-queer space making**

Tracing the history and spaces of the eco-queer movement is challenging. This article serves as a first step toward more clearly understanding what makes all these forms of individual and collective action a multifaceted social movement. In many respects the eco-queer movement represents a non-hierarchical “networks of networks” (Heckert, 2010). The connections between various nodes in the networks are constantly in flux given the addition and subtraction of activists and practitioners and/or broader political and economic opportunities. Although in flux the eco-queer movement is growing, which is evidenced by the weaving of sexuality and ecological concerns into social movement arenas with traditionally well-defined boundaries. Recall that for Enke (2007), forms of collective behavior that challenge some social norm, ideology, or practice through spaces of resistance form a vital basis for building new social forms in the shell of the old. These spaces become the locus for fostering eco-queer interdependence while respecting personal liberties and freedoms.

In the case of what I believe to be an eco-queer movement, space matters. In both rural and urban spaces, there are many heteronormativities and homonormativities that regulate bodies, minds, and culture. This may include tropes about rurality being grounded in macho-masculine gender expressions and urban spaces being sinfully gay-ridden. Or, this may take the form of stares experienced by same-sex people when kissing, hugging, or holding hands in public. Many hegemonic notions of sexuality and gender are present, but are challenged by queer identified people who also see the environmental and food arena as both a discursive and material space in need of queering. An eco-queer perspective points to the impermanence of spatial boundaries. Moreover, specific places provide the context for personal and small-scale transformations in the short-term, which may open up opportunities to scale a set of “networks of networks” in the long-term.

By taking a more fluid and spatial approach to understanding the makeup of the eco-queer movement, I have found that ideas, symbols, and discourse matter as much as the materiality of space. It is the ideology/worldview grounded in solidarity and affinity, and grounded in deconstructing binary identity categories that links various threads of the lgbtq and environmental movements together. In
many respects the eco-queer movement is not only interested in confronting mainstream eco-normal, white, straight, wealthy privilege, but also those segments of the LGBTQ community assimilating into mainstream institutions and organizations that perpetuate practices and ideologies separating out humans and nature. In short, eco-queer activist’s embodiment is embedded in the built and natural environments, which provides the space from which to work towards radical ecological, social, and cognitive change.

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From queer spaces to queerer ecologies
Recasting Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an ecology of mind* to further mobilise & anticipate historically marginal stakeholders in environmental planning for community development

Gordon Brent Ingram

Abstract

The ideas of Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) spanned anthropology, psychology, ecology, and systems theory but were barely used in the construction of queer theory. Bateson’s most influential work was a series of essays compiled in 1972 as *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Today, Bateson’s “Steps” have relevance for investigating and theorising queer ecologies that expand on and depart from more static notions of sexual minority identities and spaces in the context of expanding trans theory. This essay focuses on the relevance of the Steps for expanding theories of queer space to queer ecologies through better identification of stakeholders and environmental relationships in the context of decolonisation. Guy Debord’s notions of environmental planning dialogues for community development provides a bridge to the theoretical currents that influenced early forms of queer theory especially those of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. Four sets of ideas in Bateson’s Steps have relevance for constructing a framework for queer ecologies: re-examination of cultural systems that extend to gender, sexuality, and biological taxonomies especially to better identify vulnerable populations; ‘civilizational’ health based on acknowledgment of queer ecosystems that include biological exuberance and gender fluidity; regenerative systems of social relationships, culture and governance that could better challenge transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and cultural chauvinism; and transcontextual dynamics based on Bateson’s so-called End-linkage Theory for expanded and supple understandings of identity construction and sexuality within increasingly volatile environments and communities. Applications of Bateson’s Steps are explored for three contexts, at different scales, around the Salish Sea of Pacific Canada.

**Keywords:** queer theory, Gregory Bateson, environmental planning, decolonisation
Introduction

How will new social formations, formed by historically marginal groups formed by gender and sexual minorities, engage in new decision-making frameworks for more equitable social development as well as for better environmental management? What new kinds of decision-making frameworks and political economies are possible that could better represent often diffuse, queer minorities? The recent conversations on queer ecologies could have utility for constructing new social and political theory especially when linked to older discourses in human ecology such as the work of Gregory Bateson.

The ideas of Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) grounded inquiries into psychology, culture, and sexuality in social systems nested in ecosystems. Bateson’s have been curiously lacking in construction of modern notions of sexual minority rights and goals in the broader framework of queer social and cultural theory. Bateson’s years of field studies, extending from the 1920s to the 1970s, were on New Guinea and Bali followed by decades in Northern California. This essay explores both an emerging paradigm for queer ecologies, for better integration of new initiatives to confront gender, sexuality and cultural inequities into locally based decision-making frameworks, and the particular relevance of Bateson to this project. This essay is focused on the celebrated 1972 compilation of his latter work, *Steps to an ecology of mind* (Bateson, 2002).

The underlying argument in this essay is that our notions of sexual minority relations have gone from half-hidden networks relying on “strategic sites” (Ingram, 1997: 123–125) to visible and defended “queer space” (Colomina et al, 1994; Chisholm, 2005: 26–30; Oswin, 2008) to more ubiquitous, queering systems, political economies, and environments; constellations that can be conceived of as ecosystems and overlapping ecologies. Acknowledgement of this expanding and volatile world of intimate relations, gender and sexual cultures, and heightening contests over space and resources simultaneous with rapid global change, that can only be partially assessed by and regulated through Foucault’s biopower, is the most pressing factor for expansion of the ambiguous term, ‘queer ecologies’ into a paradigm for investigations and a mode of activism.

In exploring possible relevance of Steps to investigations of queer ecologies, I focus on the interface of erotic and other social relationships with decision-making
frameworks over public space and lands. By expanding and queering the often instrumentalist notion of stakeholder analysis to include sexual minorities, previously neglected forms of agency, that span individual desires and interests to more collective processes of planning, design and implementation, can be explored. Queer ecologies as activistic investigations could revisit Guy Debord’s Situationist ideal for community transformation through “environmental planning” (Debord, 1994: 119–127) based on “dialogue” (Debord, 1994: 127). Underlying this utopian project are new forms of territorialisation and reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 112, 133) extending to sexual minorities. Articulated in the early 1960s as France’s colonial period was ending badly, Debordian environmental planning is worth revisiting because it expands the détournement, as a way to know and enjoy communities, to more indefinite forms of decolonisation. Fluid relationships between political economies, decision-making, infrastructure, knowledge production and transformation of the biophysical and built environments, directly relevant to sexual minorities, can be considered more squarely as part of community development and the building of social infrastructure extending to communities of sexual minorities at risk. But in contrast to Debord’s arena, urban public space, I explore a broader theatre for conceiving of activism and development of civil society, that is based, instead, on Bateson’s various conceptions of ecosystems.

This essay explores how Bateson’s Steps can be adapted to build queer ecologies as a more robust framework to understand sexual minority communities, and respective disparities and potentials for activism, in this period of indefinite decolonisation. Bateson’s Steps could be used to better identify vulnerable queer groups and environmental relationships than research methods based on both more conservative and heteronormative forms of biology and ecology, on one hand, and the first two decades of queer theory focused on uncovering previously obscured narratives of homoerotic desire as in Kosofsky’s celebrated 1991 Epistemology of the closet, on the other hand. Today, needs for theory for sexual minority community-formation, activism and programme-development is driven less for asserting formerly suppressed, identities and desires and more in response to pressures for more knowledge to devise new strategies for improved ‘infrastructure’ development, service delivery, and equity of access to benefits and programmes in increasingly multicultural communities. And this relatively recent queer infrastructure, based on well over three decades of sexual health activism, is
increasingly vulnerable to neoliberal policies, global change and multiple environmental crises.

This essay is structured around both exploring diversifying uses of theories of and methods for investigating queer ecologies, more generally, and the relevance of Bateson to such undertakings in particular. The following problem statement explores a general shift in thinking about sexual minority communities and politics mapped in terms of static, heavily defended queered spaces to more dynamic and queerer ecologies far less defined by historic urban neighbourhoods. The subsequent section is on the latent queerness of Bateson’s *Steps to an ecology of mind* and how it was informed by his early field work described in the 1936, *Naven*. The core of this essay is a review of some of the possible lessons from Bateson’s Steps for such a notion of ecosystems as a framework for new insights about queer communities. I then explore the relationship of Bateson’s human ecology concepts to contemporary decolonisation. With a few of the more obviously relevant Steps, I apply such interdisciplinary, ecological approaches to three communities, at different scales, around the Salish Sea of Pacific Canada. I conclude with a further appreciation of the importance of Bateson’s pioneering effort, especially the breadth of his interdisciplinarity spanning systems theory to sexuality studies, while reflecting on the new modes of research necessary to create queerly ecological models of volatile communities.

For the sake of brevity, this essay has not touched three other bodies of thought that have been and continue to be crucial to the development and decolonisation of queer theory and related investigations of space and ecologies. The deep roots of feminism and lesbian feminism, especially theory based on the activism of women of colour, to both queer and environmental politics warrants a separate essay. Second, discussion of the growing literature on sexualities in native or ‘aboriginal’ [the preferred usage in Canada] communities in North America, and new theoretical work on indigeneity in the context of globalisation, is postponed though it has direct relevance for the three case studies. And the tremendous implications for queer ecologies of various alternative taxonomies of genders, species, and ecosystems, extending to various historic and contemporary, anthropomorphic cultural movements, are for another essay.
Problem statement: From queered space to queerer ecologies

Two decades of notions of queer space, linked to early queer theory, have often framed conversations around communities, defence of strategic locations, environmental and economic benefits and costs, and the distribution of services. But most notions of queer space, even in the context of creative and outrageous forms of constructed visibility, were linked to simplistic and static notions of gay ghettos and suburbs and not the spectrum of communities and policy engagements that we see today. Queer spaces have been too often described in terms of discrete, three-dimensional and time-specific objects that are identified, defended, bought, sold, rented, and either transformed or fossilized by some kind of social alliance that fosters tolerance and support for gender and sexual difference. Many contemporary conceptions of queer space have remained so limited as to be incapable to provide the theory to contest neoliberal policies and respective globalisation of capital.

Queer ecologies describe more complex, over-lapping, and volatile sets of human-environmental relationships defined less by static locations than by multiple trajectories. Whereas queer space provided the equivalent of a snap-shot and cognitive map, queer ecologies provides the video clip and roving global positioning system (GPS) coordinates. The concept of queer space as a discrete and constructed object, as in a bar as an entertainment establishment with a cultivated clientèle, or as temporary territory, as in a Pride parade route, is an already outmoded means of understanding gender and sexual minorities especially weak at contributing to understandings of how we engage in globalising communalities nested in ecosystems under stress. Instead, queer ecologies as describing dynamic sets of social, cultural, political economic and spatial relationships could hold utility for charting and understanding particular social groups especially where homophobic repression has declined. By coupling “ecologies” with “queer”, we can reclaim the dual and linked meanings of the Greek root *oikos*: both the human world nested in and part of biophysical processes, on one hand, and simply “a community of companionship” and “the specific milieu of social reciprocity” (Robertson, 2012: 80) on the other hand. But with so many relevant social and environmental relationships, how can we construct a better contextualised framework for understanding dynamics of gender, sexuality, and decolonisation that provide new insights and prospects for prediction?
The 2007 colloquium, *Queer ecologies: Sex, nature, politics, desire*, convened in Toronto by York University’s Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, effectively inventoried the kinds of theoretical gaps and divergent agendas for framing queer ecologies. One line of thinking was largely rooted in responses to Bagemihl’s 1999 survey of homosexuality in animals as part of further construction of a notion “queer animality” (Alaimo, 2010). Another body of research was on the intersection of nature and queer subcultures, disentangling notions of nature and “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980: 631; Azzarello, 2012: 28) later developed as “queer environmentality” as a movement, “that conceptualizes human beings, other life forms, and their environments as disregarding – and, at times, flaunting their disregard for – the ostensibly primary natural law to survive and reproduce” (Azzarello, 2012: 4). So queer ecologies, in this vein of thought, requires a biology driven in part by ‘exuberance’ and not entirely by heterosexual reproduction.

A third line of thinking was on reworking ecological concepts to better conceptualise and describe aspects of older, so-called “gay ghettos” (Ingram, 2010) in large part to anticipate new kinds of communities and political economies and respective needs for social programmes, infrastructure, and space. A fourth body of thought explored the intersections of queer and ecological activism in confronting heteronormativity in environmental sciences while expanding and applying notions of social equity as part of the project of environmental justice. For example, Giovanna Di Chiro argued that, “Environmental theory and politics in the United States have historically mobilized ideas of the normal” (Di Chiro, 2010: 224), and went on to explore the problems and residues of “eco-normativity” leading to “toxic discourse” that reproduced misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia. The project of confronting this residual toxicity in some corners of environmentalism was linked to longer-term decolonisation and challenges to racial chauvinism and racialised fetishes (Gosine, 2010). A fifth, more philosophical discourse explored how organic corollaries in the work of figures such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) could be adapted for new understandings of queering human communities (Chisholm, 2010). Ironically, none of these five bodies of thought engaged directly with the field of human ecology whose influence waned as queer theory became more influential.

Like a number of queer ecologies initiatives and conversations in recent years, the
2007 Toronto meeting explored needs for new theory and modes of activism without attempting to construct a paradigm. Paradoxically, any expansion of theory around gender and sexuality, through the wider cognisance of context and biophysical relationships, was paradigmatic. The five lines of inquiry in Toronto represented threads of thinking rooted in divergent disciplines of cultural studies, cultural geography, environmental and urban studies and planning, political economy, and philosophy. So an underlying function of the queer ecologies paradigm has been to expand the fulcrum of analysis for minority gender and sexual communities from two decades of over-dependence on analysis of cultural narratives.

While there has been an ongoing conversation on ecosystems since the 2007 Toronto colloquium, I do not recall mention of Bateson or his Steps. I have come to wonder about whether or not Bateson, as probably the most influential Twentieth Century figure who clearly linked philosophy with ecosystems, has relevance to the lines of investigations sketched in Toronto. So at this early phase in exploring some principles for queer ecologies, I have a number of questions that perhaps Bateson’s written legacy, and Steps in particularly, could further illuminate. Is the core of some paradigm of queer ecologies simply the acknowledgement that animals of the same gender make physical contact that derives in part out of forms of experience somewhat similar to human sexuality? Could a critique result of the residual heteronormativity and outright transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia packed into some remaining corners of biology? Is such recognition of what Bruce Bagemihl termed, “biological exuberance” sufficient to build a new paradigm for human sexual minorities spanning biology, ecosystems, human communities, and contemporary culture? Could a queer ecologies framework free us further from anthropomorphic biases in acknowledging other species? For example, there have been recent achievements in human understanding of animal experience, with one compelling work being the National Film Board interactive work *Bear 71* (Allison & Mendes, 2012). But could a queer ecologies paradigm push our understandings much further?

**The latent queerness of Bateson’s *Steps to an ecology of mind***

In Bateson’s Steps, we have the synthesis of a life of field work spanning the jungles of New Guinea, the villages of Bali, and the mental health clinics of
California. His journey was queer, the route was unorthodox, and the lines of thinking were joyous, interdisciplinary, and radically inclusive. Perhaps more than any other body of thought in the twentieth century, Bateson’s writings consistently argued that what we consider human, as in our relationships and cultures, are part and a product of largely, inhuman ecosystems and that all of knowledge is ultimately a trans-species project that inherently leads to challenges, blurs and reconceptions of biological difference and sentience.

While Bateson’s ideas were paradigmatic for modern environmentalism, especially in the two decades after both the first Earth Day and the Stonewall Riots, the ecological consciousness and organicism of those times had little influence on the formation of queer theory. Early on, Carolyn Dinshaw (1995: 76–77) challenged the power of conventional biology and its role in normalising obfuscation of minority gender and sexual experiences. Dinshaw committed to an, “inquiry into the ways that ‘natural’ has been produced by particular discursive matrices of heteronormativity”, a line of thinking more recently developed by Jeffrey Cohen (2008). But in a time of intensification of competition for resources and space amidst ecological crises, theorists and activists of gender, sexuality, decolonisation, and community development cannot afford to avoid ecosystems even if previous approaches to seeking better understandings have been marked and partially obscured by what Robert Azzarello termed “compulsory heterosexuality” (Azzarello, 2012: 28).

Donna Haraway recently went so far as to challenge heteronormative conceptions of species that have often defined the limits of inter-breeding populations where, “Queering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories and none is more critical than the human / nonhuman sorting operation” (Haraway, 2008: xxiiv). Eva Hayward took Haraway’s queer taxonomic reorganization a step further identifying transgender experience more with aspects of nonhuman physiology and linking “trans-formation” as in human experiences to the “re-generation” as in organisms such as starfish (Hayward, 2008: 251). Hayward even recast gender-related surgeries where, “Transexing is an act of healing. This is some kind of mutuality… Trans-morphic as zoomorphic – if we can understand the cut as an act of love” (Hayward, 2008: 262).

Instead of the system theories of Bateson, the philosophical origins of contemporary gender and sexuality activism has been based on figures such as
Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Judith Butler. And Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari engaged in very different conversations about nature seeking likenesses between ecosystems and complex human systems of bodies and thought. The rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 11), as indefinite formations of relationships and points of knowledge largely without reproduced hierarchies, and Foucault’s care of the self and “biopower” (Foucault, 1997: 67–71) became central to challenging and transforming heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. In contrast, Bateson’s work, that extended to explorations of sexual cultures well outside of both the West and so-called “civilization” (Bateson, 2000: 432), remained ignored in the formation and initial florescence of queer theory.

Bateson’s notions of ecology and ecosystems were dominated by interventions to mediate tensions in human communities and assemblages of organisms. In Bateson’s Steps, the interventions were for better cognizance, as in knowledge production, and management of respective processes that are only partially manipulated by *Homo sapiens*. A current in today’s conversations on queer ecology is a concept of ‘community’ (as in ecosystem) activism. For example, Gandy outlined intersections of queer and urban ecology to understand and better intervene in unruly interzones such as a cemetery with public sex in North London (Gandy, 2012: 14). While clearly attempting to serve a politic of diversity, tolerance and community-based environmental conservation, Gandy’s essay did not engage specifically around particular cultures of public sex and queer activism, on one hand, and decision-making frameworks of design and management of public space, on the other hand. Perhaps Bateson’s work could point the way for a short-hand of descriptors and modes of agency for working to steward such spaces.

Today’s fertile cusp of critical stakeholder analysis and diversifying forms of interventions for environmental conservation, only partially prefigured by Bateson, could be relevant here. But Bateson went only so far, in his last decade, in wading into social movements and public policy with much of his advice poorly understood by policy makers and subsequently co-opted and neutralised.

If some aspects of a queer ecologies paradigm could challenge the utter dominance of *Homo sapiens*, what lessons could Bateson provide us through his own efforts to decolonise modes of research in the last decades of the British Empire? Does Bateson’s work provide clues as to how to further decolonise modern science at a time when many localised, indigenous, and tribal cultures are reasserting
traditional and local knowledge that sometimes confirms less heteronormative visions of both non-human life and human ‘nature’. Haraway’s calculus, from several decades ago, remains relevant where:

We also don’t want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated-communities (Haraway, 1988: 579–580).

In some ways, Bateson’s ‘steps’ and ‘ecologies’ were his response to the recognition that cultural decolonisation had barely begun. But Bateson’s notions of imperialism were, especially from today’s vantage, naïve. For example, Bateson’s work extended to notions of power notably in Bali (Geertz, 1994) where he shied away from the disparities embodied by feudal, ecosystem-based social systems.

Ecologies of perception & ideas: Possible queer applications for Bateson’s Steps

In exploring the relevance of Bateson’s Steps to an expanding framework for queer ecologies that recognises new kinds of stakeholders and motivators of environmental and community engagement, theoretical work with other relevant twentieth century figures suggests how a few pioneering ideas could be recast for these queerer times. Diane Chisholm’s 2010 discussion of A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia is instructive for how we could learn from Bateson’s Steps. In exploring the relevance of such organic notions, Chisholm identified the following concepts: ‘plan/e of nature’ (Chisholm, 2010: 360) for examining the tensions of ecosystems of mainly non-human species often dominated by human culture; the ‘binary organization of the sexes’, while not avowedly feminist must have had some influence on the work of Judith Butler in the subsequent decade; and “becoming animal” described a form of trans-species consciousness labelled ‘inhumanity’, as in ‘outside of the programmed body’ and not entirely mediated by culture (Chisholm, 2010: 363–364). The reiterations of rhizomes throughout A thousand plateaus, as corollaries for non-hierarchical relationships and more sustainable kinds of human organisation, marked the previous generation of critical social theory.

In contrast to the rhizome metaphors that became widespread less than two decades
after the publication of Steps, Bateson’s notions of ecosystems were more totalising and have, so far, left less of an impact. Generalisation about ecosystems and the implications of certain system structures for recreating political economic and cultural relationships has been a much broader project vulnerable to trite understandings and applications. Today, Bateson’s Steps can be read more as an outline, a check-list, for new investigations of communities; studies that better recognise gender, sexuality and decolonisation politics within distressed ecosystems increasingly under pressure from global capital. Thus, Bateson’s early commitment to interdisciplinary investigations (Bateson, 2000: 153), spanning social, natural, and medical sciences, remain worth visiting for his inclusion of factors in the framing of a wide array of relationships within a given locale or human network.

The broader notions of ecology (Bateson, 1972/2000: xxiii) are combined with critical examinations of “systems of categories” (Bateson, 2000: 61) including fluid constructions around gender, sexual subculture, species, the lines between human and nonhuman, and associated processes and dynamics. Bateson’s scrutiny of “cultural structure” (Bateson, 2000: 84) prefigured contemporary understanding around gender construction (Butler, 1990) and performativity (Butler, 1993) extending to related experiences of communality, solidarity, agency, and resistance. In contrast, Bateson laid the basis for a far broader examination of the construction of and material basis for ideas, practices, and identities than the narrower reference points of, for example, Foucault’s biopower and Butler’s performativity.

As for sexuality and human ecology, Bateson accepted the school of thinking on sexuality of another early European researcher in New Guinea, Bronisław Malinowski, and argued that sexuality within social and economic systems cannot be compartmentalized from the totality of social relations. Bateson went so far as to argue that, “[A]lmost the whole of culture may be seen variously as a mechanism for modifying and satisfying the sexual needs of individuals, or for the enforcement of the norms of behaviour, or to supplying the individuals with food” (Bateson, 2000: 63). While the heteronormativity in these early assertions has not been fully interrogated, Bateson’s work around sexuality can be partially applied, today, to contemporary experiences of minority and dissident genders and sexualities. Furthermore, Bateson’s speculative re-conceptions of “play” (Bateson,
Ingram

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2000: 182–183), both in terms of gender and erotic performativity and interpersonal gratification linked to shifting ecosystems, are worth revisiting.

Perhaps the most relevant of Bateson’s concepts, for constructing a paradigm of queer ecologies, are some of the least developed and enigmatic of his later theoretical work. His notion of “regenerative systems” (Bateson, 2000: 447), while not new, suggested cultural mechanisms far more subtle and resilient than any that he saw applied in the ‘New Age’ of the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Bateson’s “deutero-learning” as in “learning to learn” and “the acquiring of information about the contingency patterns of the contexts in which proto-learning occurs” (Bateson, 2000: 364) remains under-explored and could have relevance as queer networks expand, diversify and sometimes recombine.

In his 1969 essay on treating schizophrenia, Bateson used the term “transcontextual” (Bateson, 2000: 272) for a set of explanations and speculations on which could be based a more supple understandings of gender and sexual identities and respective social motivators. Bateson speculated on what today is considered almost impossible and taboo: relating genotype, environment, phenotype and human development, and culture nested within ecosystems (Bateson, 2000: 424) in a manner that skirted the draconian political agendas of the more recent sociobiologists. Bateson argued for the remarkable flexibility and volatility of human social and cultural systems, extending to gender and sexuality, that in turn are partially the result of and subsequently transformed by environmental, social, and cultural processes. Towards the end of Bateson’s life, Margaret Mead even went on to explore the long-term importance of these ideas as “End-linkage” Theory (Mead, 1977: 172).

Revisiting Bateson today, we can see three outmoded bodies of his thought that could be sufficiently modernized and queered to warrant exploration within the contemporary ecosystems and globalisation processes. Bateson postulated and advocated forms of ecological and ‘civilizational’ health (Bateson, 2000: 502–513). Problematically, these sketches were made during, but were effectively outside, the rise of modern feminism and sexual minority rights and were curiously devoid of the anthropological recognition of sexuality, sexual violence, and intolerance that characterized his early work in New Guinea.

Many of Bateson’s conceptualizations of ecosystems were sometimes simplistic (Bateson, 2000: 436–437) undermining many of his related ideals for healthy
psychologies and social relations. Since Bateson’s field work, there has been a great deal of ecological research and emergence of a sub-field of “ecosystemology” (Schulz, no date). Bateson’s notions of relatively predictable ecologies with the same core feedback loops were simplistic and impoverished in comparison to today’s knowledge. Bateson’s adage that “[t]here is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds” (Bateson, 2000: 492) is quaint. ‘Weeds’, whether native or non-native, rarely can be fully controlled or eradicated and often provide some ecological services.

Bateson’s notion of “steady-state” (Bateson, 2000: 126), that spanned ecosystems and social systems, became popular in early environmentalist politics. Steady state, however theoretical in times of global change, was a pioneering ideal but was largely based on an idealisation of Balinese society (Bateson, 2000: 107–127; Bateson, 1949) as it began its run for modernisation and globalisation. The origins of Balinese irrigated rice agriculture are not so ancient but rather go back six or seven centuries and social relations have been maintained through an often repressive caste system and residual feudalism. But some of Bateson’s associated concepts could be reworked into a notion of social durability, as in resilient and adaptive social contracts and systems for the transmission of knowledge.

**Indefinite decolonisation: Genders, sexualities, migrations and ecosystems**

Bateson’s essays ended just before his death in 1980 with the simultaneous rise of globalisation of capital and nascent neoliberalism (Acheraïou, 2011: 171–178) and as the national liberation, decolonisation projects, which imbued his work, were sputtering, failing, or being deferred. For example, Bateson’s analysis of the legacies of imperialism were premature and incomplete as in his comments at the 1968 London Conference on the Dialectics of Liberation where he noted:

> Our civilization… has its roots in three main ancient civilizations: the Roman, the Hebrew, and the Greek; and it would seem that many of our problems are related to the fact that we have an imperialist civilization leavened or yeasted by a downtrodden, exploited colony in Palestine (Bateson, 2000: 432).

In his work on critiquing the legacy of empire, Bateson did not, in contrast to his contemporary Jean Genet, provide a critique of Israeli expansionism.
Queer ecologies are part of a further decolonisation of the social and natural sciences, a critique than was barely conceived in Bateson’s time. Today, Bateson’s interdisciplinarity could inform the reconsideration of the material basis of social production spanning the biophysical world, human genotypes and phenotypic responses, demographics, culture, and political economic frameworks, under globalisation, that is overdue. So Bateson’s work, squarely confronting empire and particularly the British imperial and then American hegemonies of his time, has an unexplored relevance to more contemporary movements to both decolonise the reiterations of race and class disparities in gay, lesbian and feminist movements and subsequent “de-privileging” (Ingram, 2000: 220) along with more recent critiques of homonationalism where, “there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families)” (Puar, 2007: xii). Puar went on to outline the retrogressive side, of this new tying of some queer lives to “life and productivity” to renewed obfuscation of the intensifying disparities across the breadth of queer populations. But the new work in critiquing homonationalism and pinkwashing of persisting imperial projects is well outside of the level of Bateson’s engagement in decolonisation.

The relevance of Bateson’s engagement with decolonisation in is Steps is due to his critiques of anthropology and ethnography. Early on in Bateson’s career, he engaged in a profoundly colonial project where he conducted field research on the so-called “problems” of the Iatmul of the Sepik region of north-eastern New Guinea. His seminal monograph, *Naven* (Bateson, 1936/1958), described the construction and performance of gender, ritual homosexuality, and “tranvesticism” (Bateson, 1958: 199), subcultures and behaviours in Iatmul society. While the gender and sexual richness was not specifically stigmatised or de-valued, this work existed and functioned in a neo-colonial anthropology that has continued to problematise such isolated, local cultures. Bateson completed *Naven* concurrently with a marriage to Margaret Mead while she was working in an adjacent part of the Sepik (Mead, 1977: 174) as part of one of the most important single body of research on gender construction completed in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Problematically, Bateson’s investigations neglected questions of social equity and the often stark disparities in the distribution of resources in these localised societies. So Bateson’s engagement with decolonisation of the Iatmul was
limited to his ideals of describing self-correcting ecosystems and related cultural systems of learning.

**Utilities for cognisance of queer ecologies in some examples from Pacific Canada**

What can *Steps to an ecology of mind* tell us about the new kinds of research necessary to better know how to determine and mobilise queer stakeholders? How can the Steps help us better imagine ways to intervene for more equitable communities, with expansive expressions of gender and sexuality, in a time of multiple ecological crises? Bateson’s Steps reminds us to be aggressively interdisciplinary in virtually all research from natural and social sciences to gender and cultural studies. What are the elements of these new, queer ecologies investigative frameworks for a perilous century with new imperatives for collaboration and community development?

In presenting three sketches from south-western British Columbia, my intent is to illustrate some needs for and uses of queer ecologies investigations, at various scales, that would, in turn, lay the bases for the kinds of dialogues envisioned with Debordian environmental planning. All three examples are from areas with mild climates seeing urbanization, unresolved legacies of indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship, highly productive indigenous and colonial agricultural ecosystems now often being abandoned, a growing set of native habitats and species at risk, large and highly mobile immigrant populations, gender and sexual minorities increasingly asserting rights to spaces, protections, programmes, and other entitlements, and “gentrification” (Schulman, 2012) linked to vulnerability to global capital which in turn is undermining the security and health of less affluent populations.

The first case is a small, suburban district with several towns and villages. The second case is a smaller unit of landscape spanning the side of a small mountain and inlet that is part of a large network of protected areas, and the third sketch is of a more site-specific, urban locale comprised of a green roof on the top of a converted warehouse. While these illustrations are not within Europe, they highlight colonial British and more broadly, neo-colonial Canadian legacies in the context of contemporary multiculturalism. Within the global context, these examples represent relatively favourable conditions for three demographics: sexual
minorities, recent migrants, and indigenous communities. Neocolonial legacies extended until after recent decades. More than a half century of a residential school system partially destroyed indigenous languages, cultures, sexual and gender diversity, and extended families well into the 1960s. Racist laws disenfranchising and exploiting east and South Asians extended until World War II. Spatial, legal and institutional barriers to aboriginal communities have lingered well beyond the initial 1982–85 implementation of Canada’s constitution. Most of the country’s rights and protections for sexual minorities were constructed in the courts subsequent Canada’s Charter of rights and freedoms with legal statutes for protection of trans people still lagging. Even with today’s relatively high levels of legislative protection of sexual and ethnic minorities in a resilient economy, inequities persist and are being exacerbated by the vagaries of capital, climate change, and recurrent bouts of cultural chauvinism.

I provide these sketches because they are the locales into which I was born and continue to live as a mixed-race person of relatively anglocentric, Métis heritage. Métis now comprise the largest indigenous demographic in Canada and are centred east of the Rockies. Even on the Pacific Coast, Métis have had alliances and shared spaces with more established, Northwest Coast First Nations communities and governments. Contemporary conversations on hybridity, respective interstitial and heterotopic spaces, have relevance to local experiences of “métissage” (Acheraïou, 2011: 13). And in my lifetime, I have seen and experienced the end of a period of almost apartheid-like segregation obstructing indigenous communities to far more egalitarian multiculturalism and current efforts to reconstruct sovereignties and land stewardship. But in the ecologies described below, hybridity and interstitial subcultures, processes and spaces comprise only small parts of the political economies.

1. Central Saanich

A suburban municipality north of Victoria, British Columbia, there are two small towns that grew around Salish communities with the Tsartlip (WJOLELP) Nation on the west of the peninsula and the Tsawout Nation on the east. In contrast to much of British Columbia, treaties were negotiated in the early 1850s as part of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island and with the insistence of Whitehall. While most Indian Reserves in British Columbia were imposed on communities in
Ingram  

From queer spaces to queerer ecologies

subsequent decades, those of the Tsartlip and Tsawout were negotiated to include significant food gathering areas; sites of continued importance to indigenous populations and for the ecological health of the region. In the subsequent century and a half, some provisions of the treaties have not been respected by municipal and provincial governments. Today, there are scores of dryland and shore plant species at risk and a marked decline of the oak woodland ecosystem. Large mammals such as elk and wolf have been extirpated. Traditional Tsartlip and Tsawout food gathering areas, supposedly protected under the treaties, have more often been degraded or destroyed. Over the twentieth century, thriving agricultural parcels have been replaced by suburbs.

Today, the local language, SENĆOŦEN, is only spoken regularly by less than one hundred people and the Tsartlip Nation hosts Canada’s First Peoples’ Cultural Council that recently partnered with digital behemoth Google to protect indigenous languages. As they have for a century and a half, aboriginal communities continue to have the lowest average incomes of any social group in the area. There are numerous initiatives to acquire and protect open space and to work with private land owners to better steward habitat, initiatives that have largely excluded the Tsartlip and Tsawout even those these First Nations governments increasingly assert themselves legally over traditional territories.

The municipality has seen a dynamic demographic of immigrant groups with some past groups largely forgotten including a African Canadian community established in the mid-nineteenth century that scattered after a half century. There was at least one Chinese work-camp. Today while attracting a growing diversity of immigrant populations, Central Saanich has become particularly attractive for upper-middle class households still more often of north-western European heritages. Central Saanich was formerly conservative in its voting patterns, with successive municipal governments that worked to ravage woodlands, wetlands and farmlands. Since the end of the period of police repression that extended well into the 1960s, networks of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people have created private and social spaces in the area while relying on services and organization in Vancouver and Victoria. Central Saanich has remained under-served in programmes for aboriginal and ‘LGBT’ populations though the level of health care, extending to sexual health and HIV treatment, has often been relatively high by global and national standards. Individuals whose first language is not English continue to be
under-served and have limited aspects to social spaces, organizations and programmes.

Today, the communities in the municipality suffer from exceptional and internationalised processes of gentrification of housing and lands that are pushing out less affluent groups. Climate change combined with suburbanisation is putting pressure on regional water resources. The east coast of East Saanich is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise including crucial sites for the Tsawout.

A number of sexual minority networks and organisations are now active, visible and engaged in initiatives for expanded service programmes and human rights policy. The district school district enacted a specific policy against homophobia and bullying in 2012 but with a strategy that does not fully address the racialised dimensions of homophobia, transphobia, and biophobia and intolerance nor the historical marginalisation of Tsartlip and Tsawout culture, sensibilities and sexualities. At the same time in British Columbia, queer youth of some other ethnic groups, such as east Asians, continue to be targeted disproportionately. As for research into queer ecologies, the patchwork of inequities around minority gender and sexuality experiences and related health impacts, for a range of age and ethnic demographics, could be further explored. And the long-term threats to these communities, from destruction of local ecosystems, watersheds, and food production systems warrants further investigation. Violence against vulnerable groups, a host of related mental health issues, and needs for social spaces for queer youth warrant investigation. The continued role of sacred sites and links to mental health is another area of exploration including for aboriginal and queer youth who are disproportionately vulnerable to suicide. And the impacts of gentrification and the shortage of affordable housing, especially for Tsartlip and Tsawout individuals who, for various legal and family-related factors are denied ‘Indian Reserve’ housing, warrant further monitoring.

Bateson’s Steps could foster critical re-examination, especially in public schools, of the legacies of the historic and neo-colonial, cultural systems and the parallel experiences of the Tsartlip and Tsawout. Investigating such parallel experiences also has relevance to migrant groups who often have divergent and too often marginal positions in respective communities. With some deterioration of environmental quality, Bateson’s Step of working towards ‘civilizational’ health as based on better cognisance of ecological, social, and political economic

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relationships is relevant. Bateson’s transcontextual, End-linkage Theory, where sets of cultural, sexual, and ecological identities can be seen as having potential for recombination and re-adaptation may have considerable relevance as sexual minorities attempt to thrive in areas such as these outside of well-defended queer enclaves.

2. Mount Maxwell, Salt Spring Island

Twenty miles north of Central Saanich, Mount Maxwell is part of an exceptionally wild mosaic of several thousand hectares of ecological reserve, provincial park, protected watershed, and forest lands, shore, and marine areas on the east side of one of the largest of the Gulf Islands. Within the pantheon of Canadian ecosystems, this area has the mildest winters with ancient woodlands and forests and high levels of biodiversity as a northern, insular margin of ‘Oregonia’. The protected area network centred on Mount Maxwell continues to support one of the largest and most spectacular remaining mosaics of ancient Douglas fir forest, Garry oak woodland and savannah, shore, and marine ecosystems along with a wide range of rare, threatened and declining species. These islands are relatively dry and sunny and Salt Spring Island, in particular, has become a destination of the privileged especially for building retirement homes and planting vineyards with real estate inflation often driven by the Alberta petroleum economy. Climate change, invasive species and fire susceptibility have put forests, woodlands, and groundwater increasingly at risk.

Salt Spring Island is at a geographical crossroad for historical aboriginal communities and today parts of the island are of legal interest to a number of First Nations with some, such as the Tsartlip and Tsawout to the south, fortunate to have to been able negotiate some treaty lands for themselves. However just a few miles away from the Tsartlip and Tsawout lands on Salt Spring Island is historical territory of Cowichan tribes, including the west side of Mount Maxwell, whose lands were taken forcefully, without treaties, by the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island in the 1850s and 1860s. Traditional Cowichan land use, including traditional burning, continued on Mount Maxwell into the early twentieth century with today’s supposedly natural mosaic actually a legacy of indigenous food production and other stewardship. Fire suppression began relatively late, well into the twentieth century, and provincial conservation initiatives began in the mid-twentieth century.
Proposals to begin to re-establish traditional aboriginal land use practices on Mount Maxwell, such as some controlled burning, began in 1980 but have yet to be implemented. A series of federal legal decisions in the 1990s have expanded the basis of First Nations governments for intervening in traditional territories largely through ‘consultation’. In 2001, nongovernmental conservation organizations became involved in buying remaining private lands with strategic habitat. A 2008 management plan, by the provincial government, did not acknowledge the full legacy of First Nations, their traditional burning, food gathering and conservation practices. And even with legal precedents allowing the Cowichan to reassert traditional use, there has been little formal re-engagement around Mount Maxwell other than ceremonial removal of ancestral bones from sacred caves.

Over the last four decades, there have been influxes of gay men and lesbians on to Salt Spring Island especially for farming, business, recreation, and retirement. Mount Maxwell has become a destination for hiking, nudism, socialising and sometimes sex. The communities on this relatively tolerant and affluent island has been increasingly welcoming of sexual minorities and respective consumer dollars. But without full acknowledgement of and public engagement around Mount Maxwell being unceded Cowichan lands where the Tsartlip and Tsawout and other First Nations government still maintain legal rights for intervention, a kind of exclusion is being maintained on Mount Maxwell. Aside from those with access to the few tiny Indian Reserve lands there, Salt Spring Island is unaffordable and less than welcoming to low-income, aboriginal stakeholders. In this context, elite sets of queer bodies can still function as part of erasure especially as several thousand members of the Cowichan Tribes live, just miles away across a strait, in often crowded conditions increasingly disconnected to natural ecosystems. Cowichan access to Mount Maxwell requires an increasingly expensive ferry travel with little public, ground transportation available. And in a time of disproportionately higher suicide and HIV rates in aboriginal communities, of which queer youth are particularly vulnerable, tranquil ancestral sites for healing are increasingly important and can be difficult to find. And with resurgence of native spiritual and sexual subcultures, the lack of effective access to and queer aboriginal presence on Mount Maxwell remains a troubling bell-weather.

A queer ecologies framework for new investigations could better identify stakeholders, relationships, and processes across this cultural landscape that might
appear deceptively ‘natural’. Bateson’s Step for re-examination of cultural systems and ecological relationships would lead to recognition of the uninterrupted though currently obstructed Salish legacies and continued engagements of groups such as the Cowichan, Tsartlip and Tsawout. In such a postcolonial context, new research would be beneficial on the history of Mount Maxwell and on both queer and Salish stakeholders. From a biophysical standpoint, ecological data on human and nonhuman relations could confirm the vulnerability of these landscapes to apocalyptic wildfire after over half a century of suppression of burning and expanding patches of exotic species – and risks for adjacent communities.

3. The roof garden of Railtown Studios, Vancouver

A third scale for investigating queer ecologies is that for small sites that are increasingly built and partially regulated through design and maintenance decisions. A communal roof top on a warehouse converted to rental live work studios above Vancouver Harbour highlights needs to investigate relationships between social groups, diverse cultures and aesthetic, and hybrid ecosystems combining food production, native species, and ornamentals in the context of rising food and input costs. The Railtown Studios roof garden is the result of a public-private partnership in 1996–1998 where a powerful landlord was effectively given, at a fraction of its market value, a PCB-contaminated warehouse by the City of Vancouver for “sustained tenancy” of “low-income artists”, a covenant that has only been partially honoured.

Tenancy on this parcel of land has been contentious for a century and a half generating uncertainty that continues to destabilise various notions of propriety, ownership and tenancy. This building, as well as all of the City of Vancouver, has been constructed on unceded territory of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. This parcel is on something of a cultural interzone since the city was founded in 1886. On the edge of the former neighbourhood of Nihonmachi, or Japantown, that saw a large portion of the population displaced, interned, and deported from 1942 until as late as 1950, the area subsequently was under-populated and economically depressed until recent gentrification involving arts and design studios, digital technology firms including the headquarters for HootSuite, nongovernmental organization offices, residential redevelopment, and the shift to ownership and management of the adjacent port by multinational,
Dubai Ports.

The roof garden of Railtown Studio, at five stories above the edge of Vancouver Harbour, has embodied this interzone of cultures, classes, economic sectors, political economies, and aesthetics through the formation and management of this modest urban agro-ecosystem. The roof garden reflects a tangle of shifting food production knowledge, culinary desires, household budgets, artistic interventions, aesthetics, cultures, and weather fluctuations. There are shifting corners with well-tended fruit trees and grape vines and fallow spots dominated by an ecology of ‘weeds’ (Bateson, 2000: 492). Dominant species include ornamental trees, grape vines, apple trees, native and Eurasian roses, raspberry, numerous herb species, and, in the summer, tomatoes and lettuce. Winter crops include heartier Brassica species and sorrel. Significant medicinal crops include the powerful Salish tonic, *Lomatium nudicaule*, mint, anise, garlic, rosemary, and verbena. There are numerous ornamental plants as well. Local efforts to stave the decline of honey bees and other pollinators, including the establishment of networks of urban hives, have benefited these roof ecosystems. As well as producing important items of fresh vegetables, fruit and herbs, the garden is a source of pleasure, wonder, cultural production, and therapy.

With escalating rents, retrogressive leases, and exceptional levels of tenant displacement, this roof garden has become a particularly erratic space from month to month and year to year. Since its establishment in 1998, the irrigation and compost technologies have changed every several years. Water continues to be plentiful and cheap but electricity for pumping is increasingly imported from within the North American power grid that is still dominated by coal burning. Some years see more partying (and police) than others. Volatile social relationships, only partially mediated through the landlord, have influenced the formation of these rooftop ecosystems and kitchen gardens through a kind of miniaturising of domestic political economies into the raised beds.

The garden was originally developed by a gay man, a former Mormon from Los Angeles who was an early queer and arts space activist in Vancouver. Few openly lesbian and transgendered artists have ever been applied live in the building and few Asian and indigenous artists have rented for long. In recent years, the landlord has been attempting to rent at market rates for luxury lofts, with no requirement for cultural production as determined by the City of Vancouver, while being
increasingly tolerant of homophobia and intimidation. Subsequent departures of more vulnerable individuals have provided opportunities for raising the rents on the vacated studios. The landlord, now the largest in the neighbourhood, has become an object for the interventions of the Vancouver Renters Union.

Just off shore, a marked increase in oil tankers is scheduled for shipping Alberta oil sands bitumen to Asia. Cruise ships coming from and going to Alaska generate considerable amounts of air pollution and garbage. Application of Bateson’s Steps to fully identify stakeholders, relationships, and processes in a queer ecologies research framework, could better make sense of the physical aspects of these spaces, stakeholders, and aspects of the local political economy. Social and cultural aspects of such interdisciplinary investigations could lay the basis for envisioning regenerative systems of community learning on this pleasant and spectacular green roof extending from urban ecology topics to tenancy and sexual politics. Such fine-scaled ecologies could also be managed as therapeutic as well as cultural and educational spaces.

Within the global pantheon of queer sites, all three of these areas represent relatively successful processes of deghettoization of sexual minorities. But today pressures from global capital and gentrification obstruct efforts to slow and reverse greater social disparities including for sexual minorities. In all three contexts described above, a range of stakeholders, many of whom are sexual minorities or engaged in challenging transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia, are poorly identified with claims for resources and space barely articulated. There is little Debordian “dialogue”, in large part because the lack of Batesonian human-ecological understandings, and considerable persistence of historical marginalisation of non-white members of gender and sexual minorities. Outside of earlier formulations of sexual minority enclaves and networks, these examples would not appear significant either to early homophile, gay and lesbian feminist activism nor even to more recent Act up, Queer nation, Two-spirit, and concurrent anti-racism movements. But for a queer ecologies framework to have any utility and intellectual or activist currency, investigations will be under pressure to lay the basis for envisioning new ways to redistribute resources and space at these three scales.
Conclusions: Ecologies for understanding queer communalities in a time of multiple political economic & environmental crises

[T]he ecological ideas implicit in our plans are more important than the plans themselves, and it would be foolish to sacrifice these ideas on the altar of pragmatism (Bateson, 2000: 513).

Social barriers have softened as the nexus of the linked imperial projects of homophobia, often mashed with transphobia and biphobia, and colonialism has begun to recede. Today’s empires are more stealth, less territorialised, and defined through less overt social barriers. The unequal distribution of resources, space, and costs and benefits of environmental change and deterioration is increasingly regulated through diversifying forms of gentrification fuelled by global capital. As the strangleholds of homophobia and transphobia have loosened, the grip of global capital has tightened making many communities queerer but few more liveable, communitarian or equitable.

Queer theory provided the descriptors to reclaim over century of suppressed sexual diversity and erotic cultures. Acknowledgement of queer spaces has provided some vocabulary, tentative inventories, and a few road maps. Queer ecologies could provide a framework for further research into the diverse and time and site-specific nature of sexual cultures and social and political movements allowing better anticipation new vulnerabilities and emergent formations. Foucault (2009) described biopower as systems of control and resistance shaped in large part through institutions and with direct relationships to nation states (p. 1). The rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari became a metaphor for the organic and largely non-hierarchical formation queer space. Bateson provided a particularly supple conceptual framework to fathom the breadth of transformations of human relationships, especially as digital networks were becoming established at the time of his death.

By mashing two, half-formed and contentious bodies of thought, the first on the boundaries of and most important processes within ecosystems and the second on social relations within and between minority and dissident gender experiences and networks defined by sexualities, social theorists, activists, psychologists, and even planners could find new ways to view, engage in, and transform various communities, neighbourhoods, and respective infrastructure. Bateson’s Steps suggests a multiplicity of new signifiers, icons, and, occasionally, ideals for
understanding the interaction of social formations, movements to confront inequities, and biophysical systems increasingly under stress. Today, the relevance of Steps for creating frameworks for investigating queer ecologies lies mainly through the promises of adapting the following of Bateson’s ideas:

1. critical re-examination of *cultural systems of categories that extend to gender, sexuality, and biological taxonomies* to better identify social groups including sexual minorities;

2. ‘civilizational’ health and *resilient and healthy ecosystems* based on cognisance of ecological, social, and political economic relationships extending to zoology that acknowledges biological exuberance;

3. *regenerative systems of community learning* fostering social relationships, culture and governance frameworks that could better challenge and expunge communities of transphobia, homophobia and biphobia, misogyny, racism, and cultural chauvinism; and

4. *transcontextual dynamics based on End-linkage Theory* that further expand contemporary notions of identity construction and sexuality formation in recognition of the dynamic potential of clusters of genotypes, phenotypic responses, and social and cultural formations to lay the basis for new human adaptations in the context of volatile environments.

The prospects of reviving any sort of totalising narrative, some broad philosophical, psychological, and political framework, “an ecology of mind” extending to sexuality, place, and ecosystems, are low and unnecessary. Environmental planning for community development becomes of set of what were once widely dismissed as ‘anarchistic’ negotiations. In such conversations, the state becomes highly contingent.

Bateson pointed the way to a radical ecosystemology, a site-specificity that could be deepened by queer theories. And better knowledge of these highly organic and volatile relationships between social groups, cultures and aspects of the biophysical world could inform new community dialogues and decision-making frameworks that transform and sometimes exist outside both the state and previous conceptions of the limits of queer communality and communities more generally. In this way, Debord’s concept of an environmental planning based on social dialogue can function as a bridge between the currents of thought on which coalesced queer
theory and more eco-centric movements that have better informed queer ecologies. Gregory Bateson’s career reminds contemporary theorists of gender, sexuality, ecosystems, communities, and environments that all such initiatives to create new paradigms must acknowledge a broader set of contextual factors and intercultural dynamics. The richness of the ‘ecologies’ of queer research programmes increasingly begin to resemble the scope of Bateson’s lifetime of investigations.

References


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Michael Leunig is an Australian cartoonist, writer, painter, philosopher and poet. His commentary on political, cultural and emotional life spans more than forty years and has often explored the idea of an innocent and sacred personal world. The fragile ecosystem of human nature and its relationship to the wider natural world is a related and recurrent theme.

His newspaper work appears regularly in the Melbourne Age and the Sydney Morning Herald. He describes his approach as regressive, humorous, messy, mystical, primal and vaudevillian - producing work which is open to many interpretations and has been widely adapted in education, music, theatre, psychotherapy and spiritual life.
Queer ecology: A roundtable discussion

Jill E. Anderson, Robert Azzarello, Gavin Brown, Katie Hogan, Gordon Brent Ingram, Michael J. Morris & Joshua Stephens

Hosted by Jamie Heckert

The recent development of what is known as queer ecology – the bringing together of queer and ecological theories and politics – was a key point of inspiration for this special issue. In order to honour that legacy, and to bring queer ecology discussions to ecopsychology and vice versa, I invited seven contemporary thinkers to sit together at a virtual roundtable. I began the discussion by asking each of the participants to offer their own individual reflection on the nature and value of queer ecology. These scholars bring a diverse range of perspectives to the table (as appropriate for the confluence of queer and ecological perspectives). From literary theory to anticapitalist activism, from the politics of knowledge to the vitality of the material world, from everyday performativities to the enormity of ecosystems, these seven writers offer thoughtful commentary on the intertwined nature of queer, oikos and psyche.

In the second round of the roundtable, each participant offers a response inspired by the contributions of the first round. Collectively, this discussion responds to Andy Fisher’s call for a radical ecopsychology (2002) by inviting a careful consideration of the ways in which we see ourselves and the world of which we are a part and, perhaps more importantly, how we can act to undermine, overflow or otherwise release mental and cultural patterns of domination and control. In doing so, we might free up much-needed energy to, in Gavin Brown’s words, “appreciate the queer exuberance of ecosystems”.

Jamie Heckert
Round 1: What is Queer Ecology and what can it contribute to the world?

Jill E. Anderson

My journey toward queer ecocriticism began about five years ago when I read Christopher Isherwood’s (1964/2001) novel A Single Man in a graduate literature course. What struck me was Isherwood’s utilization of his gay, middle-aged first-person narrator, George, as a kind of barometer not just for the ecological destruction occurring around him in California but also the postwar population boom (a reason my own research and writing focuses on the particular historical moment of Cold War America). But more than just observing these things, George explicitly links them and concludes that heterosexual coupling will be the cause of the coming apocalypse and complete destruction of the environment primarily (although the Cold War concern of nuclear holocaust is certainly present). Right after the Second World War, George sees “the Change” occur – “breeders” begin to move into once-idyllic and bohemian places in California: “in the late forties, when the World War Two vets came swarming out of the East with their just-married wives, in search of new and better breeding grounds in the sunny Southland, which had been their last nostalgic glimpse of home before they shipped out to the Pacific. And what better breeding grounds than a hillside neighborhood like this one, only five minutes’ walk from the beach and with no through traffic to decimate the future tots? So, one by one, the cottages which used to reek of bathtub gin and reverberate with the poetry of Hart Crane have fallen to the occupying army of Coke-drinking television watchers” (p. 18, emphases mine).

I include this extended quote from the novel because it introduces many of the tropes essential to my ecologically queer readings: disparagement of normalized heterosexual couplings and conventional reproduction; abuse of the landscape for strictly human-centered purposes; emphasis on reproduction always necessitating concern for the future and progressive conceptualizations of time; eschewal of more “bohemian” life ways; and the acquisition of consumer products leading it their requisite waste. But this is not the only blueprint for queering ecocriticism and ecologizing queer theory. Other readings might also include: challenges to notions of normalization/naturalization and redefinition of queerness and other sexualities; establishment of homes, spaces, and/or ecosystems as queer-friendly or at least productive of non-heteronormative lifestyles; highlighting of alternative
family formations and reproductions; and rejection of “traditional”, normative, middle-class comprehension of life that include consumerism and unquestioned dominance of the natural world. This list is not exhaustive nor have I pointed out any of the theoretical underpinnings here, but I think this list highlights the important tropes that generally go a long way in questioning our constructions of “naturalness”.

Robert Azzarello

There are two questions before us. The first is ontological: a question about what queer ecology is, an analysis of its being. The second is axiological: a question about what queer ecology contributes to the world, an analysis of its value. These two questions – the ontological and the axiological – are generally very difficult to parse. Indeed, the philosopher David Hume famously described this difficulty, arguing that ontological description (what something is) is often structured by axiological adjudication (what something ought to be or ought to do), and vice versa. To begin, then, I would say in response to our two questions: what we imagine queer ecology to be emerges in tandem with what we hope it contributes to the world.

But there is an even more basic question to be answered: what is ecology? Ecology, strictly speaking, is a logos of the oikos. It is not the oikos itself, but a discursive logic of the oikos, an attempt to put into logical discourse what exceeds logical discourse. Because ecology is not a thing but a selfconscious theory of a thing, it cannot hold the same ontological status as, say, Nature or planet Earth and claim sheer referentiality as these latter terms try to do. Ecology, however, can often be misconstrued as a fancy new ontological name for Nature itself. It can, in other words, inherit the same dogmatic epistemology from its previous instantiation, falling into the objectivist trap of truth versus falsity and repressing the fundamental ontological-axiological connection. For this reason, and in slight contrast to queer ecology, I prefer the term “queer environmentality”.

So, what is queer environmentality? As a “mentality,” or habit of thought, it expresses a way of looking at the oikos that rejects reproductive heteronormativity. It looks out into the world and does not see only males desiring females, and females desiring males, with the sole aim of reproducing the species by any means
necessary. It does not see bodies as mere carriers for the seeds of future life. It rejects this vision because reproductive heteronormativity is ontologically insufficient (it does not do justice to the biodiversity of bodies and pleasures, of aims and desires, in the world) and it is axiologically problematic (it values beings instrumentally only insofar as those beings have the capacity to produce the next generation, their supposed destiny).

Without a doubt, the global environmental crisis stems from specific economies of exploitation, calculated risk, and negotiated ruin. How has the ontology-axiology of reproductive heteronormativity contributed to this crisis? Exploitation happens best if resources – whether human or otherwise – are imagined to give infinitely on and on into the future. Reproductive heteronormativity is put in the service of this mode of exploitation, mitigating risk and enabling ruin, because the world is imagined to have this great capacity to reproduce itself infinitely. What the world needs now is not more reinvestment in reproductive heteronormativity as an ideological insurance plan to fix environmental crisis. Instead, the world needs a queer environmentality: an ontology of radical biodiversity and an axiology of genuine intrinsic value.

**Gavin Brown**

For a long while I found myself harbouring the fantasy of thinking through the potential for understanding queer as the permaculture ‘edge’ – that highly productive space where two ecosystems meet and merge. In tentatively exploring this conceptualisation, I was thinking of ‘queer’ as more than a synonym for LGBT, and as something more than an oppositional space to normative sexual and gender arrangements. I was considering queer as an ethical stance of openness to sexual and gender difference and diversity, as a productive opportunity to do sex-gender differently.

But before I ever had the opportunity to fully explore this way of considering the intersection of queer praxis and the conceptual vocabulary of permaculture’s approach to environmental concerns, I began to fall out of love with queer (and, in different ways, with permaculture). Queer theory seems to have run its course, to have outlived its usefulness, and to no longer have much new to offer to emancipatory politics. The radical queer networks that were once so central to my
research, my politics and my desires now seem to have been recuperated, just another niche market for metropolitan hipsters willing to play with the boundaries of sexual and gender identity. The prefigurative possibilities for collective queer autonomy increasingly feel like little more than a variation of the individualised autonomy promoted by neoliberal advocates of the free market these last three decades. I guess I have come to the realisation that ‘queer’ does not stand (as far) outside the sexual politics of neoliberalism as I had once thought.

I say all this to question whether queer thinking actually has anything useful to contribute to debates about how humanity should respond to issues of sustainability and environmental crisis. Having said this, I acknowledge that there may yet be important and useful work to do to challenge the heteronormative assumptions that are so often entangled in debates about ‘sustainability’. There might be productive work to be done queering the very concepts of ‘sustainability’ and (environmental) ‘crisis’. But those are not issues I want to pursue here either.

There is a large body of work going back several decades now that theorises the political economy of sexualities, sexual identities and sexual politics – so much second-wave feminist writing, John D’Emilio’s important work on the place of homosexuality in changing capitalist divisions of labour, and Lisa Duggan’s work on the new homonormativity as the sexual politics of neoliberalism (amongst others). But it strikes me that while modern sexual identities (including, later, the queer challenge to them) came into being contemporaneously with the ascendency of neoliberal capitalism, they also coincide with height of high-carbon economies. I think it is time to explore the political ecology of sexualities, to consider the role of (spatially uneven patterns of) (in)direct resource consumption in shaping sexualities and sexual subjectivities. Such work would trace the role of ecological resources in the assemblages of objects and practices through which sexual desires are acted upon and sexual subjectivities are performed. It could also engage in productive ways with what Jane Bennett has described as the ‘vital materialities’ of life-itself. This expanded repertoire of thinking about sexualities might begin to offer ways out of the queer impasse I have described and prompt an expanded understanding of the impact of contemporary sexualities on ecological systems at various geographical scales.
Katie Hogan

Queer Ecology: Writing as re-vision

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in history: it is an act of survival.


Queer ecology has helped me to “enter an old text from a new critical direction”, as Adrienne Rich urged, bringing to view “faith in the imagination as a critical aspect of our individual and collective ecological identities”¹. It has provided me a chance to see my previous literary explorations with “fresh eyes”, offering me a way to track a personal/professional transformational journey.

While a graduate student at Rutgers University in the 1990s, I lost two family members to AIDS, and my sister was living with the virus. In response, I decided to write my dissertation on gender, race, and the culture of AIDS. There was not much literary or cultural scholarship on women and HIV/AIDS, and in most AIDS media women were figured as angelic helpers, child-like innocent victims, or as devious vessels of transmission to men and children. Much of what I saw playing out in mass-produced, literary, and medical AIDS culture was also manifest in my sister’s life as a woman with AIDS.

In my analysis of Tony Kushner’s Angels in America – a famous AIDS play that made Kushner an international celebrity – I used feminist theory to challenge his blind spot about the play’s central female character’s risk for HIV/AIDS. Harper Pitt has unprotected sex with her husband – a closeted gay man who has unsafe sex with men – and yet her health risk is not considered. With intimate knowledge of my sister’s struggles with AIDS, I was enraged. In hindsight, and from the vantage point of queer ecology, I now see how that anger, coupled with my nonecological feminist approach to the play, prevented me from seeing Kushner’s feminist and queer take on the environment and how Harper Pitt is central to this project.

It is difficult to convey the shock I experienced when I reread Angels from this queer feminist ecological perspective. Saving the planet is presented as on par with saving socially and economically marginal communities – people with AIDS,

¹ This quotation is taken from conference material for Earth Matters on Stage, which took place at Carnegie Mellon University May 30 to June 3, 2012.
LGBTs, women, people of color, and the poor. Kushner’s ingenious use of Harper’s character to dramatize a queer green rapture, captured in her final speech, emerges as a central moment in the play and epitomizes its ecofeminist sensibility. In this speech, Harper sees a “great net of souls”, individuals who have died from famine, plague, and war – bringing to mind AIDS and other massive historical catastrophes – work together to repair the earth’s torn ozone. Rather than the typical fiery destruction of earth, and the dramatic departure of the “chosen” to a Christian heaven, this “net of souls” gathers together to heal, rather than escape, the planet (Kushner, 1993b: 144). This visionary queer apocalypse – centered on the restoration of the neglected, the outcast, and the afflicted earth – is only witnessed by Harper, a socially adrift female character whose life is torn asunder by sexism, homophobia, AIDS, and environmental deterioration.

The play’s repeated references to the body’s failing immune system, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and the effects of climate change on ecosystems, link the losses caused by AIDS with the human-induced environmental contamination that surrounds us. These cataclysms create a queer eco-feminist “shock” that reveals the violence of 1980s Reagan’s America, a time known for its poisonous silence about AIDS, racism, poverty, and environmental destruction. Without the frame of queer ecology, Kushner’s unique transformation of the normative apocalyptic paradigm was lost to me.

Queer ecology, as Mortimer-Sandilands describes it, “takes dominant narratives of nature to task to create space for non-heterosexual possibilities” (2010: 22). Kushner’s play accomplishes this creation of space and possibility by aligning queer ecology with feminism to generate a queer-eco feminist perspective enacted in Harper Pitt’s character.

Gordon Brent Ingram

Acknowledging the queerness of ecosystems in a time of knowledge suppression

Back in 2007, a year before any hint that a global economic contraction was coming, I participated in an exceptional colloquium. Toronto’s York University with the exceptional support of the Government of Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council brought together a dozen activist scholars for "Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire." Convened by Catriona Mortimer-
Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, and nurtured by an international centre for interdisciplinary studies of human-environmental relationships, York’s School of Environmental Studies, “Queer Ecologies” transpired in the Gladstone Hotel on a more humanistic edge of the gentrifying Queen Street West. Participants returned home to revise manuscripts as chapters of the 2010 anthology (Sandilands & Erickson, 2010).

Much has changed since those early queer ecology discussions including a global economic crisis, further erosion of intellectual infrastructure under the guise of austerity, and a number of popular uprisings. And now we are experiencing the rise of new forms of knowledge suppression, often more pernicious than formal censorship, that are obstructing the funding and other support for empirical and theoretical research. In these difficult times, is an expanded notion of species and ecosystems that is not entirely geared to biological reproduction, a sort of an ecology of diverse pleasures, at all relevant? As a scholar and practitioner of environmental planning engaged in research on how historically marginalised stakeholders reconstruct decision-making frameworks around communities and land, I come to this roundtable with some questions.

Is the core of an environmental (and political) paradigm of queer ecologies simply the acknowledgement that animals sometimes make contact with and appear to derive pleasure from other individuals of the same species and gender? Can such recognition of what Bruce Bagemihl (1999) termed, "biological exuberance" provide the basis for queer human ways to experience biology, locale and community?

What relationships could acknowledgement of queer ecologies have to further decolonising of modern science at a time when localised and tribal cultures are reasserting traditional and sometimes anthropomorphic knowledge that sometimes further erodes heteronormative views of both non-human life and human ’nature’?

What is the relevance of such potentially essentialist notions of biological exuberance and pleasure within ecosystems at an exceptional time of environmental change, habitat destruction, and extinctions? How does such an idea of biological pleasure have relevance, if at all, to efforts for humans reorganizing to stem ecological destruction?

Could certain experiences of the queerness of ecosystems, processes across places
formed by both natural and social relationships, inspire new forms of cultural engagement in communities of both human and non-human beings? And if some kind of queer knowledge of ecologies could mobilize individuals and groups to engage more effectively and ‘ecologically’ in their communities, what can we, as scholars, begin to anticipate?

Michael J. Morris

At the conjunction of “queer” and “ecology”, there is the potential for reconfigurations of the living material world, as well as for articulations of other possible worlds of life and livability. For myself, “queer” and “ecology” are not merely signifiers for a pre-existing real; rather, these terms operate within historically situated material-discursive productions, practices through which the world is not only represented, but also actualized. For “queer”, these practices are generally concerned with destabilizing regulatory norms of heterosexism that are naturalized through social (re)productions in which lives and livability are constrained along the axes of binary – and asymmetrical – gender/sex and an economy of heterosexual reproduction. These naturalizations of heterosexism become iterated through discourses ranging from the natural sciences to the social sciences to the humanities and the arts, as well as through daily performances of bodies as they are lived. “Queer” functions as a spectrum of critical interventions in such normalizing material-discursive practices, articulating possibilities for bodies and lives that do not adhere to the rigid regulation of naturalized heterosexism. Productions of “ecology” also span the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and the arts, encompassing a terrain of diverse analyses, categorizations, and representations of “nature” – or the living material world – as a complex system of interdependency. What circulates as “ecology” informs environmental policy and activism, what counts as “nature” and “natural”, and popular understandings of the human situation in the world, influencing ethical orientations as well as the practical implementations of those ethics in day to day living within human and nonhuman naturecultures. One potential for a “queer ecology” is the critique of ecological practices as material-discursive apparatuses that participate in the naturalization of heterosexism through how they represent – and thus produce – the world of interconnected lives and livability. To queer ecology, then, is to extend the critical intervention of “queer” towards expanding
what becomes livable for both the human and nonhuman, precisely in their relational interconnectedness.

Coming from Dance Studies, my particular investment in queer ecology is towards critical analyses of the ways in which performance – from theatrical productions to performances in daily life – operate at intersections of sexuality and ecology. As both sexuality and ecology are constituted through durational material-discursive practices, I am interested in how performance as a diverse spectrum of embodied activity orients and positions human and nonhuman bodies towards one another, enacting ecologies and sexualities that potentially subvert naturalized heterosexist productions of both. In particular, I am interested in performances that enact encounters between bodies that disrupt normative conventions of sexuality in ways that also destabilize the exceptional category of “the human”, enacting relationalities that reconfigure the world as an endless event of intra-activity through which human and nonhuman material agents are themselves differentially materialized. I believe that through such performances of “queer ecologies”, new ontologies can become performatively articulated, reorienting and proliferating what is possible within sexual and ecological framings of bodies, the material-discursive practices through which such bodies and their framings are produced, and – ultimately – what becomes livable within the worlds that they materialize.

**Joshua Stephens**

If we understand “queer” to signify the jettisoning of normative frameworks, in favor of a more tactical practice correspondent with experience and desire, this seems an extraordinarily potent intersection. I think a good deal gets lost in the attempt (conscious or otherwise) to restrict the practice(s) of ecology and “queering” to specific territories; it seems productive of boundaries with which the world simply does not conform. This is as much a candid observation as it is something of a metaphysical claim. In *Logic and Sense*, Deleuze gets into the latter a bit, noting that the abnormal set applies as much and as legitimately to the work of Lewis Carroll as it does mathematics, and that the logic of paradox is that of infinite subdivision (care of the force of the subconscious) and what he calls nomadic distribution – distribution across an open terrain, as opposed to something closed or contained. In other words, we’re a creative species, and we’re invariably inclined to de-localize any logic we come across, and subject it to infinite
iterations/permutations, without much regard for proscribed sites of application.

I had the fortune of studying with folks steeped in Murray Bookchin’s work, and even Murray himself, before he passed. His elaboration of what he called Social Ecology seems resonant here, inasmuch as he suggests that “to separate ecological problems from social problems – or even to play down or give token recognition to this crucial relationship – would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. The way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis”.

While I think Bookchin’s spot-on, here, I might suggest reverse-engineering his proposition a bit. Ecology inheres certain objective conditions (the limits of which effectively define our present crisis), and they are largely indifferent to our perceived needs or aspirations for convenience. Human beings as a species – as living things arguably defined by contingency, fragility, delicacy, and imperfection – inhere a similar indifference to what are often our needs/aspirations for purity, predictability, etc. This is especially true for us as social change agents.

For me, a “queer ecology” would necessarily describe a more candid, ecological approach to difference, human limitation and desire, and a reflexive, fluid relationship with the unfolding of experience. Whether it’s denial or mere confusion, our inability to anticipate, accommodate, and care for these aspects of ourselves in a communal fashion works against us as a sort of contaminating force; it reflects unreasonable demands on our social environment every bit as real as those we recognize in the natural world. An attention to this is a profoundly radical innovation, politically. It offers us a way forward that recognizes the damage capitalism and domination have produced in the human ecosystem, and proposes responsive practices at the level of the present moment.

**Round 2: Responses**

**Jill E. Anderson**

For a national conference a few years ago, I organized a panel on food and the environment. After I presented a paper on the emphasis on repro-timing (Judith Halberstam’s term) and the nuclear family in fast food advertisements (and the problem that creates for resource management), an audience member challenged the entire panel: “What are you doing in your daily life to change the world?” At
first I took this as an innocent inquiry, but the question began to gnaw at me. This person was testing me, asking me to justify my career decision in addition to my choice to write this particular paper and participate in this particular dialogue, telling me, however indirectly, that merely researching, writing, and discussing is insufficient. I needed to be living in such a way that made my work acceptable. As Second Wave Feminism taught us, the private is public. But is it not enough that I am a professor, teaching a 4-4 load? Is it not enough that I am a vegetarian and local food enthusiast, partially because I recognize the environmental impact of the food industry on the environment? Is it not enough that I wrote my dissertation focusing on the critical application of queer ecology in the historical moment and literature of the 1960s in America? Maybe it’s not enough. I don’t actually know. And it’s unlikely that I’ll ever feel like what I do every day is enough.

This idea of involvement was first posed to us in the roundtable when we were asked what queer ecology could contribute to the world. No one said nothing. No one even really acknowledged the limits of queer ecology itself (although queerness and ecology seemingly have their own limits), but we instead accepted as axiomatic that opening up both queer theory and ecocriticism (or environmentality, to use Robert Azzarello’s phrase) is beneficial. It seems that merely invoking queer ecocriticism is sufficiently political, and it’s the political angle from which we all seem to be coming at this subject, in varying degrees.

Gordon Brent Ingram’s questioning of the experiential place-centeredness of the possibility of queering ecosystems and forming “cultural engagement in communities of both human and non-human beings” is at the heart of what I hope (perhaps delusively) to be doing in my own criticism. Michael J. Morris’s explanation of the ontological power of reframing bodies and their relationality to ecologies and both human and nonhuman others and evocation of making these interconnections livable is political. Joshua Stephens’s mention of Murray Bookchin’s Social Ecology and his command that we make “more candid” our communal obligations to the “human ecosystem” is political. Gavin Brown’s linking of restrictive modern sexualities and carbon economies is political. Katie Hogan’s critical examination of the AIDS epidemic and Tony Kushner’s “queer green rapture” is decidedly political.

As scholars, teachers, performers, and writers, are we doing enough? Are we inherently activists because we’ve produced and represented this thinking? Are we
Robert Azzarello

Let me begin this second round of reflections with a small confession. Lately, I’ve felt very odd talking about queer environmentality. With many students, as well as with some friends and family members, I’ve recently had a hard time explaining what I mean when I say that queer environmentality has both ontological and axiological implications. There are many reasons why this is the case. Because reproductive heteronormativity is so thoroughly ingrained in the mind, it often rubs people the wrong way when it is criticized outright. But there are other more innocent, less ideological reasons why this is the case, too. It’s difficult to explain a theoretical argument to an audience unfamiliar with both the argument’s context and with its chief terminology. Indeed, there’s usually a lot to say before one can even begin to say what one has to say. More than that difficulty, however, I think that my feelings of oddness spring from the kind of question Gordon Brent Ingram posed about the relevancy of queer-environmental theory in the face of pressing political dilemmas.

In New Orleans where I live, the most visibly constant dilemma has always been about how to sustain a city in the face of sinking land, rising seas, and wetland deterioration. But other environmental disasters – other “surprises”, as it were, like the British Petroleum oil disaster a couple of years ago – always seem to lurk on the horizon. My students, friends, and family feel this kind of affective uneasiness, this kind of unabated threat. What can a theory of queer environmentality add? How can it help?

"Not much”, I think during those many moments of feeling odd. Of course, in situations involving an audience that is familiar with both context and terminology, I’m all about it. Last weekend, for example, I was at Rice University for an “After Queer, After Humanism” conference. It’s times like those, and like this one now, that I am convinced that ethical theory – especially environmental ethical theory – ought not abandon hard questions whose relevancy or practicality may not be immediately apparent. Why not? Environmental thinking is an ideology like any other. One can say that we as a species should minimize our impact on the planet, or one can say the opposite; both of these positions, as well as many in between,
are equally ideological. I have chosen to work in the environmental humanities instead of other fields like engineering, for example, or chemistry. As such, I take it as one of my main tasks to look carefully at the complex nature and real-world effects of ideology. I take it as my task, in other words, to describe the relationship between Weltanschauung and Welt. This work may not be straightforward, easy, or even practical. But I think it does hold value.

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**Gavin Brown**

I found it fascinating to read the various contributions to this roundtable. In thinking through what a ‘queer ecology’ might be, it seems we are caught between a pessimistic use of queer thought to critique the role of (hetero)normative assumptions in perpetuating environmental crisis, and an optimistic commitment to exploring the potential for queered framings of human-environmental relations.

I found the contributions from Jill Anderson and Robert Azzarello both enticing and troubling. Although I agree with their basic premise that reproductive heteronormativity enables a view of the planet’s resources as infinitely reproducible, thereby justifying the profligate exploitation and consumption of those resources, this argument also troubles me for a number of reasons. First, I question whether ‘sustainability’ is any less imbued with heteronormative assumptions (even as it thinks in terms of temporal cycles rather than linear progress)? Second, I want to problematize the subtext of their argument, which seems to be ‘we can save the planet if only heterosexuals breed less’. That might be true; but birth rates tend to fall when various quality of life and ‘development’ indicators are achieved, including greater gender equality. All of these things take environmental and human resources to achieve. I question what injustices might be perpetuated if this critique of reproductive heteronormativity is pursued without due consideration of wider global inequalities and patterns of uneven development?

The debates on reproductive futurity seem overly dependent on the experience of societies in the Global North (and particularly North America). But even here there are holes in the argument – do not LGBT people (in the Global North, at least) consume nearly as much as their heterosexual peers and generate just as much waste? Here my training as a geographer kicks in. Rather than generalising about
reproductive futurity on the basis of one or two national contexts, would it not be more useful, more ecological, to study the complex and dynamic interaction of social relations and resource management in specific contexts? This is what Political Ecology has been doing for many decades. Although Political Ecology is increasingly attuned to context-specific gender relations (at various spatial scales) there is undoubtedly still room for more attention to be paid to sexual norms in these contexts and for other aspects of queer thought to be added to the mix. I would encourage a two-way dialogue – what can queer theorists learn from political ecologists?

In this regard, I think Michael J. Morris makes some highly pertinent observations. A queer (political) ecology might usefully “destabilize the exceptional category of ‘the human’” and expand our understanding of what makes life liveable for humans and nonhumans alike. So I return to the competing optimistic and pessimistic tendencies that I noted in my opening remarks. If our (collective) tendency for critique is too strong, if we already know the answers to our investigations before we start them, then we run the risk of failing to appreciate the queer exuberance of ecosystems when we encounter it.

Katie Hogan

My brief queer green reading of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* in my round one piece resonates with several participants’ roundtable contributions. Jill Anderson’s reading of Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man* as an apocalyptic population boom narrative meshes with my take on Tony Kushner’s “queer” use of the apocalyptic imaginary as a form of environmentalism. As Andil Gosine has pointed out, apocalyptic anti-population discourse has typically targeted people of color and poor women for centuries – but LGBTs are also prominent targets of this rhetoric. Anderson and I discern how each author’s text employs the fraught discourse of apocalypse to queer a genre that is traditionally used against LGBTs. Isherwood’s focus on compulsive heterosexual reproduction as a catalyst for planetary and community destruction satirizes the typical Christian apocalypse in which pristine chosen heterosexuals escape the moral cesspool of the fallen world for a heavenly paradise. Ironically, in endless contemporary spin offs of “end-times” scenarios, the destruction of the earth is of little consequence. Kushner’s *Angels* also spoofs fundamentalist apocalypse by highlighting a scene of queer
ecological collaborative repair of the torn ozone layer. He also peppers his play with repeated references to climate change, poison snow, and toxic politics. Both Kushner and Isherwood create narratives that display concern for vulnerable communities and the earth.

In short, Kushner and Isherwood enact an environmental justice perspective that challenges the conventional opposition between landscape/nature vs. human life by proposing that the problem of the dominance of the natural world encompasses the dominance of human community worlds. Joshua Stephens’ roundtable contribution evokes this idea as well when he makes use of Murray Bookchin’s point that ecological and social problems are enmeshed. As Bookchin argues, “The way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to address the ecological crisis” (cited in Stephens).

Queer ecology also illuminates Adrienne Rich’s notion of writing as revision – another theme of my short Round I piece – and Rich’s idea plays out vividly in Gavin Brown’s contribution. Brown says, “I guess I have come to the realisation that ‘queer’ does not stand (as far) outside the sexual politics of neoliberalism as I had once thought.” That queer ecology is part of – rather than outside of – neoliberal ideology and practice is a crucial observation that has profound implications. Brown raises the specter of queer ecology’s complicity in the service of critical analysis, and he calls for the development of “the political ecology of sexualities”. Neoliberalism’s pervasiveness in LGBT life, queer theory, and activism is also evident in Tony Kushner’s life and work, and Kushner, like Brown, articulates awareness and resistance to it. In a striking statement about marriage rights and military service, Kushner asserts:

It’s entirely conceivable that we will one day live miserably in a thoroughly ravaged world in which lesbians and gay men can marry and serve openly in the army and that’s it (quoted in Gosine, 2001).

Despite the pernicious reach of neoliberalism, the “thoroughly ravaged world” can remain a focus of queer politics and ecology.

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**Gordon Brent Ingram**

In further exploring, through this round table process, the possibilities for better acknowledging and confirming queer ecologies, as a more expanded framework
for learning about and intervening in human communities, the word that keeps coming to my mind is 'context'. Queer theory was not very successful at acknowledging context; rarely were broader communities and ecosystems of importance especially in the analyses of literature. And seldom have the interfaces between communities, ecosystems and political economies been explored where sexual minorities have been a major concern. Carolyn Dinshaw’s 1995 essay on Chaucer first voiced queer theory’s discomfort with biology and environment as heteronormative fictions. The 2008 Giffney and Hird anthology, Queering the non/human, began to tease out the heteronormativity in many more conventional notions of ecosystems. Jeffrey Cohen’s essay in particular (Cohen 2008) outlined what drove many queer theorists and activists away from working with concepts of organic collectivities. And Giovanna Di Chiro’s 2010 essay further explored the toxic nature of heteronormative notions of ecology. As someone who has conducted work on ecosystems for three decades, Giovanna’s framings of the “toxicity” of many conventional notions of nature ring true to me. But I have only been able partially realize (and recover from) the depth of this “toxicity” and what it has meant for my own scholarship and activism.

In support of a comment by Joshua Stephens, the queer ecologies line of thinking outlined above has a curious tension with, and amounts to an extension of, Murray Bookchin’s (1982; 1990) notions of both “social ecology” and his critiques of socio-biology. And while the particular nuances of Bookchin’s social ecologies have largely been neglected with the ensuing decades, the influences of socio-biology, and its uses in justifying neoliberal policies that often relegate sexual minorities to abjection, have not been fully critiqued. Perhaps, queer ecologies is part of a renewed project to further critique the perniciousness of socio-biology through repositioning human culture, and sexual cultures not oriented to procreation in particular, as a significant ecological factor as important to human communities and environmental relationships as those that have been supposedly determined by genetics.

Queer ecologies, as a project in my work as a scholar and practitioner of environmental planning, means finding new ways to learn about systems of communities and places in the context of indefinite decolonisations while challenging persisting attitudes that are heteronormative, misogynist, and culturally chauvinist, on one hand, and that recognizes the greater and poorly explored
diversity of biological and cultural relationships and possibilities on the other hand. Queer ecologies confirm a far more fabulous, awful, and sometimes enchanting biosphere of possibilities and alternative futures than were previously fathomed by the Enlightenment and European imperial and civilizational projects. Finding ways for us to successfully relate this expanded worldview to better day-to-day engagement in human communities, sexualities, institutions, political economies, cultures, and environments in the throes of terrific change will become a central role of fields such as cultural studies, geography, and community planning over the coming decades.

Michael J. Morris

In round one of this discussion, Gavin Brown describes a “queer impasse”, suggesting the possibility that, “Queer theory seems to have run its course, to outlived its usefulness, and to no longer have much new to offer to emancipatory politics”. Brown directs our attention towards the possibilities of a “political ecology of sexualities”, towards an examination of resource availability and consumption as conditioning factors in the practice and formation of sexualities and sexual identities, and towards a consideration of how contemporary sexualities impact “ecological systems at various geographical scales”. This suggests a provocative intervention in how we might understand sexuality itself. From queer theory – primarily from the work of Judith Butler – comes the appreciation of sexuality as performative, as enacted, iteratively produced over time. Sexuality is never reducible to desire or object choice; it is an assemblage of ongoing performative practices. These performatives do not only produce sexualities; they produce the very subjects of such sexualities as well (Butler, 1990). Brown’s suggestion of a “political ecology of sexualities” would seem to consider the roles of materials and objects within the performativity of sexuality, and thus the formation of subjects themselves.

Here, to “queer ecology” seems to turn towards an “eco-sexuality”, an ecological perspective of sexuality that accounts for the nonhuman material relations that condition, enable, and affect the practices and possibilities of sexuality. Considered ecologically, such material relations cannot be considered to be the setting or accessories of sexuality; rather, such relations must be recognized as internal to the formation of both sexualities and subjectivities. This perspective of sexuality
suggests an emphasis on sexuality, subjectivity, and even bodies as material and relational. Indeed, to bring attention to the material relations of sexuality would allow – if not necessitate – us to consider human bodies themselves as assemblages of materialization in a vast continuum of life and matter on this planet. I am reminded of a passage of Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway*:

What is needed is a robust account of the materialization of all bodies – ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ – including the agential contributions of all materials forces (both ‘social’ and ‘natural’). This will require an understanding of the nature of the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena; an accounting of ‘nonhuman’ as well as ‘human’ forms of agency; and an understanding of the precise causal nature of productive practices that take account of the fullness of matter’s implication in its ongoing historicity (2007, p. 66).

A “queer ecology” might be the pursuit of just such an account, an account that considers sexuality to be a form of discursive practice that participates in the ongoing differential materialization of both human and nonhuman bodies, as well as their agential roles in such processes. To “queer ecology” – in a way out of the “queer impasse” Brown describes – might be to queer the anthropocentric norms of sexuality itself, not only in order to consider the non-heterosexual behaviors of nonhuman life, but also in order to consider sex and sexuality as processes through which matter comes to matter in lived and living forms.

**Joshua Stephens**

There’s a real danger, I fear, in the recurring references to heteronormative reproduction as a factor in ecological crisis. It seems to confer upon an overwhelming generality culpability for a crisis driven by policies and practices in which a similarly overwhelming majority have enjoyed virtually zero input. In the same breath, it draws us nearer to reenacting prior encounters between radical social movements (of a progressive variety) and Malthusian discourse. We ought to be quite clear in our fundamental and unequivocal rejection of anything that slouches in that direction. Further, we ought to hold ourselves to candid interrogations of our own reductive, racist impulses when allocating responsibility for ecological catastrophe. Given recent attempts by xenophobic, quasi-Eugenicist tendencies to hijack powerful environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, this vulnerability is a real one.

As many have discussed here, neoliberal modes of self-formation popularized in
the last three decades or so have, indeed, crept into and (in many ways) effectively colonized queer subjectivities. It’s inadequate to take aim at the low-hanging fruit of mainstream recuperation of “queerness”, when consumption and entrepreneurship have been normalized in even arguably radical corridors. At the level of the grassroots (the anarchist bookstore; the organizing meeting; the activist listserv – for instance), one is hard-pressed not to notice a sort of open marketplace of vocabulary in which much is traded, but little is absorbed or made one’s own. The language of (anti)oppression often serves an overtly (to say nothing of fiercely) competitive performance of radical authenticity; a sort of fog sitting atop a landscape in which the ethics from which that language springs seem to animate very little. Simply in repurposing this language in such performances, we can observe a certain colonization, and the reinscription of a colonial ethics – an insult salting the injuries of ongoing institutionalized domination, and our failure(s) to break with it.

At the intersection with ecological considerations, we might cast a critical, ethical gaze (and, in turn, practice) toward neoliberal approaches to self-formation; the manner in which they perpetuate an inertia with predictable ecological returns – in both the most material sense, and in the sense of the less material landscapes in which we encounter each other. While his being quoted on it is now so frequent I fear it’s lost much of its gravity, German anarchist Gustav Landauer was onto something quite powerful when he argued that the State is a social condition, and way of being; that we dismantle it to the extent that “contract other relationships” and “behave differently”. The task is not to atomize radical transformation into isolated lifestyle choices, furthering the neoliberal project. The task is, rather, in the contracting of other relationships that give central place to critique as an act of intimacy; where interventions against ecologically destructive patterns in both our relations and the world at large are deeply erotic undertakings – acts that cast care as an overt gesture of refusal.

References

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INSIGHTS

Gender queering Mother Earth

Deborah Anapol

The author of Love without limits (1997), The seven natural laws of love (2005), and Polyamory in the 21st Century (2010), Dr. Anapol is currently based in the San Francisco Bay Area when not traveling the world leading seminars on sexuality, conscious relationship, sexual healing, and ecosexuality. She is also on the faculty of International University of Professional Studies.

One day not long ago I was practising a specialized form of breath work which is designed to harmonize masculine and feminine energies. The belief system of all the traditions I’ve studied and taught for many years in my seminars on Pelvic Heart Integration, is that feminine energy is breathed up from the Earth and into the feet and the pelvis, while masculine energy is breathed down from above, into the heart or the crown of the head. Suddenly, I realized I was instinctively breathing masculine energy into my feet and pelvis and it felt so right. In that moment, the thought struck me like a thunderbolt: What if Earth, what if Nature hiself, was not mother, not even female, but male, or more likely both? What if Mother Earth and Father Earth were queer polyamorous lovers engaged in Hieros Gamos, Sacred Union, not only with extraterrestrial beings, or humans, but within themselves and with each other?

While the queer deconstruction of gender informs us that we can find both feminine and masculine qualities almost anywhere we look; in terms of both our personal identities and our cultural predispositions, gender plays a significant role. Despite the essentialist critique, historically most cultures have clear, if cross culturally inconsistent, expectations for gender roles and have seen certain natural formations as possessing special powers, either phallic or womb-like. For me, what’s important is not the argument about the validity of gender as a concept but rather becoming aware of the assumptions our culture has made about the gender of our planet and noticing the implications of this world view. Perhaps gender
queering Mother Earth is a key not only to our ecopsychological health, but to our very survival!

Modern psychology has accepted for at least half a century that health results from a combination of those traits considered feminine and those considered masculine. Historically, feminism has been a strong voice for the acceptance of traditionally masculine behaviors and roles for women, while advocating for the expansion of our concept of divinity to include Goddess as well as God. Meanwhile, the men’s movement has encouraged men to reclaim their so-called feminine attributes, and queer theory has informed us that the very concept of gender is essentialist, that is, socially constructed and artificially confining.

Designations of gendered qualities are always somewhat arbitrary, particularly when we extend our labels beyond the genitals themselves. Genetic variations and surgical interventions can make even this seemingly straightforward categorization of male and female parts ambiguous at times, but despite occasional complexities, sexing of biological life forms is a common endeavor and one not dependent upon genitalia. In the plant kingdom it’s not uncommon for an individual to be both male and female. Papayas, for example, can be either male, female, or hermaphrodites. The hermaphrodites are, of course, the tastiest and most desirable. Gender anomalies also occur in the animal kingdom. For example, among parrotfish, if the group loses its solitary male, the most dominant female will gradually transform into a male.

In light of all this gender bending, I find it extraordinary that Mother Earth and Mother Nature are so consistently viewed as female. Once we depart our home planet, gender gets a lot more variable. To this day, the ancient Tantric tradition of India considers the moon as masculine and the sun as feminine, and similar reversals of the Greco-Latin convention of a masculine sun and feminine moon are found in many cultures. But here on planet Earth, even several centuries into our (Western) scientific, secular paradigm, we are taught that Father Sky or God resides in the Heavens while Mother Earth nurtures our bodies by supplying us with food, shelter, petroleum, precious metals, and all manner of consumer goods.

This mythical marriage of Earth Mother and Sky Father is often attributed to the creation myths of “primitive people” but one day I began to wonder – has it always been so? If, as Thomas Berry, asserts, science is giving us a new intimacy with the Earth, why are we still wedded to the notion of Earth as Mother?
Feminist writers such as Susan Griffin (Women and nature, 1979) have written brilliantly about the connection between the subjugation of women and the rape of the land and the land’s resources under patriarchy. What if this parallel between disrespectful attitudes toward women and disrespect for Nature is not merely a metaphor? What if the pervasive view of Earth as female is a distortion of ancient knowledge? What if what we are dealing with is not just a case of mistaken identity, of essentialist fallacy, or dualistic thinking, but is actually a root cause of the pillaging and objectification of the Earth? Could assigning a feminine gender to Earth and Nature be a critical strategy in the rationalization for separating ourselves from the Nature, and exploiting the Earth? Have we been persuaded that Earth is something less than sacred because she is female? What are the implications of viewing Earth as exclusively female? Did eliminating Father Earth from our collective consciousness create a vacuum for humans to rush in, to “husband” the earth – which in the consciousness of the time equated to ownership, control, and domination?

If Nature had been seen for the last millennium as the home of the stern, judgmental, and punitive Father God, would humans have dared to disrespect him? Dared to rip his treasures from his belly, dared to pollute his waters and carelessly destroy his forests? What if we believed in a Mother Sky Goddess who made humans from the clay of Father Earth, infusing them with the life force of her breath? Would patriarchy be so blasé about his destruction?

When feminist writers, such as Merlin Stone, whose 1976 book, When God was a woman dared to propose that God includes the Divine Feminine, many found this notion blasphemous. Others knew, at least sub-consciously, that God has no gender, but had never heard this spoken aloud. At the time it was a very radical notion.

It is still quite radical to propose, as sexecologists Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens have done, that Earth is not Mother but rather Lover. Nevertheless, coming as it does from queer activists and Lesbian partners, Sprinkle and Stephen’s shift from Mother Earth to Lover Earth does not necessarily imply a gender change.

All but the most rigid fundamentalists have relinquished the idea that God is exclusively masculine. The women’s spirituality movement has largely succeeded in revisioning Spirit as androgynous. It’s now widely accepted that at one time in
our evolution the Goddess, in her many guises, was indeed the primary deity. She was not just an earth goddess or love goddess but also Queen of Heaven, Lady of the Evening Star, Goddess of the Hunt, and even Goddess of the Sun in ancient Japan. And yet, the habit of thinking of Earth and Nature as exclusively female persists. Mother Earth, Mother Nature – in the Western world, these archetypal images are strongly imprinted upon our collective psyches and they have helped shape a dysfunctional relationship with the natural world.

I specify Western world because I recently stumbled upon the elusive evidence my intuition told me must be there if only I could trace the image of earth back far enough into pre-history, prior to any influence or interpretation by the civilized world. I was leading a sexuality seminar in Sydney, Australia and the mostly queer audience went ballistic when I used the terms feminine and masculine to refer to a basic polarity. Hoping to re-establish rapport I began talking about my research into the projection of an exclusively feminine identity onto the earth and was quickly informed by several anthropology graduate students in the group that among the aboriginal peoples of Australia whose culture and oral tradition can be traced back over 30,000 years, Earth and Nature are clearly understood to be both masculine and feminine.

Encouraged by this validation of my hunch that the identities of Mother Earth and Father Sky were relatively recent inventions, I was electrified when the following month a student at another seminar in Sedona, Arizona referred to Father Earth. When I mentioned my interest in this designation, she brought me a pile of books on ancient Egyptian mythology. It seems that Geb, who is often shown reclining beneath his sister-wife, the sky goddess Nut, was a nurturing god of the earth and fertility. He was typically colored green or had plants growing out of his body and was sometimes portrayed as ithyphallic. In addition to being seen as the source of life, he was also god of the underworld – ruler of everything in the earth – minerals, precious stones, and the souls of the dead - as well as the plants and animals sustained on his surface. Unlike the European pagans’ Green Man, Geb’s power was impressive and not entirely beneficent – earthquakes were said to be caused by his laughter, he was hereditary chief of the gods, and kept the souls of the damned imprisoned in his bowels.

Several sources mention that Geb was later associated with the Titan god Kronos, father of Zeus and Aphrodite. Kronos was said to be the son of the Earth Goddess
Gaia and Sky God Uranus. Somewhere between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, Earth’s gender changed, roughly corresponding to the rise of patriarchy. Hints of Kronos’ origin can be found in his association with the scythe and with the Athenian harvest festival, but following his later association with the Roman god Saturn, Kronos is remembered today not as a fertile and nurturing Earth Father but as an aging Father Time.

Research has shown that the linguistic gender of nouns strongly affects how people perceive the world. Moreover, as cultural historian Thomas Berry and cosmologist Brian Swimme (*The universe story*, 1994) have noted, our creation stories shape our relationships with the natural world. Perhaps it’s time for a new mythology! The Gaia Hypothesis is a step in the right direction, and the next step may be to re-invent Gaia as genderqueer. I’m eager to trace this transgender transformational journey back into the shadows of prehistory and forward into a sustainable future.

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I have friends who live on a small urban farm in Portland, Oregon. They grow a variety of vegetables, have several fruit trees, and share their space with ducks and chickens. We recently witnessed their three female ducks engaging in an uninhibited sexual encounter. I was enthralled as they rhythmically stimulated each other until they reached a sexual climax. It amazed me how quickly each observer constructed her or his own explanation. I was told by one friend that the ducks’ behavior was a common occurrence in the yard although she really tried to discourage it. Another friend commented on how the “ladies [ducks] were just horny and needed a man.” Still another friend assured the group that this expression of sexuality was only happening to demonstrate dominance of territory. With hesitation as the only queer voice in the discussion, I challenged the comments of my friends: I thought the ducks were having a great time with each other. They were connecting. They were having sex and that seemed completely natural to me.

When I later reflected on the conversation, I became filled with questions. What was the reason for discouraging same-sex duck sex? Would it be encouraged if the sex were between male and female ducks? What if a male duck was present and the female ducks still engaged in the mutual pleasuring of each other? It appeared all too easy to assume that these ducks were lacking something, i.e., a male duck. It was also an oversimplification to suggest their sexual behavior was only an act of dominance. Vigorous struggling is common in all duck sex. The shape of the female duck's vagina is a physical barrier that prevents a male duck’s penis from entering fully unless the female shows that she is receptive by keeping her body level and lifting her tail feathers high. Perhaps these particular female ducks had
same-sex sex simply because they wanted to. I want to be clear that I am not comparing duck and human sexuality. I am merely widening the lens to include queer sexual behavior as no more or less valid than nonqueer sexual behavior in both the human and more-than-human world.

Public displays of sexuality that challenge heteronormative behavior are regularly self policed by queers. In some cases when queers have boldly expressed their sexuality in heterodominant spaces, they have experienced hateful acts of violence. “This is one of many reasons why queers have sought autonomous urban and rural spaces where they can collectively experience their sexuality” (Sbicca, 2011). When the overcast skies disappear and the warm sunshine finally arrives in Portland, Oregon, the city awakens. Parents and children start riding their bikes. Couples lay on blankets in city parks while watching their dogs. Neighbors are in their yards harvesting food from their gardens. Groups of friends barbecue while laughing and listening to music. And many queer-identified individuals of all genders and sexual orientations head to one of the clothing-optional beaches at Rooster Rock State Park or Sauvie Island to bask naked in the sun along the river.

On my first visit to Rooster Rock State Park I was amazed at how liberating it was to hike fully exposed to panoramic views of the Cascade Mountains. The deep blue ripples of the Columbia River flirtatiously lured me closer. To shed my clothes was symbolic. My vulnerability was uncovered for all to see. This kind of bodily disclosure raised my awareness to the topography of the land. The robust curves of sandy dunes, the orgy of fir trees, and the burly rock cliffs were indeed exuding sex and sexuality. At its roots sexuality is an emotional trigger. There is profound culturally embedded shame around nakedness and sexual expression. I felt so deviated from the normative structure of society that veils itself with appropriate and inappropriate ways of being. I looked around and saw a landscape of queerness. The land had no expectation of me. I was naked and free from the nagging whispers that cloak my sexuality with the limitations of this way or that way. I saw three men applying sunblock to one another’s bodies. They engaged in a passionate kiss and returned to applying the sunblock. Much like the ducks, it was an uninhibited expression of sexuality. They showed no hesitation or fear of being ridiculed. This natural setting offers queers freedom to build relationship with each other and the more-than-human world. Unlike the experiences in non-queer spaces, “interactions in queer autonomous spaces develop sustainable social
relations and value-practices, based on mutual respect, consent, sexual liberation, and non-normativity, in which people engage in open-ended processes of developing alternative ways of being, feeling, thinking, engaging, acting and becoming-liberated” (Jeppesen, 2010: 477). The beach at Rooster Rock provides a safe-haven for queerness in nature. This is just one of many autonomous spaces that allow opportunities for queers to feel connected to and a part of the natural world.

Although the *American Psychiatric Association* removed homosexuality from its list of “disorders” in 1973, the perception of sexual and gender diversity as an unnatural category still remains. In developing a queer ecopsychology we must transform our ecological perspectives to see the purity and naturalness in diverse expressions of sexuality and gender, in both the human and more-than-human world. Queer ecopsychology must transcend the need to pathologize sexual expression and gender-non-conforming life. Distinguished evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden has contributed ground breaking work in her research of diversity, gender, and sexuality in nature and people. Roughgarden (2004) first takes an in-depth look at some of Western culture’s academic disciplines and discusses how each creates its own way to justify difference. Through her exploration she challenges Darwin’s sexual selection theory and introduces what she calls a social selection theory. This examination illuminates the history of how sexual and gender diversity is pathologized, thought of as weak, and in some cases considered irrational. A queer ecopsychology must follow her lead and move outside the frame of heteronormativity to new theories that include sexual and gender variation. If we continue to generalize about the sexual experiences of humans and the more-than-human living world it will exclude the infinite possibilities of sexuality. This generalization reinforces female/male, gay/straight, and natural/unnatural binary thinking. When we fail to see sexuality and gender on a spectrum it “not only denies that certain behavior already exists, it limits the potential for that behavior to become more common, and more commonly accepted” (Johnson, 2011).

When we have a sense of belonging we are more likely to feel invested. We are more inclined to protect what we are a part of. I believe queering ecopsychology could provide ways to bridge the gap between the social justice and environmental movements. Perhaps if members from both communities “come out” visibly in
support for the other’s cause we will become united in a greater movement that recognizes and encourages infinite ways of being natural. The awesome openness of a queer ecopsychology will recognize sexual and gender diversity as central to and not in addition to the foundation of a flourishing ecosystem. I look forward to this evolution.

References


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"For if we experience the earth as a living being, then in all honesty I think we have to admit that she is an erotic being. How else do we explain fireflies, mangoes, the unfurling of ferns? We are part of an erotic being in an erotic universe, whose deepest purposes seem to be served by getting various creatures to rub against each other in a wide variety of ways. Erotic energy holds the universe together. What is gravity but the desire of one body for another?" – Starhawk (1995). "The sacredness of pleasure", in Bisexual politics: Theories, queries and visions, N. Tucker, (ed.).