

# UnderCurrents

critical environmental studies



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Founded in 1988, *UnderCurrents* is an independent non-profit journal dedicated to the publication of critical work that seeks to break down and challenge Western ideas and concepts of "nature." Produced by graduate students at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, it publishes work of students, cultural workers, and people theorizing or contesting the politics of "nature."

### Submissions

Submissions are encouraged from any field, provided that links are made to the natural world. Creativity, and a concern for social change is desirable in works submitted. It is the wish of *UnderCurrents* to present a vision of humans as part of nature, rather than apart from or "over" it. We are therefore seeking works that do not discuss nature or aspects of it solely as a resource, whether economic or aesthetic.

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### Contributing Artists:

**M. J. Ankenman** is a Toronto based photographer who has recently graduated from Ryerson Polytechnic University. In her current work she is exploring emotions and their symbolic counterparts. Her photo appears on the inside back cover.

**David Berger** recently completed his Masters in Environmental Studies at York University. His photo appears on the back cover.

**Heather Cameron** is a doctoral candidate in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto. When not taking photographs she studies propaganda and media technologies. Her photos appear on pages 3, 25, 26 & 27.

**Kelly O'Brien** is a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she is working on issues of the medicalization of lesbian bodies. Her work appears on pg. 19.

**Marc Christian Tremblay** is a student of the New Media programme at Ontario College of Art. He works in video, sound, performance, and publishing. He is currently the Co-Editor of *Bite*, OCA's student magazine, as well as it's co-designer. His work appears on the cover, page 28 & 29.

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# Contents

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Editorial Essay

2

Lost Landscapes and the Spatial Contextualization of Queerness  
gordon brent ingram

4

Re-membling a Queer Body: Interrogating a Surgical Attempt to  
Ensure 'Normal Sexual Function'  
morgan holmes

11

Retrospective of Life in a Small Town  
deanna bickford

14

Lavender's Green? Some Thoughts on Queer(y)ing Environmental Politics  
catriona sandilands

20

Not Quite Bedtime  
In Her Memory...  
ailsa craig

26

Buggeries

30

Sex, Earth and Death in Gay Theology  
j. michael clark

34

Hymn to Pan Polymorph  
crayfish

40

Queer/Nature (Be Like Water)  
caffyn kelly

43

# Carrying On and Going Beyond: Some Conditions of q u e e r / n a t u r e

A brand of 'queer' which addresses concerns within the broad parameters circumscribing a site called 'nature' may be as diverse, open-ended, and perhaps contentious as any examination of either of those two terms. Difficult though it may be, trying to map out a space for Queer/Nature within a politics of the environment demands the charting of courses through a discursive terrain of perils and possibilities. As insisted by the writers and artists in this issue of *UnderCurrents*, a politics of nature can no longer be an articulation of white, male, heterosexual prescriptive or descriptive privilege. Here, what is most evident is the disruptive power of any examination of the normative categories of nature and the natural from the perspective of queer identity. The breadth of perspectives demonstrated by the works included suggests the necessity for an ongoing project of investigation which takes apart both the categories of queer and nature, and then defines and recombines them in innovative, constructive ways. By no means is this an attempt to represent all the various ways in which this dialogue may occur and significant topics are absent, perhaps most importantly, the nexus of race, political economy or transgenderism and Queer/Nature. Despite these gaps, we hope to open up a discussion between queer and environmental politics, as well as initiate a consideration of the broader question of how, and by whom, nature is spoken of.

One of the conditions which frames the majority of the pieces included is that of sexual orientation. This may be obvious enough, considering the colloquial usage of the term "queer" as descriptive of Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual identities. But what is of particular note is the multifarious ways in which the authors choose to elucidate the matrices through which sexual identity is organized and maintained. Morgan Holmes' work investigates the North American medical establishment's normalizing activity around the biological and performative aspects of genital identification—in the interest of, as she argues, the dominant culture's maintenance of sex roles and functions. Specifically, she addresses the vastly under-recognized practice of surgical alteration of genital form which occurs with a fair degree of frequency in the "modern" Western world. This monitoring and restriction of physical difference functions not only as a signifier of heteronormative, patriarchal society but loops back as the very bio-

medical manifestation of this authority. Additionally, while Holmes does not make the link explicit here, her piece also necessarily engages in a subtle critique of Western feminist condemnation of genital mutilation in other cultures. She makes clear that discourses around the practice of genital mutilation or what constitutes 'natural' need to be engaged within the context of contemporary Western society as well.

Use of the erotic as an effective conceptual tool for the development of a meaningful relationship with the natural world frames J. Michael Clark's inquiry into the formation of a gay eco-theology. His piece grapples with how gay identity, and its attendant social and political exigencies, constitutes a particular position from which a connectedness with the earth may be viewed and fostered. As with a number of the works in this publication, Clark also considers the fact of AIDS as an ineluctable prism through which these questions must pass. In an attempt to reconcile, as he so eloquently puts it, a "deep gratitude for life and passionate grief," he calls for a renewal of an understanding of life and death, nature and culture, as contingent events and experiences within the continuum of Being.

The Foucauldian formulation of the body as the terminal site for the articulation of power has been broadened (by Foucault and others) to encompass the *space* in which those bodies engage in acts of sociality. That the queer body — an always already political body — informs, as well as reflects, the composition of the body politic, is addressed in Gordon Brent Ingram's piece conjoining issues of queer theory and new geographic or spatial thought. Ingram speculatively raises a number of issues about what does and does not fall within the purview of either gay or environmental politics. He calls for a consideration of the ways in which homophobia, gay bashing, and the paucity of gay identified space—be it urban or rural, outdoor or indoor—can be read, as well as redressed, by placement within an analysis of environmental problems. Through his innovative strategy of locating what has typically been considered as part of the socio-political sphere within the context of an environmental agenda, Ingram provides an example of the potentiality for new kinds of coalitions between political and/or activist constituencies.

This question of the relationship between divergent po-

litical or social agendas is precisely the one tackled by Kate Sandilands. Her epigrammatically structured *querying* of how an environmental politics might manifest itself from a discursive site influenced by queer politics suggests quite strongly that lack of dialogue between any two or more groups devoted to social change cannot be an appropriate reaction to what may be seemingly differing agendas. What is also not acceptable, in Sandilands view, is a rigid interpretation of the concept of nature that serves to exclude. In this vein, Sandilands examines the syncretic possibilities for the notions of wonder and the strange. (Wonder being that position from which one might view the environment, and strange as a metonym for queer.) Sandilands asks whether these two conditions can, in fact, be evoked reciprocally to offer a new way of positioning queer within a politics of the environment.

Deanna Bickford writes of memories and the way one's history seeps into the compartments we construct of our lives. Her understanding of nature is conditioned both by sexual identity and the texture of location and time. Love for the place where she grew up, love for family, and love for women weave through her piece to structure a site from which love for nature can emerge. Bickford does not shy away from a consideration of what is, indeed, a confluence of tough loves. Relatedly, Caffyn Kelly's simultaneously elegiac and hopeful work contemplates

the possibilities for ways of being in the world which transcend the bifurcation of life and death, straight and gay, same and different. For Kelly, love can be a deliberate strategy for participation in the affairs of nature.

Love may, at first glance, appear a bewildering sentiment to invoke in a discussion centered around the generation of a politics of inclusion. Still, any attempt to articulate a relationship between queer and environmental(ist) identities must, perhaps, engage in a consideration of affect. Queer is, for the most part, defined from a position of "affectual preference." And nature is, in the dominant paradigm, "that which is not human." To love, in both of these instances, is to jar up against confining categories of being in this space, at this time, on earth. What is required in this act, as Kelly reminds us, is persistence.

Shauna M. O'Donnell  
with the Editorial Collective of  
*UnderCurrents*



Photo: Heather Cameron

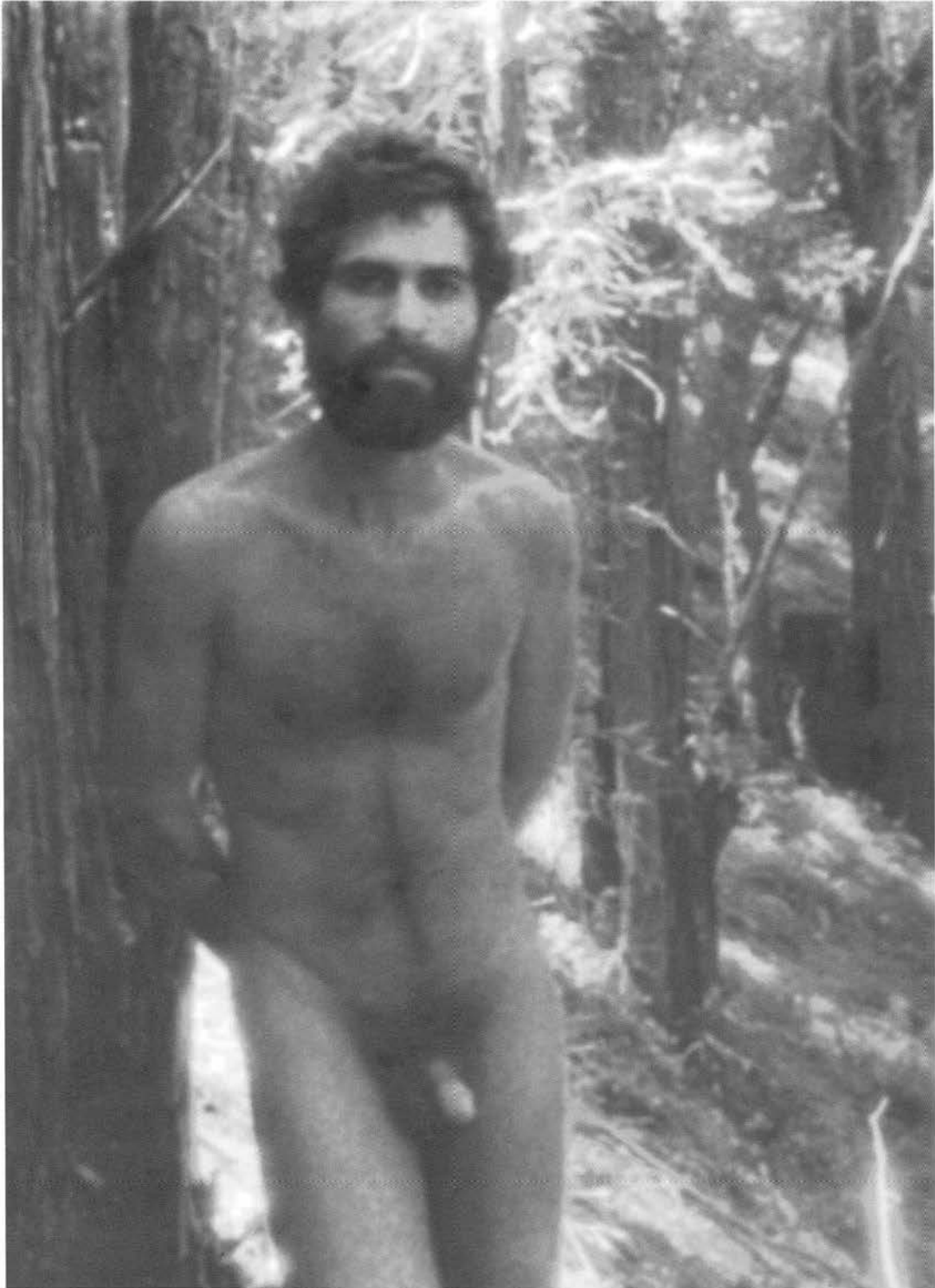


Photo: Brent Ingram

David Millhauser (1950-1987) Muir Woods



# Lost Landscapes and the Spatial Contextualization of Queerness

gordon brent ingram

*for Alex Wilson 1953-1993*

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual<sup>1</sup> habitation of outdoor and indoor environments has become a major topic in queer<sup>2</sup> theory and spatial issues<sup>3</sup> have come to represent new frontiers in the politics of our various communities. Homophobia, violence, and isolation in outdoor spaces are coming to be framed as environmental problems. A host of possibilities for new alliances around queer space is emerging. But it is first necessary to ask a number of questions before specific interventions in the condition of outdoor areas can better define and strengthen our communities and improve our lives.

Is homophobia partially an “environmental” problem? Do lesbians and gay communities and well-used queer sites represent particular resources that are vulnerable to “environmental degradation”? Has the ongoing loss of freedom of queer expression in outdoor areas, and comfortable and safe access to respective “resources,” been a central experience for most lesbians and gay men? Can the building of our communities and queer placemaking be viewed as a kind of social environmentalism the way, for example, are the expanding efforts to confront and counter “environmental racism”?

In order to determine what we

have lost, as a basis for a new kind of environmental activism, we need to know where we are. Spatial contextualization of queerness is about better defining where we are as a basis for more concerted action—including reappropriating “space” and territory. An additional purpose of this discussion is to reconsider the concept of the gay ghetto and to explore “deghettoization”<sup>4</sup> as both central to “queer theory” and as providing a basis of an authentic architecture of “queerscapes”.<sup>5</sup>

This essay explores these questions in terms of the concept of “lost landscapes”: the experience of denied access to or assault, intimidation, or perceived risk in relation to particular sites because of our identities, interactions, and behaviour. The notion of lost landscapes is complex and directly related to the broader concept of spatial apportionment along lines of race and gender.<sup>6</sup> A framework for considering apportionment of outdoor space for lesbians and gay men reflects the reality that the majority of our communities experience a compounding of these losses of access, safety, comfort, and freedom of expression in fashions related to women and people of colour—or in the developing world to indigenous groups and cultural minorities. The major reason for why a precise understanding of lesbian and gay male life, sexuality, and space, has been so long in coming is that it only makes sense as part of more extensive explorations of communities of ‘difference’.<sup>7</sup> For most lesbians and gay men, queerness compounds personal situations as double and triple jeopardies.

An understanding of the intensifying juncture of environmentalism, radical ecology, ecofeminism,<sup>8</sup> and queer theory is becoming crucial for the expansion of political activism in the coming decade. But why has environmentalism been so weak, so far, in recognizing “body space” along with outdoor sexual violence and homophobia as environmental problems? An over-emphasis on the experience

of straight white men and persistent homophobia in environmental groups are only partial explanations.

In addition, the regional scale of many environmental problems can obscure more site-specific problems such as:

1. the lack of recognition of the widespread nature and statistics on anti-lesbian and anti-gay male violence;
2. the difficulty of separating violence related to sexual orientation from that directed at women and people of colour;
3. the lack of acceptance of subject-oriented information on violence, threats, abuse, and discomfort.

This third gap is the most intriguing and is now being filled with newly structured descriptions of experiences of place called ‘cognitive mapping’.<sup>9</sup> These mental maps allow people to define their experience, including their fears, more on their own terms and with their own vocabularies. The dam is now breaking on the “evidence” of queer space—and the lack of it.

If we ask a few hundred residents of a neighbourhood to map-out their public open space and to talk about it in situations where they feel comfortable and where their perspectives will have an impact on decision-making, different experiences would emerge along lines of gender, race, culture, age, mobility, and sexuality. The mental maps of most gay men and some lesbians show secret and hidden spaces, some which might be relatively segregated at certain times. These secret queer spaces were a major part of the lives of gay men before gay liberation. Indeed they have been central to our communities, especially when there was repression against bars and other gay-owned businesses.<sup>10</sup> As well as outlining these fleeting islands of pleasure and meeting, such mental maps pick up our various terrors in terms of violence, which are especially acute for women in terms of sense of risk and comfort in exploration.

Considerations of the organization of social spaces pushes us to consider how a range of lesbian and gay male communities are marginalized. Maps of queer space beyond the boundaries of “decency” and “good taste” may be quite different than sites of homosexuality in relatively tolerant environments. Sometimes queer spaces are isolated, dangerous, or trashed places that no other group much wants—at least at certain times of the day or night. There is the marginalization of being pushed to places that few other social groups use or want but there is also the desire to live on the edge—to live perpetually away from the centre of acceptable lifestyles and sexuality. These kind of ‘decentred’ “queer” landscapes are not necessarily supposed to be very functional or pretty. Unfortunately, we don’t have a very rich vocabulary or understanding for the types of environments associated with different kinds of marginalization, homophobia by design, and conscious choices against standard morals.

## Homophobia, violence, and loss of access to landscapes

Is a central part of queer experience about being denied the potential access to certain spaces and certain levels of freedom of expression, comfort, and security? What are these actual losses and how are they enforced? How much of these losses have been internalized and will persist in our lives indefinitely? The following is a list of some of the most important processes working against queer open space: homophobic and misogynist violence, police re-

pression, *de facto* privatization of public open space, site design and management to discourage contact and queer placemaking, the lack of relevant representation, and cumulative discouragement to engage openly out-of-doors.

One of the most effective ways to be denied access, security, comfort, or freedom of expression is through the threat of violence. It does not matter much of the particular source of the threat. The dynamic geography of dyke and gay bashing has had a tremendous impact on our mental maps, where we choose to go and where to live, and the subsequent formation of our communities and neighbourhoods. Police repression has a similar effect.

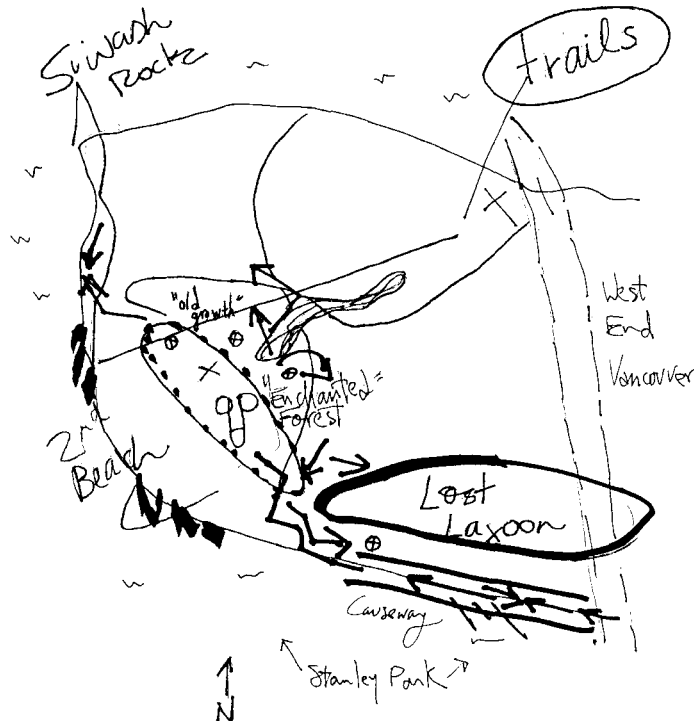
The *de facto* privatization of public open space,<sup>11</sup> which increased in the 1980s in much of the developed world, pushes a whole range of local populations out of strategic sites. Police and violence have been factors as have design and management decisions which make certain sites inaccessible or uncomfortable. For

some sites and some groups there has been a particular form of homophobia by design which functions to discourage contact as perpetrated through homophobic landscape design and park management decisions.

Most public open space has little representation of queer experience and imagery. There are scant depictions, billboards, statues, memorials, and outdoor art by and explicitly about aspects of our lives—even in neighbourhoods with large gay communities. There are and have been constraints in terms of “morality” but there has often been acrimony when public art has been proposed for important sites. Most queer sites, especially for racial and cultural minorities, are relatively unmarked to the point where only some members of those communities know how to find them. All of this can lead to a cumulative discouragement to engage openly out-of-doors.

## ‘Deghettoization’ as “ghetto” environmentalism

The word *ghetto*,<sup>12</sup> especially for lesbian and gay communities, is increasingly seen as contentious. For one thing, most lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals do not live in classic ghettos. For more invisible minorities, the term does not have the same meaning as it has for visible minorities. Some of us may feel pushed into a certain neighbourhood but then these “ghettos” can get expensive and exclusive and just as many people will choose new edges and margins. The project of deghettoization, which some have argued as being central to new queer politics, is about





consciously moving presence, placemaking, and representation out to the more homophobic and higher risk zones.

Sexually assertive gay men and lesbians, since the Victorian period, have essentially been outlaws. But the nature of this constant “reconstruction of the ‘legend’ of the homosexual outlaw,”<sup>13</sup> and how we play it out in the landscape varies with the nature of broader communities and configurations of sites. One issue is the line between what is acceptable as public and what is acceptable as private. The boundaries and demarcations between public and private, throughout spheres of gay male and lesbian life, have been particularly provisional and temporary in response to fashion, prosperity, and repression.

The Stonewall Riots transformed our notions of queers sites forever: boundaries were set and lines were drawn and that information was represented and replicated. The riots marked a new cohesion, perhaps even a kind of militarization that has been about aggressively contesting and reappropriating public sites if only for short periods. The ritual quality, and indeed the power, of these episodes, these demonstrations, to groups so culturally and emotionally “ghettoized” and marginalized should not be underestimated. But there has been more than just the temporary assertion of control over points and territories. The experiences, the rules, and the vocabularies that have been asserted transform how we view ourselves, our communities, and our inherent rights.

Sites of sexuality, conspiracy and remembrance have been particularly contentious both within our communities and within broader society. By now in virtually every neighbourhood in North America and Europe, with sizable lesbian and gay male communities, there has been at least one major controversy about safety, another about sexuality, and yet another about the conception, symbolism, interpretation, and delivery of sculptural and

pictorial information for strategic public sites. Art that explicitly explores queer sensibilities and outdoor space has begun to emerge over the last decade.<sup>14</sup>

## Queer environmentalism from body to political corps to biosphere

If the notions of “homosexual” and “lesbian” were largely constructed in the nineteenth century<sup>15</sup>, a time of intensifying exploitation of natural resources and indeed of space, there are bound to be some relationships between patriarchy, homophobia, and assaults on and impoverishment of ecosystems and localized cultures. There is an argument that queer space has been associated with the extremes of the allocation of space and resources. As the pace of ecological destruction quickens, amenities, habitable space, and life support become more scarce and expensive. Niches for lesbians and gay men may become increasingly temporary, embodying intensified forms of *delocalization*.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, such promising movements as ecofeminism have barely considered spatial issues.

A theory of queer and nonqueer space could lay the basis for description of risks to our continued presence, security, and comfort in terms of scope and scale, on one hand, and opportunities for collective expression on the other. Within this continuum, queer sites can be identified as clustered across various extremes. While this is perhaps too reductionist a framework for considering the linkages between collective behaviour, gender and sexuality dimensions of culture, and ecological relationships, it is important to recognize that one of the most exciting developments in queer culture has been the new and increasingly creative uses of space, both outdoor and indoor, for meeting, for resistance, for ceremony, and for redefinition and strengthening of alliances. The 1990s are about the *spatial articula-*

*tion* of collective experiences. What then are some strategies for reappropriating and creating queer space?

There are increasingly organized efforts to counter homophobic and misogynist violence, including the presence of community groups, education of police, and design for more secure sites. There have been some modest gains at countering police repression through pressure from various groups. But more comprehensive strategies to counter violence and assert presence are still needed.

The middle class strategies of the 1960s and 1970s, that emphasized the acquisition of private space by individuals, groups and separatist land trusts have not been every effective in creating new queer space. Countering the effective privatization of public open space must first involve the identification of areas that could and should support a range of activities and then the assertion of the legitimacy of the queer presence. “Kiss-ins” and “die-ins” in suburban shopping malls have had a mild impact. Design and site management decisions that can be shown to be homophobic must be documented and confronted. More importantly, strategies for permanent queer placemaking of more sites must be explored. Again, the goal is not to create any kind of segregation or exclusion of heterosexuals but rather to make these sites more than just “gay friendly.”

Part of some of these placemaking strategies can be the addition of markers. Asserting queer imagery in public space is an expanding project in organizations like Queer Nation and more specific projects like those of DAM! (Dyke Action Machine!) who playfully reworked and subverted the ambiguous male imagery of Calvin Klein and Marky-Mark.<sup>17</sup> To counter internalized forms of ghettoization, a range of efforts to highlight queer presence, at times ceremonial,<sup>18</sup> and to make symbolic efforts to show a long-term involvement need to be fashioned.

## Questions in theory and activism for queer space

One of the factors that have held back queer environmental activism around space, is a lot of unresolved questions. The following are some speculative questions for an activist and experiential theory of queers in space.

1. What constitutes “queer space” and how is the concept useful (or obstructive) for different groups—particularly lesbians and lesbians and gay men of colour?
2. Are queer neighbourhoods really refuges from homophobia or is it just places where there are a lot of lesbians and gay men?
3. What are the points of similarity and divergence between lesbian and gay male experience and use of outdoor space?
4. What are the potential uses of a theory of queers in outdoor space in terms of identity, community, safety, communication, and pleasure?
5. How have the uses of historic (queer) sites changed over time and what are the trends in claiming and remaking these places?
6. Are there major differences in queer spaces between the South and North and the “developing” and the “developed” worlds and, in particular, between areas and groups with shortages of sufficient housing.

## Conclusions: Design and construction of queerscapes

There is not much point in worrying about queer space if we think that we will be unsuccessful with protecting the planet, biodiversity, and life support. But to grasp our queer positions in the landscape, within this broader crisis, provides powerful opportunities. Clearly identified lesbians and gay men will continue to have a difficult time contributing to and

taking leadership roles in alliances over broader environmental issues until we have better determined our own situations in the landscape—until we each have better senses of the spatial context of our own communities.

More differences become apparent in our communities when we have a clearer sense of where we really are, what we have access to, and what we have lost. Most of us will have to confront both a backlog of fear, frustration, and even complacency, and the reality of “open” spaces where queer presence and expression have been carefully controlled when not removed. Collective kinds of experiences, such as political and cultural demonstrations, will continue to play a key role in the intensifying reappropriation of what should be queer sites.

As well as more authentic bases for working in coalitions with heterosexuals around broader environmental issues, there is a longer term agenda for an architecture of queerscapes. Programming for the full range of queer experience and consensual expression is the new project in queerscape architecture that few of us, so far, have explored. For now, it is important to explore our own lost landscapes. Until we have conceived of more room to make contact, nurture, and “play”, on our own terms, in the places that we love, we will not be able to garnish our full energies and creativity to also work to stop the destruction of the many places, living things, and broader human communities that are now at risk.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> It may be that the only commonality between lesbian, gay male, and bisexual use of space is from homophobia and some vaguely similar desires. The implications of transgender individuals and other sexual minorities to a theory of queers in space have not been fully considered in this discussion.

<sup>2</sup> “Queer” is used as a shorter synonym of

“lesbian/gay male/bisexual woman or man” and suggests a departure from earlier lesbian and gay male movements in its implicit and indefinite construction of a “de-centered” ‘community of difference,’ the positing of a “new stance for opposition” see Duggan 1991.

<sup>3</sup> The most relevant analytical frameworks and surveys for consideration of queer outdoor space have been provided in S. Adler, and J. Brenner. “Gender and space: Lesbians and gays in the city,” *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research* 16 (1992), pp. 24-34, L. Knopp, “Sexuality and the spatial dynamics of capitalism,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992), pp. 651-669, and B. Weightman, “Commentary: Towards a geography of the gay community,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 1 (1981), pp. 106-112.

<sup>4</sup> To explore this project of “de-ghettoization,” see L. Duggan, “Making it perfectly queer,” *Socialist Review* 22:1 (1991), pp. 11-31.

<sup>5</sup> A “queerscape” is not only a landscape, as based on the Flemish root *schap*, with queers but also one that is *decentred*, in terms of “supporting” sexual minorities though not necessarily marginalized or ghettoized.

<sup>6</sup> L. K. Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A feminist critique of the man-made environment*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), which on page 2 notes that “Space, like language, is socially constructed; and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in society. The uses of both language and space contribute to the power of the some groups over others and the maintenance of human inequality.”

<sup>7</sup> To further explore this framework of social “difference” and space see G. C. Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in cultural politics*, (New York, Routledge, 1987); J. Terry, “Theorizing deviant historiography,” *differences: A journal of feminist cultural studies* 3:2 (1991), pp. 54-74, and C. Owens, “Outlaws: Gay men in feminism,” in *Be-*

yond Recognition: Representation, power, and culture, S. Bryson, B. Kruger, L. Tillman and J. Weinstock (editors), pp. 218-235, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> S. Griffin, "Split culture," pp. 7-17 and Y. King, "The ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecology," pp. 18-28 in *Healing the Wounds: The promise of ecofeminism*, J. Plant (editor), (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Eric Estuar Reyes, "Queer Spaces, The Space of Lesbians and Gay Men of Color in Los Angeles," pp. 91-112, a thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> One discussion of the role of open space in periods of homophobic repression is made by John Grube of pre-Stonewall Toronto where the sites were as crucial for making

friends and exchanging information as for sex. See J. Grube in "Queens and flaming virgins: Towards a sense of gay community," *Rites* (Toronto) 2:9 (1986), pp. 14-17.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Davis, "Fortress L.A.", in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (New York, Vintage Books), pp. 221-264.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Wittman noted in the early 1970s that "San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We had fled to here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there...we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs..." from *A Gay Manifesto*, reprinted In *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, K. Jay and A. Young (editors), (New York: Douglas Book/World Publishing/Times Mirror, 1972) pp. 330-345.

<sup>13</sup> See Craig Owens, 1992, pp. 218.

<sup>14</sup> For an example of queer environmental art, see the piece "Utopian Prospects" by Mark Robbins in *Angles of Incidence* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 38-41.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol :1 An Introduction*. (New York: Random House, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Virilio, (translated by M. Polizzotti), *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, (New York: Columbia University, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> See the posters with "do you love the dyke in your life?" by "dyke action machine" in the streets of New York City in 1993.

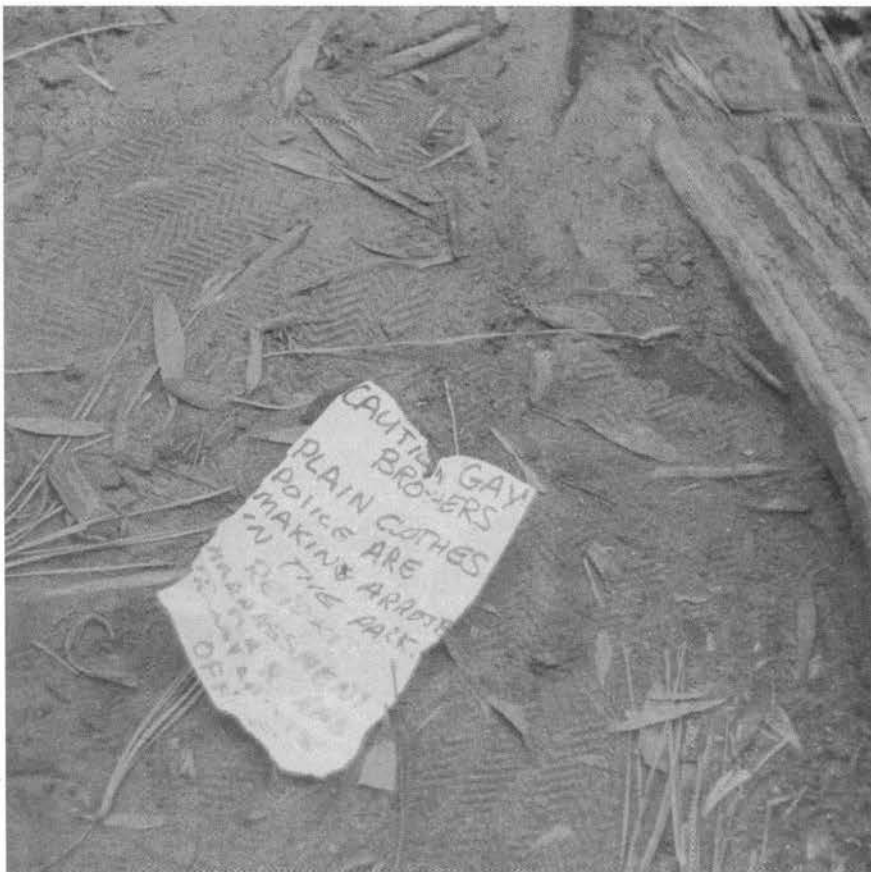
<sup>18</sup> One of the best documented examples of queer (spatial) ceremony was the laying of the AIDS Quilt amidst sites of U.S. power and remembrance at the 1993 March on Washington.

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Brent Ingram is from Vancouver Island and plans and designs networks of open space and protected areas. He received in his Ph.D. in environmental planning from Berkeley in 1989. He has been involved with an array of gay and lesbian / queer cultural and political projects since 1974 as well as rainforest conservation in the Pacific Rim. He is currently writing a critique of the environmental planning process for Clayoquot Sound, on Vancouver Island, and is co-editing a book called "Queers in Space: Landscapes of lesbian and gay male difference". Thanks to John Murphy, Michael Howell, Jeffrey Escoffier, Eric Reyes, Moira Kenney, and Ben Chin for their comments. Thanks to Carrie Moyer of DAM! for information on their 1993 campaign.

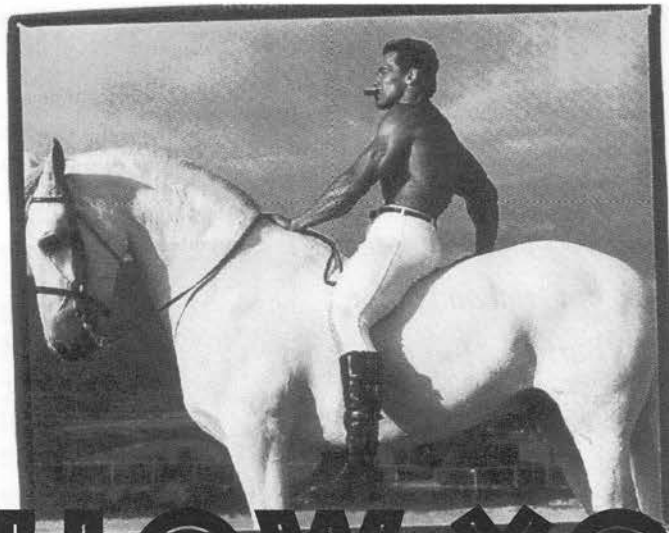
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Photo: Brent Ingram



Buena Vista Park, San Francisco, 1980

**THINK ABOUT CROSSING THE LINE**



**FOLLOW YOUR  
HORMONES**

Photo: Annie Leibovitz Text: Apple & Lexus Concept: Plush Limbaugh

# Re-membering a Queer Body

morgan holmes

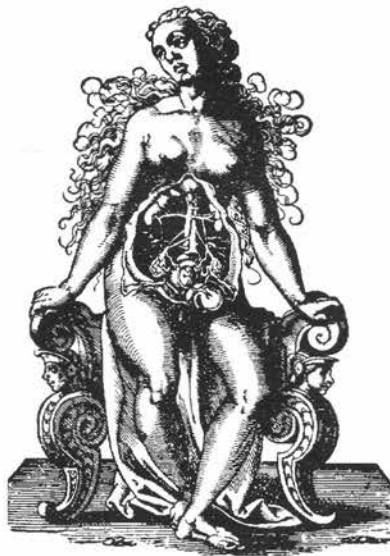
In the spring 1993 issue of *The Sciences*, Brown University geneticist Anne Fausto-Sterling, citing the work of John Money, indicates that approximately four percent of the population is, to some degree, intersexual: they either possess physical characteristics of both officially recognized sexes or they have chromosomes which indicate a sex which are 'contradicted' by their physical appearance.<sup>1</sup> In Toronto, the four percent figure translates into roughly 88,000 people. Yet little has been written about intersexuality, although its concerns often intersect with those of feminist and queer theory. This paper deals with feminist issues in patriarchal medicine and its relation(s) to intersexuality (and intersexuality's inherent ability to challenge arguments for the 'natural' basis of heterosexuality).

Sex is generally understood as the biological basis for assertions of gender: i.e. the body is the incontrovertable facticity which cannot be denied. The starting point of this paper, the one I could not proceed without, is that sex, while I agree that it is located in/on the body, is not absolute—that is to say that sex is not clearly defined, not something which all bodies adhere to simply and easily. Sex is also constructed, not only at the ideological level of gender, but at the physical/biological level of bodies and surgery. The frequency with which intersexuality occurs, in which species it is more prevalent, its causes and manifestations and its variances are studied so that *all* traces of intersexuality in humans can be erased. Texts and research dealing with

intersexuality make no provision for intersexuality to exist except as a pathological condition. Instead of using the knowledge to designate a space in which intersexuality constitutes a sex or set of sexes which is consistent with the forms that the human body may take—just as male and female are presently seen as medically consistent configurations of human form—the knowledge is used in order to make diagnoses which effect, not merely closure on the sexes as bimorphic and complementary, but also lead to the erasure of physical states that challenge this vision of human existence.

To understand the **problem** of intersexuality, it is necessary to understand how **normal** sexual development occurs and how this process may be **disturbed**. [my emphasis] (Edmonds 1989:6)

By common definition a female body is one capable of reproduction and



not possessing a penis while a male body possesses a penis and is not capable of gestation. However, when it comes to 'managing' intersexed children, it is the *size* of the phallus<sup>2</sup> that counts:

Choice of gender identity thus depends on the external genitalia and the possibility of future coital ad-

equacy. When the sex assignment is definitively made, the gonads that conflict with the assignment should be electively [according to whom?] removed. (Emans and Goldstein 1990:62)

This means that when a genetically male child (XY) is considered incapable of achieving 'normal' heterosexual activity as a male, he will be reassigned as female even though the micropenis would be functional (i.e. sexually sensitive and able to carry semen and urine).

In this paradigm female bodies are not understood through any positive attributes but are defined only through lack of a penis. Indeed, the possibility of fertility in a genetic female (XX) — and not the adequacy of the phallus — justifies the removal of the phallus/clitoris.<sup>3</sup>

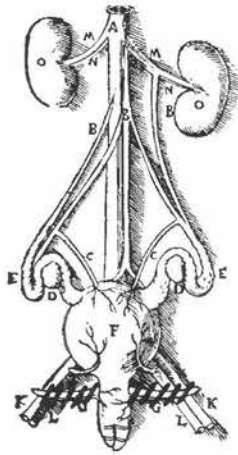
It should be emphasized that '46,XX' persons with CAH<sup>4</sup> are females and are potentially fertile. Thus, regardless of the appearance of the external genitalia, the sex assignment should be female. (Emans and Goldstein 1990:58)

The removal of the phallus/clitoris in both male and female intersex 'cases' results in bodies which, regardless of their genetic constitution or initial appearance, conform to the most important definition of the female: absence of the penis. This system of treatment sees fertility as the most important defining factor of an XX body and the least important defining factor of an XY body (for which the main issue is adequacy of sexual performance). Furthermore, this system takes heterosexuality as an a priori imperative. The contradiction in this logic is that XY intersexes revised to be 'female' will be infertile even though fertility is used to validate the removal of a phalloslit<sup>5</sup> from an XX intersexual.<sup>6</sup> This contradiction is why I am insisting that there is no positive definition of female bodies in medicine. Ultimately, fertility is irrelevant to femaleness while potency remains an essential feature of maleness.

Intersexual bodies, in the medical framework, are abnormal insofar as the



the 'true' sex is obscured by some malformation of the external genitalia and/or the gonads and reproductive organs. The medical presumption is that by relying on the scientific criteria which distinguishes male from female, the 'true' sex of intersexed bodies can be revealed. In addition, because of the issue of phallic adequacy and because "...the surgery nec-



essary to convert to female is simpler..."<sup>7</sup>(Edmonds 1989:14) even in a chromosomally male body, a phallus which cannot meet the medical criteria to become a certifiable penis will be removed.

It is true that penises come in all sizes, as do hands and feet... In the case of the microphallus, however, the organ is definitely too small to permit satisfactory copulation. It is, therefore, fairly common to recommend to the parents that they raise such a baby as a girl. This is, of course, a very difficult decision for them to make, and they must be given all the information needed to understand the rationale of the decision. (Money 1968:40)

The rationale is, of course, primarily functional and also assumes that a dominant, heterosexual mode of penetrative sex is the only appropriate one. There is no allowance made for intersexed persons to grow up in the bodies they possess so that they can eventually decide for themselves what 'normal' sexual function is. The recommended surgical procedure

assumes that the normal male sexual role is to insert a penis of acceptable size into the appropriate receptacle (i.e. a vagina — which can be constructed for those not born with one).

Heterosexist, functionalist medicine furthermore assumes that if one *is* born with a vagina, the appropriate sexual activity will be as receptor and not penetrator. Thus, when a body which has been designated female (either through chromosome testing or anatomical standards) possesses a phallus, the surgical procedure remains roughly the same as that for treating the micropenis: remove the phalloslit in a process of either partial or total clitorrectomy.

When I underwent surgery in 1975 a procedure known as 'clitoral recession,' in which the midsection is removed and the glans reattached to the base, had come into practice and was used in my case. Although I consider the surgery to be a serious amputation in which a perfectly functioning body part is stolen, D.Keith Edmonds takes the procedure more lightly:

Preservation of the glans has become fashionable in an attempt to preserve clitoral sensation.... The clitoral skin is incised along its length on the dorsal surface, carefully opening the sheath of the corpora to preserve the neurovascular bundle and shelling out the remainder of the corpora.... The corpora having been excised, the glans is then sutured onto its base. [my emphasis] (Money 1968:62)

In addition to the similarity of the surgical procedure involved in the removal of a micropenis, the interests of heterosexual 'normalcy' are being similarly served. The assumption is that a body which possesses 'female' reproductive organs and a vagina must *not* be a body which is also capable of assuming the sexual privilege of penetration usually reserved for males. After all, if the phalloslit grows large enough, the lines between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour could be severely blurred and the heterosexual matrix would be severely threatened.

The patriarchal desire to protect the rightful place of the phallus and a societal tendency to value largeness in the male penis cannot be overlooked in a diagnosis of intersexuality. It is, after all, this patriarchal framework which demands that the female body a) must not possess a penis and b) is pathological if it does possess a penis.

What to do about the clitoris which threatens to assume the rightful place of the penis is made easier by falling back on chromosomes: regardless of how (en)large(d) the clitoris is, an XX karyotype will define it as a clitoris rather than as a penis. Depending on the anxiety level of the surgeons involved, the phalloslit will be remedied by varying degrees of surgical intervention ranging from partial amputation of the phalloslit to its complete extirpation. The complete removal of the clitoris is no longer a favoured mode of treatment but that doesn't mean that it never happens in current practice:

Currently few physicians perform [total] clitorrectomies and when they do such operations usually follow the perceived "failure" of one of the less drastic procedures. A commonly cited reason for performing a clitorrectomy after clitoral reduction or recession is the presence of painful erections and/or cosmetic dissatisfaction. In the latter case surgeons complain that the clitoris remains too large and visible.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not clitorises are still *completely* removed or 'only' reduced or recessed, it remains valid to question who has the right to decide what a 'normal' female body looks like, or for that matter, what a 'normal' male body looks like.

The clitoris which threatens to become a penis must be made to remain a clitoris and the penis which threatens not to become a penis must also be made into a clitoris. To reiterate, it is the absence of the penis which defines the female body, in the case of micropenises it doesn't matter that there is no vagina—it can be surgically constructed. Clitoral hypertrophy (the phalloslit) and micropenises are

different case scenarios, which on an individual basis will have even greater variances, and yet the outcome of being forced into a standardized 'female' body is the destiny of each case. Why? To maintain a stable place for the phallus—and by extension, for patriarchal, phallocratic privilege.

Through the course of treatment of intersexuality, the male body, as it is commonly understood, remains stable. What defines the male body is the penis, its size and ability to achieve and maintain erection. By removing micopenises and phallosclits, male bodies continue to be those which possess 'viable' penises. Female bodies are, of course, not stable in this equation at all. Female bodies are not defined by the *presence* of a uterus, female bodies are not defined by the *presence* of a vagina and they are not defined through the *presence* of reproductive ability. Vaginas can be created for those who have had their micropenises removed and if they choose to have children later they can adopt them.

This is the medical (and cultural) understanding of what female bodies do not have, and must not have: a penis. The model furthermore assumes that any body which *does* possess a penis must either be designated 'male' or be surgically altered. If these options were not taken, if female bodies could run around with penises then perhaps male bodies could run around with vaginas...

Imagine the terror this scenario (a kind of gender terrorism in action), indeed a truly 'Queer Nature', must inspire in the minds of doctors who have learned so well what bodies are for (procreation and heterosexual penetrative sex). I thrill at the thought that one little phallosclit could wield so much power and cause so much anxiety—but then I re-member my dis-memberment which was/is the penalty exacted for causing such anxiety and I'm not grinning anymore.

Not that I would necessarily have kept my phallosclit. Not that I think my anger is some bizarre twist on Freud's

castration theory. But I would have liked to be able to choose for myself. I would have liked to grown up in the body I was born with, to perhaps run rampant with a little **physical gender terrorism** instead of being restricted to this realm of paper and theory. In theory I can be many things. In theory I could have been many things. But physically, someone else made the decision of what and who I would always be before I even knew who and what I was.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An example of this is Testicular Feminization Syndrome, in which a person has a male genotype (i.e. 46,XY karyotype) and a body with a female genital appearance.

<sup>2</sup> In medical practice there is no distinction made between a penis and a clitoris until a body has been declared either male or female, until that time 'phallus' is used to designate the erectile organ which could be either a penis or a clitoris. This practice is grounded in the observance of genital development in embryos which, until about the sixth week of gestation have genitalia which appear the same.

<sup>3</sup> Note that I have made a distinction between a phallus and a clitoris because it is the designation of the phallus as *clitoris* which necessitates its amputation or removal.

<sup>4</sup> CAH is one of many possible intersex etiologies.

<sup>5</sup> I have created this term rather than describe the organ as a phallic clitoris because I don't want to describe it as an organ possessing phallic attributes - to do so assumes that the proper place of the phallus is on/of the male. Furthermore, to describe the organ simply as an 'enlarged' clitoris assumes that all 'normal' clitorises are somehow identical (having taken the body size of the owner into consideration). These clitorises are not *phallic*, they are phalluses in themselves, however decidedly different from the male penis. Therefore I have retained the adjoining 'clit' to make the point that in spite of the intersexuality of such bodies, they are related on physical, philosophical

and experiential levels to female bodies not deemed anomalous. I am hoping to bring to the surface, the idea that part of what informs the need to erase these phallosclits is the patriarchal anxiety over the possible phallic power of all female bodies.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, for the XY individual who has been assigned a female sex, hormone treatment will be required throughout life oth-



erwise there will be no pubertal activity and secondary sex characteristics will not be established (although menstruation is not likely even with hormones treatments because there is no uterus).

<sup>7</sup> The same sentiment is expressed as "It's easier to make a hole than build a pole" by Dr. John Gearheart in Johns Hopkins Magazine, Nov. 1993, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Fausto-Sterling, Anne, 1993b, "How Many Sexes are There?", unpublished paper prepared for The History of Science Meeting at Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Morgan Holmes is a member of ISNA, a peer support and advocacy group. ISNA can be contacted at PO Box 31791, San Francisco, CA, 94131, USA. Morgan is on the verge of completing a Master's thesis on the treatment of intersexuality in Western Culture —she hopes to continue this work at the Ph.D. level somewhere in Canada. Special thanks to Trevor and Boogaloo who love me even on the darkest days.



# Retrospective of Life in a Small Town

deanna bickford

The following are photographs from my perspective as an insider/outsider in a rural midwestern village. I would characterise Selma as a place of traditional sex roles, conservative politics, racial/ethnic bigotry, Christian fundamentalism, and a devastated economy. I would also characterise Selma as the place which has most strongly formed my identity, since I lived there for 19 years among my entire extended family.

I am queer—which to me has just as much to do with my childhood responses to, and relationships with landscape, religion, working people, and my family, as it does with having crushes on girls in high school. And, just as Carol Pope sings, I believe “you can’t go back,” but I feel a strong connection to that place, even when my connections with family may be tenuous and strained.

Regardless of what I gained or lost personally by finding myself in a different world, the living truth remains: I am from that place where floods happen, where people lose their farms, where tent revivals still take place on the banks of the Des Moines every summer. For the most part, however, folks just try to feed themselves and their families. And although this piece follows my personal trek of alienation, attempts to gain perspective, and resistance, I also am remembering those who allowed me to grow.

signs of love:



inspiration point



loveseat (detail), circa 1991



tracks: evidence



vanishing point

FAMILY TREE last winter i came home for the last time and i hung grandma’s laundry out on the line by the time i got done laughing it was frozen stiff i remember now she’s waiting in the kitchen with fried onions and soup it’s been seven long years since i flew the coop i covered my tracks now i can’t find my way back home... METAPHORS for what might have been my family tree’s got an elephant’s skin where on earth did the cottonwoods go with their soft white seeds does anyone know? funny how my blood’s so distant now light years between us no one asking how all i feel is that my family’s not a family to me but who

are we? my daddy's retired my mama works too much but it helps keep her thoughts far out of touch she forwards my mail with a scribbled note: "it's really hectic" is all she wrote SO i took a little tour thru the greyghost town got a village full of spirits of the trees torn down from the banks of a river i called my own grew from the seeds we all had sown. mid-afternoon and not much light long cinder alleys and no one in sight i yell from the schoolhouse there is no sound—just the barks of dogs from miles around...

TOO much history—this is what my friend donna said to summarize why old lovers never quite make it when they try again, or the reason given to me by marie-ann for leaving paris for toronto while we were sweating in the sauna together. too much history in paris, she had said. i've always wondered how much history was too much, and what it felt like, probably because i now feel as though i've had a lifetime deficit. when i left home i tried to disappear but i forgot to leave a trail to find my way back...this talk of history reminds me of martin luther king jr.'s freedom speech, we were robbed of our names, robbed of our language, robbed of our culture, robbed of our families, our history...my back shivers in response, yes that is right, mr. king. i feel remorse, but the only pity i feel is for myself as i begin to confess that perhaps my history was not robbed from me. more likely, more pathetically, had i given it away? too much, too little, gave it away...which was it?



*"People have never had a problem disposing of the past when it gets too difficult. Flesh will burn, photos will burn, and memory, what is that? The imperfect ramblings of fools who will not see the need to forget. And if we can't dispose of it we can alter it. The dead don't shout. There is a certain seductiveness about what is dead. It will retain all those admirable qualities of life with none of that tiresome messiness associated with live things. Crap and complaints and the need for affection. You can auction it, museum it, collect it. It's much safer to be a collector of curios, because if you are curious, you have to sit and sit and see what happens. You have to wait on the beach until it gets cold, and you have to invest in a glass-bottomed boat, which is more expensive than a fishing rod, and puts you in the path of the elements. The curious are always in some danger. If you are curious you might never come home, like all the men who now live with the mermaids at the bottom of the sea."*

- Jeanette Winterson,  
*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*



## love?

1) i go off on my own until i am lost, until i am drunk with who was i yesterday? amnesia. sun comes up, it's wednesday afternoon, i'm in love; only thing is i can't remember with whom. en francais, en anglais, to be in love (with)—a transitive verb, and i cannot think who it is. my love has no one object, or if so, i've forgotten her name and gained some kind of emotional tattoo...but i am surely lost, and i am feeling alive and in love. i know i'll be loved again, i know i'll love again, i can feel it, and this makes all the difference in the world. i am in love just knowing that, i am giddy and giggling uncontrollably, running into people and things, i am both mute and loud, aggressive and gentle.

fidelity

2) look into my eyes, see my insides twist and shout with an abundance of surging blood and crimson brilliance lying just under the skin and fat...the muscle and bone is waiting for you to come and feed. look: my back is your table, my hair your napkin. every woman has the vase with a single bud, but have you seen the nasturtiums explode from every pore on my breasts? you'll be eating your first course for hours, my love. hello, i'll be your waitress for the night, and i intend to make you very...hungry.



3) confusion, surprise, these i am sure of. i hope to see these twins as my friends who know me better than Trust. Trust is not to be trusted, i trust so easily—but the breath of my intuition blows like a fall breeze through the leaves in the form of a secret, a whispered question. the leaves respond, and make their choice, as evidenced by the rich burgundy kaleidoscope pattern below. few things are certain, but always the wind will breathe, always the leaves will respond. everything else is negotiable.

4) most of us are mere apprentices to love, we play in its aesthetic attraction. like trying on vintage clothing—drawn to its charm, lured by its mystique, but caring nothing of its history, its meaning, even its function. we look at ourselves in the mirror, and we are amused. we pose: we hang it back on the rack. instead we'll wear something more expensive, yet mass-produced: the fibres ball up and unravel sooner, stains are hard to remove, the fabric rips like a page from your diary. yes, we choose to dress ourselves in the insidiously flawed, knowing that “wearing it out” comes conveniently quick, and gives a surefire excuse to go shopping once again.

trust



desire?

Deanna Bickford is finishing her Masters in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, and identifies with all kinds of queer-socialist-anarchist-ecologist tendencies.



# UnderCurrents: Guidelines for Submissions

*UnderCurrents* accepts original articles, reviews, fictions, photographic and art work concerned with interrogating issues of the “environment” and the politics of “nature”. Submissions are encouraged from any critical field that is seeking to rethink normative or standard Western discourses, practices and representations of the “natural” world.

**Papers/Articles** should be no longer than 3000-4000 words. Article submissions should be double-spaced, including endnotes. All endnotes should be placed at the end of the text and follow Chicago Manual of Style (13th edition.) guidelines.

**Reviews** can be either short critiques (300-1200 words) or full-length review essays. The review should include full publication information.

One hard-copy of the paper plus one disk-copy (3.5”, IBM-PC or Macintosh) should be submitted.

**Photographs** should be black and white, and no larger than 8.5x11”. Originals are preferable. Macintosh TIFF format gray-scale digitized images are also accepted.

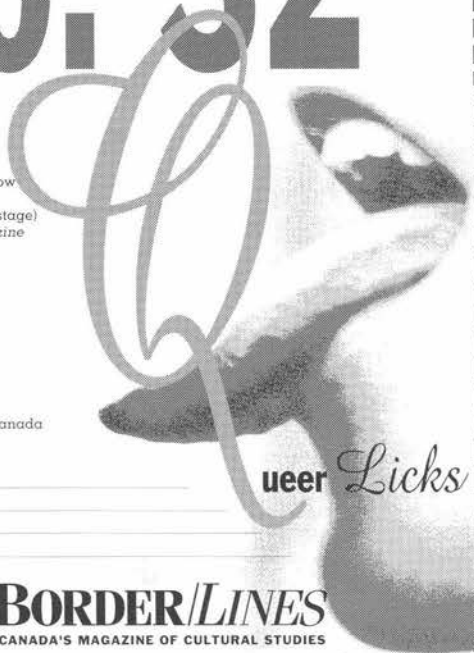
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Among the homosexual females there was also a tendency toward

under-development of the breasts

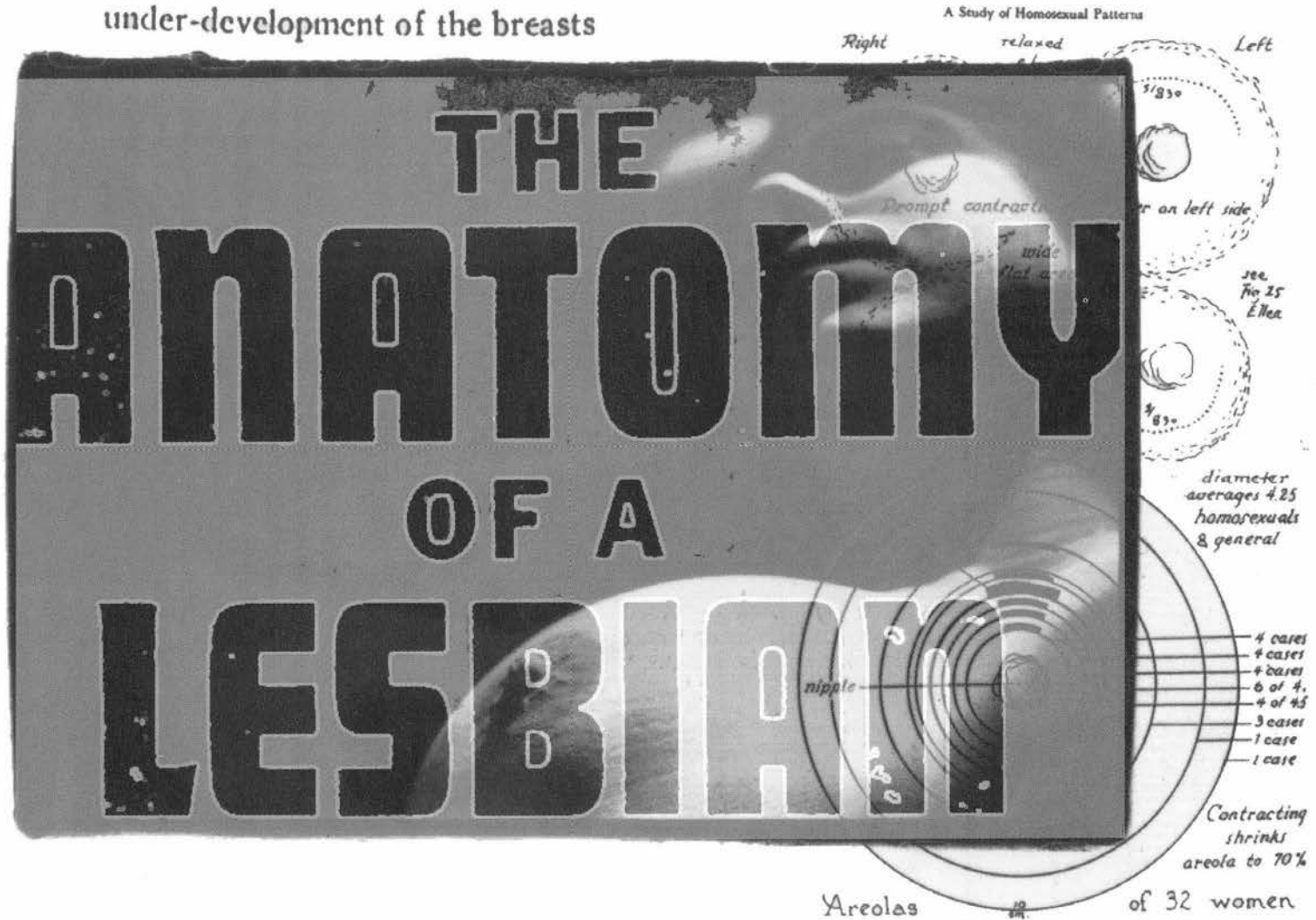


FIGURE 1



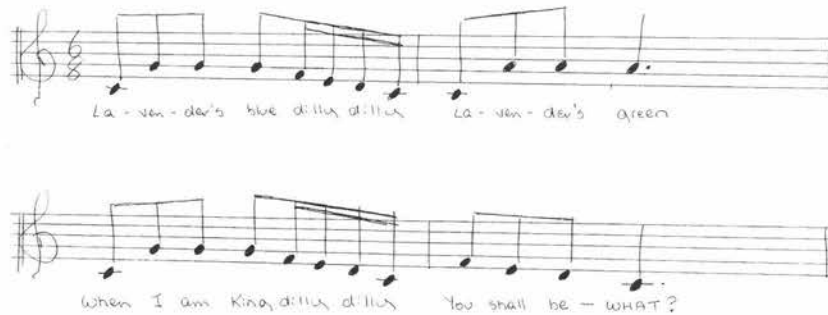
# Lavender's Green?

## Some Thoughts on Queer(y)ing Environmental Politics



catriona sandilands

1.



2.

At the Stein Valley festival in the Summer of 1989, Anne Cameron, who was presumed to be an authority on such things, was asked “what is the place of gay men and lesbians in the environmental movement?” She answered: “everywhere.” Much applause. Next question.

Cameron might have meant that there are multiple places where queer and environmental politics coincide, multiple points of conversation between two profoundly transformative agendas. She might have meant that it is not useful to speak of a *single* ecological space in which lesbians and gay men might find a particular voice. She might have even meant that the entire agenda of environmentalism is in need of a profound “queering,” a process by which a variety of tenets of eco-politics would be held up to polysexual scrutiny.

But in the absence of any significant and sustained conversations between L/G/Bi and environmental politics, I don't think it's possible to read Cameron's statement, or even the applause, optimistically. In the move by which Cameron and her audience so unproblematically moved on to the next question, “everywhere” came to mean “nowhere”: the agenda is already set; there is no useful “queer” specificity to be discussed; get on with it. If you want to be “green,” don't bother showing your “lavender.”<sup>1</sup>

3.

- ▼ We're here, we're queer, we're not going nuclear!<sup>2</sup>
- ▼ Mother Nature is a butch!
- ▼ Out of the closet and into the woods — join us now!
- ▼ 2 - 4 - 6 - 8 - not all life on earth is straight!



4.

It is not enough to point to “one-in-ten” environmentalists, as if the mere presence of gay bodies at blockades of logging roads were a significant form of inclusion or conversation. It is not enough simply to add “heterosexism” to the long list of dominations that shape our relations to nature, to pretend that we can just “add queers and stir” in our formulations of what “oppression” and “exploitation” mean. It is not enough to wear buttons with pink triangles beside the ones that say “Save the Whales” and “Stop Acid Rain.” It is not enough, even, to imagine that the tree you are hugging is the same sex as you.

Or perhaps that’s a start. Maybe it’s even flirting with you.

5.

*This earth is my sister;  
I love her daily grace, her silent daring, and how  
loved I am.*<sup>3</sup>

6.

You would think that ecofeminism would be a reasonable place to find some sort of critical examination of the relations between (at least) lesbian and environmental politics. But I am constantly amazed by the profound heterosexuality of its metaphors, the ways in which reproduction, in its narrowest sense, is often located as the “apex” of women’s connection to nature. Why do women not embrace “sister earth” as a lover? Has the sexualization of nature been so completely, so *unwillingly* penetrative—“raping” the wild—as to render celibate our affections?

Or is it that the inclusion of “queer” would force us to call into question the ways in which “women,” as a category, has been invoked in a rather monolithic way, both in ecofeminism itself and in the “worldview” that it purportedly challenges? Discourses of “difference,” meaning heterosexual difference, live on in many ecofeminist discussions of “who women are,” and also in many understandings of “nature” itself. Therein lies a challenge.

7.

Snails are hermaphrodites. Earthworms too. Bedbugs are homosexual [now we know why our parents cautioned us “don’t let the bedbugs bite”]. Geese indulge in *menages a trois*.<sup>4</sup>

8.

Arguments from “nature” have been commonly used to attack any sexuality other than reproductive heterosexual penetration. Despite the considerable evidence that many species engage in same-gender sex (however you may want to understand the validity of using “evidence” from other species to reflect upon human behaviour), “homosexuality” has been socially positioned as “unnatural.” Indeed, when same-gender sex is observed in other species, “the paradigm of heterosexism ... selectively overrides the use of nature as a model of alternate gender and sexual relationships.”<sup>5</sup> Yet “nature” is still invoked as a tool of condemnation.

At the same time, “homosexuality” has been socially positioned as “uncivilized.” As Gary Kinsman notes, discourses around “degeneracy” have been used in medical and psychiatric practice to define “homosexuals, like criminals, as throwbacks to earlier stages of civilization.”<sup>6</sup> A mutant Darwin continues to haunt us.

“Queers” have thus been positioned as boundary-creatures: neither fully “natural” nor fully “civilized.”<sup>7</sup> Surely here the inclusion of “queer” into environmental politics would have us interrogate the discursive relations by which such a position is possible? Given the tendency in (some) environmental political theory to describe “oppression” in terms of the operations of hierarchical dualism (nature/culture, man/woman), it would seem that the inclusion of “queer” would also have us interrogate the adequacy of “dualism” as a description of power, and the political forms that result from such an analysis.<sup>8</sup>



Cock-of-the-Rock

9.

queer, a., & v.t. 1. Strange, odd, eccentric; of questionable character, shady, suspect. 2. Spoil, put out of order.  
- Concise Oxford Dictionary

10.

Perhaps we are asking the wrong question. The inclusion of “queer” into environmental politics must involve not so much a noun as an adjective and verb. Rather than enumerate some series of points where lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgenderists can carve out some sort of unique “position” in relation to environmental issues, perhaps the point is to “queer” nature itself, to create “queer” environments.

To queer nature is to question its normative use, to interrogate relations of knowledge and power by which certain “truths” about ourselves have been allowed to pass, unnoticed, without question. It is a process by which all relations to nature become de-naturalized, by which we question the ways in which we are located in nature, by which we question the uses to which “nature” has been put. To queer nature is to “put out of order” our understandings, so our “eccentricities” can be produced more forcefully.

Queer environments are thus those in which the boundaries between “nature” and “culture” are shown to be arbitrary, dialectical, mutually-constitutive. These are places where “unnatural” and “uncivilized” combine to produce questionable, shady, suspect, characters who are not comfortable inhabiting existing bifurcations.

11.

The cock-of-the-rock, a native of South America, has a permanently erected crest that practically conceals its small beak. This strange bird’s chief claim to fame lies in its extraordinary ritual dancing ceremonies. During these performances, one male at a time cavorts and postures on a rock or outcrop whilst the other males and the females watch near by.<sup>9</sup>

12.

Read the cock-of-the-rock as a drag queen both to call into question the “naturalness” of any particular sexuality or gender, and to force us to consider the situatedness of all interpretive practices around “nature.”

Position drag “in” nature both to suggest that “nature” may be partially performative, and to challenge the boundaries between “truth” and “artifice.”

Speak of nature and artifice as non-mutually-exclusive to suggest that the truth may be stranger than we could ever imagine.

13.

The earth has innumerable modes of being that are not human modes. Our direct intuitions tell us that the earth is infinitely strange, even where gentle and beautiful.<sup>10</sup>

We have met strange and it is us.<sup>11</sup>

14.

A politics that would have us celebrate “strangeness” would place queer at the centre, rather than on the margins, of the discursive universe. It is not that we encounter “the stranger” only when we visit “wilderness,” but that s/he/it inhabits even the most everyday of our actions. To treat the world as “strange” is to open up the possibility of wonder, to speak also with the impenetrable spaces between the words in our language.

Such a project lies at the core of refiguring both human relations to nonhuman nature, and human relations to each other. It involves both a certain humbleness, and, in William Connolly’s words, a certain generosity. “Not a generosity growing out of the unchallengeable privilege of a superior social position and moral ontology, but one emerging from enhanced appreciation of dissonances within our own identities.”<sup>12</sup> Not a rigid boundary between Self/knowledge, and Other/fear, but movement in the world through a multitude of queer environments.

15.

*I would have loved to live in a world  
of women and men gaily  
in collusion with green leaves, stalks,  
building mineral cities, transparent domes,  
little huts of woven grass  
each with its own pattern—  
a conspiracy to coexist  
with the Crab Nebula, the exploding  
universe, the Mind —<sup>13</sup>*



16.

Gaily in collusion. Such a process would seem to mark the subversive conversation between queer and environmental politics, a conversation that demands of each change, accommodation, displacement. The “nature” of environmentalism, here, would seem to depend on such an articulation.

Strange bedfellows, perhaps, queers and environmentalists, but stranger, hopefully, the results.

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## Notes

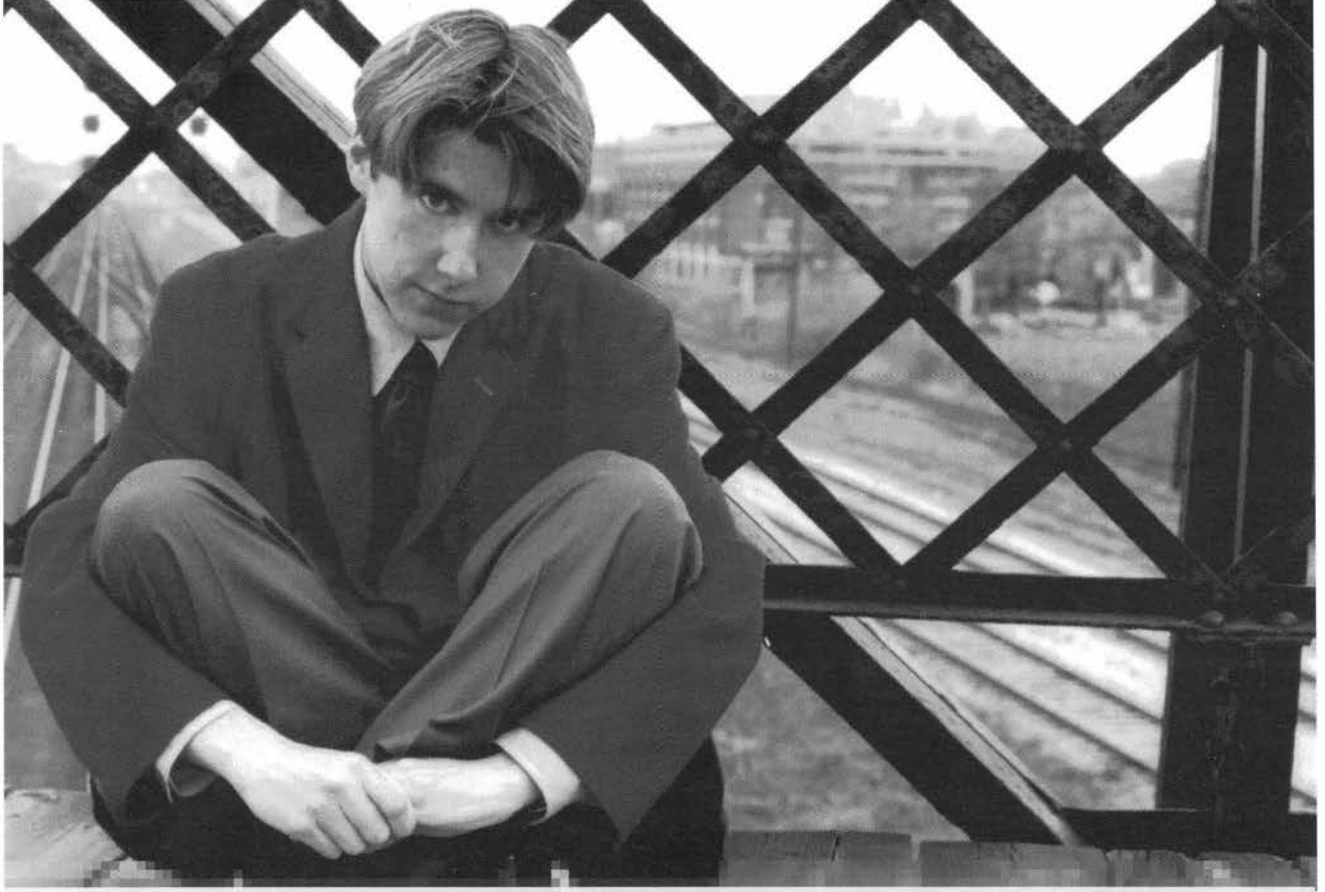
- <sup>1</sup> The corollary position — if you want to be “lavender,” don’t bother showing your “green” — will not be discussed in this paper. But I encourage the question: how can one speak of “greening” the queer, and not just “queering” the green?
- <sup>2</sup> Queer Nation, during the Gulf War, chanted “we’re here, we’re queer, we’re not going to war” in a variety of demonstrations. I found this much more interesting than the otherwise endless repetition of old John Lennon lyrics.
- <sup>3</sup> Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 219.
- <sup>4</sup> Jane Curry, “On Looking to Nature for Women’s Place,” in *And a Deer’s Ear, Eagle’s Song, and Bear’s Grace: Animals and Women*, ed. Theresa Corrigan and Stephanie Hoppe (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1990), p. 152.
- <sup>5</sup> Bonnie B. Spencer, “Lessons’ from ‘Nature’: Gender Ideology and Sexual Ambiguity in Biology,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 330.
- <sup>6</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, cited in Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987), p. 50.
- <sup>7</sup> On this paradox, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 132.
- <sup>8</sup> Donna Haraway’s argument similarly critiques the idea of “dualism” as a description of contemporary forms of power. Her “cyborg” is, of course, also a boundary-creature; one could even argue that the category “homosexual” is “cyborg,” insofar as it is at least partly a scientific construction (see Kinsman). So here, I invoke her discussions of fractured and partial identities, although not in detail. See Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- <sup>9</sup> Desmond Morris, *Introducing Curious Creatures* (London: Spring Books, 1961), p. 64.
- <sup>10</sup> Alan Wittbecker, “Nature as Self,” *The Trumpeter* 6:3 (Summer, 1989), p. 80.
- <sup>11</sup> Paraphrased from Walt Kelly’s “We have met the enemy and he is us,” on a Pogo Poster for Earth Day, 1971.
- <sup>12</sup> William Connolly, “Voices from the Whirlwind,” in *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment*, eds. Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 221.
- <sup>13</sup> Adrienne Rich, from “The Phenomenology of Anger,” in *Adrienne Rich’s Poetry*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 71.

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Heather Cameron, "DandyLions" 1993, from the Queer Sights, Toronto exhibition



# NOT QUITE BEDTIME

ailsa craig

---

Right now, this is what I want.  
I'm lying in bed  
It's one of the days in the millennia between  
when we see each other  
I want you

I want to take you offguard  
with a cold hand slipping under your clothes  
and onto your waist  
on a streetcar filled with people  
who were already trying not to look.  
Kiss me.

I want to hear you knock on my door  
and come into my room,  
Watch you take your clothes off  
then reach for each other.  
I almost stop breathing each time  
in that first moment when my skin remembers yours.

I want you to fill me.  
To see you reach for the lube  
"It's cold."  
"I know"  
and I want to open for you.  
I want to give that to you.  
I want you to fuck me.

I want to hear you again  
with your arms above your head  
pushing against my bedroom wall.  
I want to see the muscles through your body  
straining  
tensing.  
I want to feel your cunt around my fingers  
my hand.  
Moving with me  
Filling me.

And if you start to cry  
as your jaw quivers and we've both lost words  
I want to touch the side of your face  
run my fingers through your hair  
till we're back where it feels safe again  
and kiss you.

# IN HER MEMORY...

ailsa craig

---

Lying in the bath  
hot water seeping  
tension from my shoulders  
so I can sleep tonight.  
My fingers cross my stomach  
to my cunt.  
Purply pink  
I can't forget you touching me.  
The hair has started  
growing back.  
Stubble curls replacing  
what I'd shaved away  
because you  
touched it all.

I wash my arms, my legs, my thighs  
marks of purple blue  
to map your anger,  
Bruises showing  
through the bubbles  
Pull the plug and watch the suds swirl down.

I lock my bedroom door  
and flinch at every sound  
remembering  
you.

---

Ailsa Craig has published in *Quota* and *Xtra!*. She is currently doing research for a book about abusive lesbian relationships. She lives in Toronto with her lover and two cats.

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Marc Tremblay

You don't have to talk to me...



but I like small talk...



and other diversions...



BUT I DON'T LIKE CREDIT CARDS! Cash only, please.



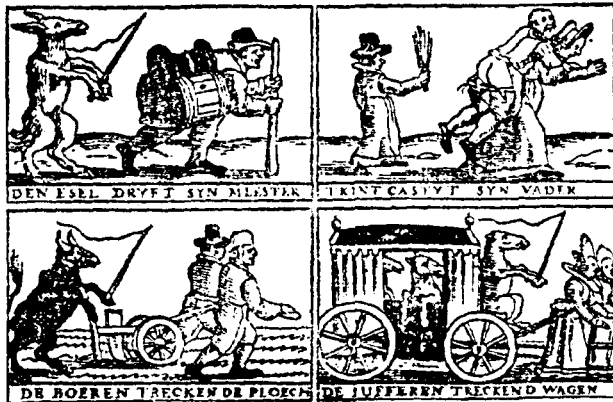
# Buggeries

Buggery (*offensa cunjus nominatio crimen est*, as it is euphemistically designated in legal documents) was uniformly punished by putting to death both parties implicated, and usually by burning them alive. The beast, too, is punished and both are burned (*punitur etiam pecus et ambo comburuntur*), Guilielmus Benedictinus, a writer on law, who lived about the end of the fourteenth century. Thus, in 1546, a man and a cow were hanged and then burned by order of the parliament of Paris, the supreme court of France. In 1466, the same tribunal condemned a man and a sow to be burned at Corbeil. Occasionally interment was substituted for incremation. Thus in 1609, at Niederrad, a man and a mare were executed and their bodies buried in the same carrion-pit. On the 12th of September, 1606, the mayor of Loens de Chartres, on complaint of the dean, canons and chapter cathedral of Chartres, condemned a man named Guillaume Guyart to be "hanged and strangled on a gibbet in reparation and punishment of sodomy whereof the said Guyart is declared accused, attained and convicted." A bitch, his accomplice, was sentenced to be knocked on the head (*assommée*) by the executioner of high justice and "the dead bodies both to be burned and reduced to ashes. . . ." This disgusting crime appears to be very common at least Ayrault in his *Ordre Judiciaire*, published in 1606 he has many times (*multoties*) seen brute beasts put to death for this cause.



In his *Magnalia Christi America* (Book VI, (III), London, 1702) Cotton Mather records that "on June 6, 1662, at New Haven, there was a most unparalleled wretch, one Potter by name, about sixty years of age, executed for damnable Bestialities." He had been a member of the Church for twenty years and was noted for his piety, "devout in worship, gifted in prayer, forward in edifying discourse among the religious, and zealous in reforming the sins of other people." Yet this monster, who is described as possessed by an unclean devil, "lived in the most infandous Buggeries for no less than fifty years together, and now at the gallows there were killed before his eyes a cow, two heifers, three sheep and two sows, with all of which he committed his brutalities. His

wife had seen him confounding himself with a bitch ten years before; and he then excused himself as well he could, conjured her to keep it secret." He afterwards hanged the bitch, probably as a sort of vicarious atonement. According to this account he must have begun to practice sodomy when he was ten years of age, vicious precocity which the author would doubtless explain on the theory of diabolical possession.



In 1681, a habitual sodomite, who had been wont to defile himself with greyhounds, cows, swine, sheep, and all manner of beasts, was brought to trial together with a mare, at Wünschelberg in Silesia, where both were burned alive. In 1684, on the 3rd of May, a bugger was beheaded at Ottendorf, and the mare, his partner in crime, knocked on the head; it was expressly enjoined that in burning the bodies the man's should lie underneath that of the beast. In the following year, fourteen days before Christmas, a journeyman tailor, "who had committed the unnatural deed of carnal lewdness with a mare," was burned at Striga together with the mare.



From E.P. Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals: The Lost History of Europe's Animal Trials*. London: Heinemann, 1906.

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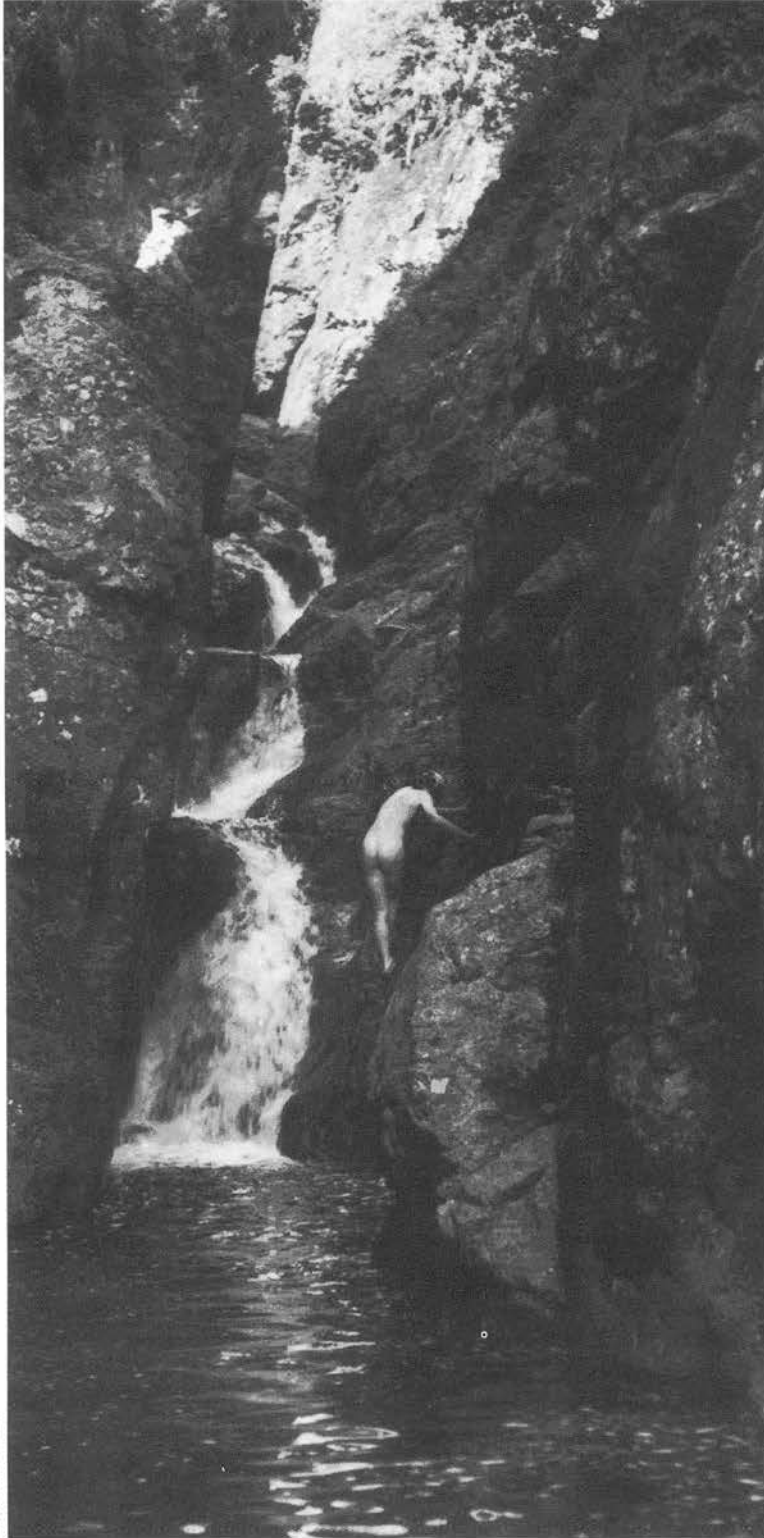


Photo: Amish Morrell

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Amish Morrell is a student in the Bachelors of Environmental Studies program at York University. He is exploring the use of photography in facilitating awareness of and communication around environmental issues. Amish is from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

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# Sex, Earth, & Death in Gay Theology

j. michael clark

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## (i) Erotic Connections for Ecology

Because I am a theologian whose ideas have been fundamentally shaped by the lived, sexual experience of gay men, both my understanding of what justice means and my perspective on ecology or environmental ethical theory are firmly grounded in or connected to the erotic. Both justice and ecology are relational matters, clarified by how we come to understand our most intimate (and usually also sexual) human relationships. More specifically, as I have internalized the work of Carter Heyward and Jim Nelson in my own theology,<sup>1</sup> I have come to affirm with them that our fundamental need for connectedness, love, and self-affirming acceptance—our erotic drive toward connectedness with all things—undergirds our quest for mutuality and, through the realization of that quest, our efforts to establish justice in all relationships, not just our sexually expressed ones. In other words, our sexuality is not so much about where, how, or with whom we put our genitals, but is rather something that permeates our lives and that both urges us toward and sustains our relationships—even those that are not genitally consummated ones. As such, our sexuality enables—nay, compels—liberational, justice-seeking activity in the world.<sup>2</sup>

As my understanding of erotic empowerment has thus expanded to encompass that energy which not only com-

pels justice-making in all my human relationships, but which also compels justice-making in all other relationships as well, I have concluded that the care and tenderness of our specific relationships must inform all our values, all our ways of relating to and seeking justice within the world—both biospheric and geospheric—lest we remain in conflict with ourselves: One cannot make-love and make-hate simultaneously. Of course, if I am going to affirm that erotic empowerment also informs ecology, I have to address my specific sexuality as well. In other words, I have to inquire as to what the specific experiences and perspectives of being gay or lesbian in a homophobic society permeated by AIDS can bring to ecological discourse.<sup>3</sup>

Ecofeminist Anne Primavesi has noted that “by becoming aware of patterns of domination [and exploitation] in our own lives, we learn to connect these patterns with the domination of non-human nature.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed we do, for we are reminded that the same dualisms which link nature, women, and sexuality extend to gay and lesbian people who are also viewed as primarily and excessively sexual and unspiritual. We, too, are subject to heteropatriarchy’s devaluing and disvaluing reductionism. In fact, our experience of total disvaluation as valueless (even as “bad”) and of violence against us as gay men and lesbians enables us also to see the extent to which our society also disvalues nature and acts violently upon both the human and nonhuman environment.

In fact, we can construct a gay ecotheological analysis in contradistinction to primarily male “deep ecology” and as a further extension of ecofeminism. According to deep ecology, an anthropocentric world view of human self-centeredness or selfishness has led to environmental problems; in contrast, according to ecofeminism, an androcentric world view of masculine privilege and social structures has devalued and exploited both women and nature.<sup>5</sup> Gay

ecotheology insists that both these views are incomplete: The predominantly western, white, heteromascu-  
linist world view is the problem; not only are women, nature, and sexuality devalued, but heteropatriarchy’s hierarchy of values and categories disvalues diversity. What we gay men and lesbians see is not just a devaluing which leads to domination and exploitation, but a disvaluing which strips away all value and which thereby leads to exclusion and disposability—to being acceptable for extinction.

Ecofeminism has articulately addressed the patriarchal hierarchy of value which devalues (which lowers value) in order to dominate, use, and exploit. Gay ecotheology extends this to address the heteropatriarchal hierarchy of value which disvalues (which strips away all value) in order to get rid of, to use up, to dispose of as having no further use or no use whatsoever. While ecofeminists work against the devaluation and domination of self and world as utilitarian objects for a masculine society, gay ecotheology works against the disvaluation and exclusion of self and world as disposable, worthless commodities in a heterosexist society which disdains diversity and eliminates the unnecessary—that which has no utilitarian value.

Especially for those of us who are gay men or lesbians, disvaluation, exclusion, and disposability must also factor into ecological analysis, in addition to devaluation, exploitation, and domination, because we see our society virtually willing to throw away our earth, our home, as well as because we carry within our collective memory an awareness of just how often human beings themselves have been treated as expendable and disposable. In the history of the gay and lesbian communities, never has our own expendability been so evident as in the rising incidence of anti-gay/lesbian violence and particularly in the AIDS health crisis. The same value hierarchy that insists that nature is reducible to expendable resources also insists on dichotomizing innocent



and not-innocent victims of AIDS. Gay men, IV-drug users, people of color, and third world countries where AIDS rages heterosexually are still devalued and disvalued. Our expendability mitigates the urgency of cure or treatment. And the experience of our expendability becomes a paradigmatic metaphor for western culture's attitudes toward all the earth. Hence, gay ecotheology adamantly opposes any disvaluation and exclusion which leads to dispensing with diversity and disposing of life. Potentially, at least, gay men and lesbians together can become the embodied witnesses for an ecotheology which discloses that our gay and lesbian existence is not only a mode of being-in-the-world, but also a way of being-with-the-world as co-partners in the inclusive processes of healing and liberation.

As we realize the absolutely equal and intrinsic value of all that is, as well as the fundamental and erotically informed interconnectedness, relationality, and interdependence of all things within the web of Being, we cannot help but question the human arrogance which has permeated heteropatriarchy. We are in fact compelled to exchange egocentrism for ecocentrism, to exchange anthropocentrism for what Primavesi has termed "ecological humility."<sup>6</sup> "Ecological humility" can also be understood as part and parcel of an important Jewish concept. The concept of *tikkun olam* entails our obligation to be about the business of repairing the world, both in its human and nonhuman, its biospheric and geospheric aspects. It does not assume that humanity is the pinnacle of creation, but rather celebrates the intrinsic value and rich diversity of all that is and reminds us of our humble interdependence within the web of Being. *Tikkun olam* also requires that we assume the tasks of caring, cooperation, and responsibility. It is our obligation to love the earth and to love life itself, even though we are mortal and our individual lives must end.<sup>7</sup>

## (ii) An Ecology of Death

Because I am both gay and HIV+, I am all too aware of such mortality. As a result, I am specifically interested in exploring what an erotically empowered, ecological theology has to say about death. One thing is certainly clear: Our traditional Christian understandings of eschatology—of death as somehow not-death, not really—have had extremely negative environmental consequences. Traditional eschatology has functioned as yet one more sanction for devaluing and, ultimately, disvaluing the earth and this embodied life. As Catherine Keller has noted, the "drive to transcendent unity" with the divine, outside or beyond this life and this world, is "a profound impetus in all patriarchal spirituality, and it always achieves its end at the expense of nature and multiplicity."<sup>8</sup> Devaluing this earth inevitably leads to the careless disvaluing of the diversity of life on earth by means of exploitation to the point of the extinction of species; eliminating complexity works toward eliminating any viable future for life on earth. The danger of patriarchal, linear thinking is that it assumes both a literal beginning ("creation") and a literal ending ("eschaton"). Coupled with a transcendent, otherworldly spirituality, such linear thinking also implies that we can or that we should work the earth to that end and thereby hasten the arrival of the "next" world. Such otherworldliness not only devalues and disvalues this world, but actually sanctions exhausting a clearly expendable earth.<sup>9</sup>

One clear alternative to such otherworldly eschatology, however, is very difficult to accept. Watching so many of our friends die "due to complications from AIDS" before their fortieth birthdays while we gay men monitor our own health and bodies and T-cell counts makes the idea that when we die, we're dead, period, altogether extremely unpalatable. Nevertheless, we cannot pursue escapist solutions to this problem. Karl Peters

named our shared dilemma in his paper discussed during the 1992 American Academy of Religion meetings. He said, "The atomistic, individualistic understanding of human nature makes it very difficult to see that there is anything positive for ourselves in our own dying."<sup>10</sup> And, he's right. An isolated and individualistic understanding of human nature is so ingrained in us that we obsess about the loss in death of our individual, subjective, experiencing center—what Peters calls the "phenomenal self"<sup>11</sup>—and we will do anything in our mental, spiritual, and physical power to avoid confronting our own mortality and dealing with our own death as the end. Peters argues that we must instead come to see ourselves "in a bigger picture, not just as individuals but as part of larger systems,"<sup>12</sup> as part of familial and relational networks, as interwoven within the biosphere, the geosphere, and the cosmos. Rosemary Radford Ruether also challenges this stubborn individualism which clings to the phenomenal self, because this individualism both denies death and disvalues (other) life.<sup>13</sup> Our own "personal selves" or "phenomenal selves" are transient. Just as we emerged out of a greater oneness, through conception and birth (out of erotic empowerment if you will), and have "individuated" throughout our embodied lives, so in death we must relinquish individuality and merge back into oneness. And, this is very hard for our phenomenal, subjective selves to accept.

An ecological perspective may help. Ruether reminds us, for example, that "in nature, death is not an enemy, but a friend of the life process. The death side of the life cycle is an essential component of that renewal of life by which dead organisms are broken down and become the nutrients of new organic growth."<sup>14</sup> Peters echoes her wisdom when he says, "In a finite world, the possibilities of existence can only be actualized in sequences in which some things give way to other things. ...Death is a necessary good

in that it allows for new forms of life, new ways of living and thinking to be born.”<sup>15</sup> He even goes so far as to argue that it may be possible to see our individual deaths “as contributing to the good of both others and ourselves in the context of ongoing human society and continuing [nonhuman] life on our planet.”<sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, the early Judaic roots of our dominant western religious tradition do not encourage either individualism or death-denial. Two key elements (among others) for a Judaic ecology are relationality (with god/ess and the world, intimately and covenantally interwoven one with the other) and mortality (as human limitation and as limits on human power, use, and abuse). In fact, prior to Hellenic influences, Judaism “saw mortality as natural rather than a problem to be overcome. Its vision of blessedness had focused on a healthy and prosperous life in a full term of years, not escape from mortality altogether.”<sup>17</sup> Just as the mandate of *tikkun olam* precluded an exploitative relationship to the earth, so an ecology built upon the cyclical renewal of earth and creatures, notably in the periodic Jubilee year, precluded linear, apocalyptic, end-time thinking, prior to the rise of later messianic expectation. According to Ruether, this Jewish perspective that “mortality is our natural condition, which we share with all other earth beings, and that redemption is the fullness of life within these limits, is a more authentic ethic for ecological living”<sup>18</sup> and, I would add, ecological dying as well.

This strand in Judaism brings me back to Karl Peters’ paper. He defines the phenomenal self as a “symbiotic union of biology and culture.”<sup>19</sup> This “symbiotic union” is clearly relational and interactive, because he goes on to say that, “as webs of reality, each of us has the possibility of continuing in particular ways beyond the death of our phenomenal selves”; moreover, “our cultural, biological, and cosmic continuation constitute a kind of immortality, not of ourselves as self-conscious

subjects, but a kind of objective immortality—of how we continue in terms of our influences on others in our society, on the human life form, on other forms of life, and even on the earth itself.”<sup>20</sup> Peters implicitly shares an important ethical and ecological mandate with the early Jewish perspective: We are called to construct



our lives so as to make positive, quality of life differences in the lives of others, both human and nonhuman, both biospheric and geospheric alike. “Objective immortality” then means that our impact on the quality of life for others and for the earth itself continues. Even without ego, or names, or other individualistic identification—and certainly without indi-

vidual, subjective, phenomenal experience—our influence is interwoven into the ongoing, processive cycles of the web of Being. The question remains, however, as to whether even “objective” immortality, just by the very use of the word “immortality,” doesn’t risk becoming just one more ruse by which we avoid confronting the very hard reality of our own personal deaths. That when we die, it’s over. Ended. Period. And this is where I get stuck.

Both intellectually and ecologically I know that life and death are one, that just as we came out of that oneness, we must return to it. Any otherworldly eschatology is certainly ecologically untenable. Any immortality beyond that of our attention to and impact upon the quality of life for others and for the earth itself, here and now, is impossible and, ultimately, undesirable. I cannot fathom what it would be like to live forever, nor do I think I would really want to. At the same time, I certainly don’t want my subjective experience of my relational network to come to an end. I do not want to leave my spouse behind and I do not want him to leave me behind. I do not want anyone else to leave “due to complications from AIDS.” And yet, I cannot deny the reality and the finality of death for my phenomenal self, for my subjective, experiencing, individual self. I am left not with some calmly, objectively achieved, intellectual truth, but rather with the paradox of two seemingly incompatible emotions: Both deep gratitude for life and passionate grief, whether for another’s or for my own ending, are legitimate emotions held in tension. Importantly, “passionate grief” also embraces our anger and protest against the realities of suffering and death.<sup>21</sup>

From an ecotheological perspective I must conclude that death is the final word for our individual, embodied, subjectively experiencing, phenomenal selves. At the same time, death is not the final word for our lives as “symbiotic unions of

biology and culture” whose influence upon the relational web of Being continues affectively beyond our deaths. We will continue to have an influence on other life—for good or for ill; we just won’t be able to experience that. That we are not atomized and isolated individuals, but beings interwoven with/in/to Being provides an ethical mandate here—the same urging toward justice first experienced in erotic connectedness. As a result, even though death does have the final word for our phenomenal selves, we cannot live for number one in any reckless or irresponsible sense. Death’s finality does not obviate human or environmental ethics.

As we open ourselves to life with gratitude and meet death with appropriate grief, we can begin to take responsibility for our dying as well as for our living. We must find in our gratitude and wonder at this erotic and sensuous life the empowerment to trust through both our fear of the unknown and our grief at leaving embodied relationships and experiences—our grief that our subjective life must end—and thereby allow ourselves to be embraced anew by the divine oneness. Nobody said it would be easy. But, a sweet bye-and-bye eschatology is not only escapism, but an escapism that impugns the earth and damages life with reckless, devaluing disregard, and that, as a result, also threatens to deny the value of our personal lives as well. Rather than have the value of our lives so cancelled out, we can embrace our gratitude, our grief, even our protest—all our erotically embodied passions—and choose an absolutely trusting, eschatological leap of faith. It is a hard and painful choice, but it can also be a liberating and empowering one, freeing us from a fearful obsession with death to being more fully alive in the present. Fortunately, the strength of our erotically empowered and embodied, loving relationships—our personal ecosystems—can enable us into and through such a sacred passage.

### (iii) An Ecotheology of Life

As I have wrestled with these concerns, I have become more and more willing to argue that our best understanding of the divine is one which insists that god/ess is interwoven into and through all that is; all the individual expressions of life together constitute the divine. Just as we experience a relationship over time as something over and above the two individuals in that relationship, god/ess is something that includes all that is but which, as the whole-cloth of all that is, cannot be simplistically reduced to the parts. The metaphor which has consistently come to mind is that of a quilt. A quilt is made up of various pieces of fabric, different designs, different textures, which must be sewn together into a whole-cloth for the quilt to exist. A simple pile of swatches of cloth (a simple total of the parts) does not make a quilt, but their interrelatedness into a whole does. Each piece of the quilt is a part of the whole-cloth, just as each living thing is a part of the divine. Just as “quiltiness” is a part of each piece of a quilt once it is sewn into the whole, so the divine is interwoven into and through each individual life which participates in the whole of life, of Being itself. Every individual life, both human and nonhuman, geospheric and biospheric, embodies or incarnates the divine.

This also means there is no first cause, no divine quilt maker. The cosmic quilt did not originate outside itself. There is no creator God in this traditional sense. Unlike humanly crafted quilts, the cosmic quilt just is. And, as a result, good and evil are not warring opposites in the fabric of life. Good and evil constitute a unity, not a dualism. Reality simply is. Sometimes the fabric in a particular swatch of cloth is weaker than that in other swatches; sometimes the threads which bind piece to piece are not as sturdy. As the life of the quilt progresses, those weaker pieces tear; they undergo suffering. And, surrounding swatches are diminished by the loss of

their weakened and “suffering” neighbors; humanly speaking, they undergo grief. But the suffering and the grieving which the pieces of the quilt experience are not imposed from outside; they are not caused by some moral agent, some supreme quilter who purposefully chose weak fabric or sloppy stitching. Although I may protest against this reality, I cannot blame the fabric of life for the fact that I will not last forever, but I can rejoice that, because the quilt of life is organic, as I pass out of existence, other pieces of life-fabric will be born and will grow into their rightful, although equally transient, places within the quilt. Importantly, as well, the whole-cloth does not punish some swatches or patterns for differing from other swatches or patterns. Diversity is the very richness of the quilt.

And so, I find myself trying to affirm that both good and evil, life and death, even death from HIV progression and AIDS, are simply part and parcel of the whole. I may not like that reality, but I cannot escape it. We have erred whenever we have conceptualized the divine as a moral agent who was anthropomorphically assigned all power, all knowledge, and all goodness. We have erred whenever we expected the divine to act, morally good, as a rescuer. We have erred whenever we blamed the divine for acting, morally bad, as the cause of so-called “natural evil.” And, we have also erred whenever we accused the divine of weakness, moral or otherwise, for failing to rescue us from reality, however difficult to bear it may be. While human evil (e.g., injustice, homophobia) rightly demands human correctives, suffering and so-called natural evil (e.g., AIDS) are our experiences of natural processes which are really, in and of themselves, morally neutral components of a morally neutral and given whole-cloth, however grievous those processes and experiences may be to us. This is not to deny the reality and the pathos of our experience. Our pain, our grief, our suffering, and our deaths are certainly

real. Indeed, even though so-called natural evils do not have any ultimate Final Cause, these occasions demand appropriate human response, which is to say: compassion. In and of itself, HIV is also morally neutral. Our experience of its activity in our bodies and our experience of the ways in which it brings many of us to premature ends are together something which we certainly experience as evil, and we rightly protest its reality and struggle to find ways to overcome its power. But we cannot blame the divine for its existence; rather, we must turn our ethical considerations toward those humans who use this occurrence of experienced natural evil as occasions for enacting human evil, human hatred, and human injustice.

Carol Christ has said that she believes that "all that is cares."<sup>22</sup> Ron Long has argued that the divine is not a creator, or even a personal being, but is best understood as resistance (to human injustice and to occurrences of natural evil) and as hope (in the fulfilling of human justice and in the overcoming of human suffering).<sup>23</sup> I have tried to synthesize these ideas.<sup>24</sup> I know that god/ess is not a being as such, not a creator, not a first mover, or a divine quiltmaker. Rather, the divine is interwoven with/in/to the very fabric of life; s/he is the whole-cloth of Being itself, the organic quilting of all that is. And yet, I believe that we often experience this as personal, as if god/ess in godself was still someone with whom we could relate, with whom we could enter into dialogue in prayer or worship. I have wanted to exculpate this anthropomorphic image of the divine from responsibility for evil, as if the divine and evil were separable, but my own radical monotheism will not allow such dualism. Nevertheless, I still "experience" the divine as companion, friend, co-creator and co-sufferer, as comfort in suffering and empowerment in the pursuit of justice.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the quilt image will help again. As one swatch within the fabric of life, I can speak of the whole, not as

something objectified outside myself (as an I-It relation), but as the whole of which I am intimately a part (as an I-Thou relation). To speak of and even to the whole, metaphorically as if it were not-me, does not mean that I do not recognize that I am a part of that whole-cloth with whom I commune in meditation or prayer, or about whom I speak theologically. The divine is as intimately interwoven with/in/to my being as I am with/in/to godself. Our lives and our deaths are a part of that whole. We bear responsibilities to contribute well to the quality of the relationships, the ties that bind us, within that whole. That responsibility is not limited merely to our sexual partners or to other humans; it is an ecological demand: The very givenness of the quilt of life, the sacred fabric of Being, demands our just caring, cooperation, and responsibility for all the rest of the fabric, whether human or nonhuman, biospheric or geospheric, for each individual piece that, like ourselves, contributes to the rich diversity of the whole.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), *Touching our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); James B. Nelson, *Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), *Body Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>J. Michael Clark with Bob McNeir, *Masculine Socialization and Gay Liberation: A Conversation on the Work of James Nelson and other Wise Friends* (Las Colinas, TX: The Liberal Press, 1992), and J. Michael Clark, "Men's Studies, Feminist Theology, and Gay Male Sexuality," *Journal of Men's Studies* 1.2 (November 1992): 125-155;

the ensuing discussion is a reorganization and summary of ideas previously published in these resources.

<sup>3</sup>J. Michael Clark, *Beyond our Ghettos: Gay Theology in Ecological Perspective* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993), pp. 12-20, 88-90, and, "From Gay Men's Lives: Toward a More Inclusive, Ecological Vision," *Journal of Men's Studies* 1.4 (May 1993): 347-358; the ensuing discussion represents excerpts and summaries of the analytical paradigm originally put forth in these previously published resources.

<sup>4</sup>Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>Marti Kheel, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference," *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, I. Diamond and G.F. Orenstein, editors; (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), pp. 128-137.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Roger S. Gottlieb, "Weapons of the Spirit: Jewish Resources in the Struggle against the Environmental Crisis," unpublished paper, roundtable presentation, American Academy of Religion, Kansas City, November 25, 1991.

<sup>8</sup>Catherine Keller, "Women Against Wasting the World: Notes on Eschatology and Ecology," *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, I. Diamond and G.F. Orenstein, editors; (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. 257.

<sup>9</sup>Cf., *ibid.*, pp. 250, 255.

<sup>10</sup>Karl E. Peters, "Ethics of Dying in Light of a Social Ecological Understanding of Human Nature," unpublished paper, roundtable presentation, American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, November 23, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>Peters, "Ethics of Dying," p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ruether, *Gaia and God*, p. 71, cf., pp. 208-220.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> Peters, "Ethics of Dying," p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 12, 16, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> For extensive studies of the element of "protest" in theology and fiction, respectively, see: G. Tom Milazzo, *The Protest and the Silence: Suffering, Death, and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) and Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God* (trans. M. Wiesel; 1979, New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Carol P. Christ, "Rethinking Theology and Nature," *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, I. Diamond and G.F. Orenstein, editors; (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald E. Long, "God through Gay Men's Eyes: Gay Theology in the Age of AIDS," *AIDS, God, and Faith: Continuing the Dialogue on Constructing Gay Theology* (R.E. Long and J.M. Clark; Dallas: Monument Press, 1992), pp. 15-18.

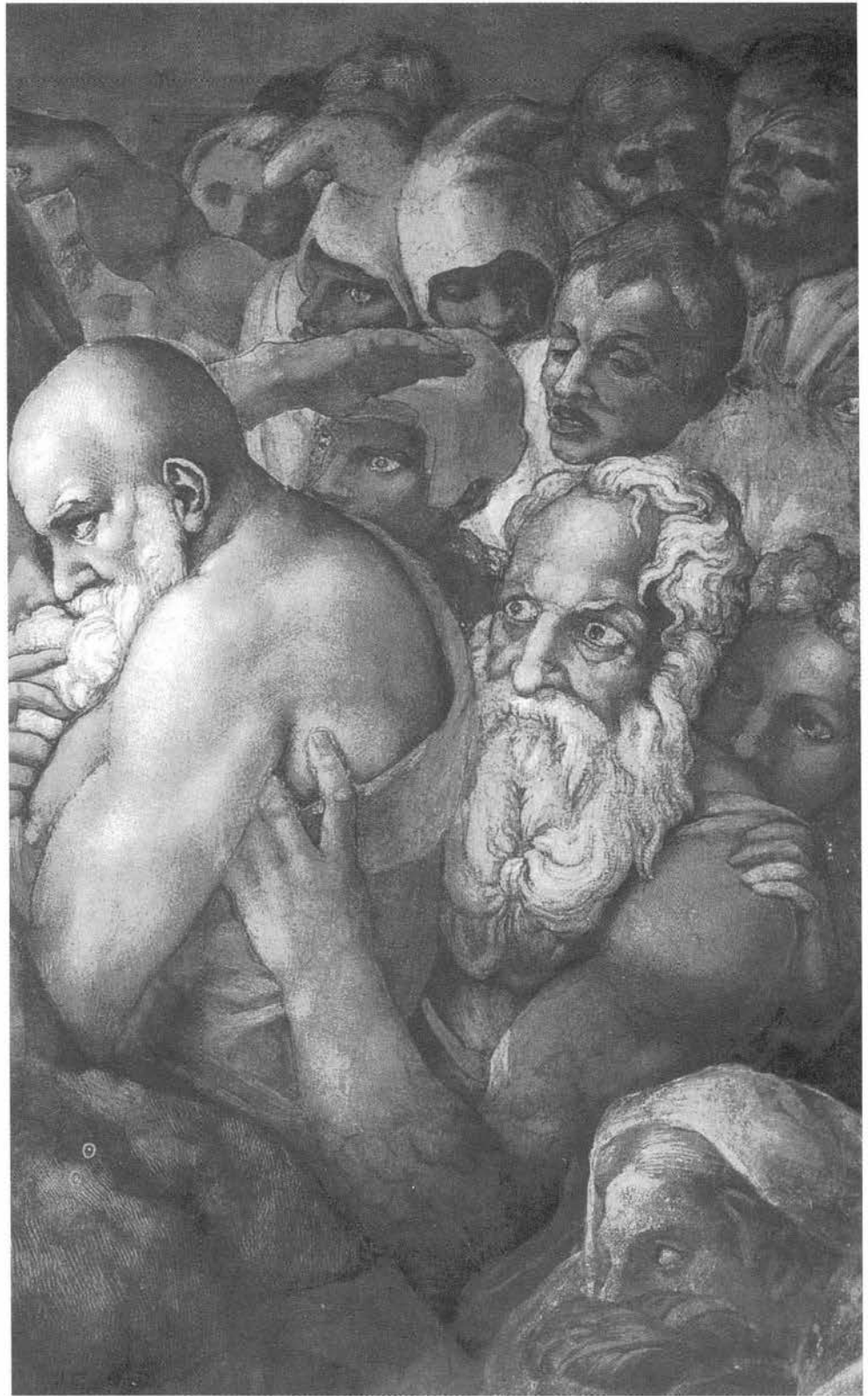
<sup>24</sup> J. Michael Clark, "Toward a Lavender Credo: From Theology to Belief," *AIDS, God, and Faith: Continuing the Dialogue on Constructing Gay Theology* (R.E. Long and J.M. Clark; Dallas: Monument Press, 1992), pp. 51-55.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55, cf., 77-80.

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# Hymn to Pan Polymorph

crayfish

---

Mother Earth, we say,  
The words roll off our tongues.

If Earth is our mother, who then is/was Our Father?  
Yahweh? Indra? Zeus? Thor the Thunderer?  
The whole gang of sky gods, firing their big-bang round of seminal, spermatozoid starter-fluid  
to get the shit-ball rolling off the slag heap and onto the road of history?  
Are we a bastard child, Humanity the unwanted,  
forced upon the Earth by arrogant, pro-life cosmic cops?

Has Father left us, alone, with a mute, bound-and-gagged Mother,  
with only the instruction, barely legible on fading yellowed tablets:  
“Do as I did (unto Her), She is your dominion”?  
Or perhaps this was an arranged wedding, like His Son was wed to His Church,  
lovers till doom, incestuous.  
We the Son barely struggling at Her thighs, told  
“I must leave you (business elsewhere in the galaxy),  
Take care of Her as your wife”  
(not as your lover).

Naming us “Man,” He, self-proclaimed Word of the Worlds, Namer of Names,  
leaves us two choices:  
to love, revere, and worship her;  
to rape, abuse, and batter her.

This Nature we will lavish with gifts, praise Her with names,  
toast Her with wine and with song,  
and worship with blood from our sacrificed brethren.  
We will dance on her brown body until we can no longer hear her cries,  
then we will call her mute, and call her tyrant,  
and say it is She who enslaves us,  
and we will punish Her.

\* \* \* \* \*

But who are you who comes to me this night, who drugs me and whispers in my blood  
*NO, NO!* (your words shake me, throttle my flesh),  
she is sister, you say, she is brother, she is hybrid cyborg coyote creature,  
she is death into whose arms we glide,  
*HE IS DEATH*, and He escapes us as we search for Him,  
escapes through the cracking pavement of our bodies,  
escapes in our exhalations



as we search with our torch-lights and dogs  
Has He left us, broken-mirrored in our sadness,  
will He not return?

but She,  
she is you, she is He, she is polymorph, now this, now that,  
i run and touch, i run and grasp  
*is this You?*

but there is only wind,  
*i lunge for You,*  
and there is only sand, and broken shards  
fractured on the grass

i gather the traces You have left behind  
i weave them into a banner, and as i hoist it, it shreds itself  
invisible  
in the wind

i search for those glimmering fragments of You,  
of what i thought was You,  
and of Him, who had left us,  
and the vials full of names He had dropped as He fled,  
i search in the wind, i gaze under rocks,  
i stumble over clouds and plunge to ocean depths  
all the while gathering words that have grown in Your tracks,  
sprouted in the footprints You have left

You, Pan, brother stag, who have left me staggering in the morning  
drunken on the dawn dew of life  
You, who have startled me awake and now are gone  
You, Son of Man, Daughter of Fire, Wisdom breath blazing across galaxies  
I worship You, You who came to worship me,  
whose lips encircled mine, tongues fused,  
our floods released in each others mouths  
filled with words and white liquid stars

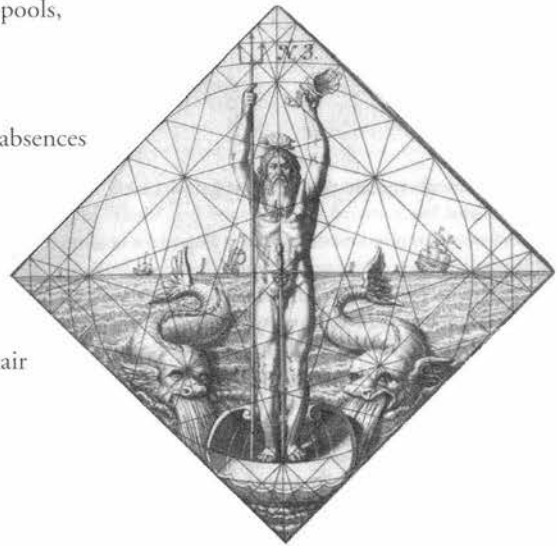
These words i now gather in the faltering dawn  
words i collect from the sand-strewn beaches swathed across the face of morning,  
words of children, ruins of castles left to wash away in the tide,  
words collected from the seaweed that entwines my legs and arms as i submerge myself to find you,  
words collected from rusty ships' hulls grounded on the ocean's floor,  
words clipped out from the bodies of corpses,  
stolen from the lips of drowned sailors,  
words found flung onto the nets of angels whose wings slowly sinking unwind  
and drape over rocks and coral reefs,  
words found in bottles

And when i have gathered them all,  
and when i have collected them,  
i will recite these words to You  
i will hold them to Your lips,  
these words i have wrapped around my phallus like a flag,  
these words that have smothered and smoldered and seethed,  
words that have seared and burned sigils into my flesh,  
words turned to ashes

i will present these words to You,  
brother, Light-bearer, veiled sister,  
You who hide behind many names,  
whose diamond-glinted traces glimmer in the silences i uncover  
turning over the rock faces of your submerged wounds,  
whose lips have slithered over my breasts and limbs  
leaving behind soft explosions of moss sprouting in the crevasses,  
whose fingers have scrawled on my flesh  
"It is not me who comes to you, it is She,"  
You, black mother! You, diamond-vajra-father! Red sister!  
You, who have penetrated my arteries, spilled your flesh into my gene-pools,  
ignited the blood rushing through my veins,  
who have spun salivary webs with your mucus lips,  
showered me with them  
and hung me to dry on the breaths of Your absences

You, nature! You, god! You, friend! You, fiend! You, hunter!  
You, hunted!  
When i think i have captured you, you are zero,  
a fish floating through my hands as i slip  
beneath the sheaths of Your golden sea-hair

when i whisper these words to you,  
my tongue pressed against your flesh  
i will know you are me  
we are she  
we are life



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*crayfish* is a pen-name of a PhD candidate at York's Faculty of Environmental Studies

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# Queer / Nature

## (Be Like Water)

caffyn kelly

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In mind-numbing despair, she killed herself. Friend, kind of my kind — I begin with her body. She is no longer a poet, an artist, a shining star. Here she is evidence of failure: my own failure, and the failure of my community.

What binds life to the earth? What binds each organism to life?

Here where the ocean and mountains meet, the will to live seems relentless. Things survive where they surely cannot. A cedar tree cracks the cliff, growing first straight out, then vertically. Ferns perch where soil is well-nigh impossible. Even the black stain on the rock is alive: an algae film of tiny plants. It feeds the periwinkles that birds feed on.

The birds too are impossible: that they are light enough to fly! What keeps their hollow bones from crumbling? How can a thing so fragile be tough enough?

Between high and low tide there is a community. You can hear it breathe. It even seems to sing: rock, water, and the hundred thousand organisms and micro-organisms that take in and let go as the sea swells and recedes with its certain, complex rhythm.

Like all edges, this place permits diversity. Yet it is a pitiless place. Death is unremarkable here. Or perhaps, despite the astonishing fight for life each individual thing undertakes, living and dying is a matter of indifference in the fabric of this community, where death is life of another kind.

## II.

Despite the proliferation of discourses that decipher and celebrate queer identity, we are still jeopardized. We are wounded. We grieve the untimely death of friends.

Three of my friends are lately dead. One died of AIDS. One killed herself. One man was stalked and murdered by a former lover. In each death, and in the sum of these deaths, I feel the violence and hate the world directs at us. And in my grieving I feel it burn like a corrosive poison inside me. The way I feel when I hear that five homosexuals were stoned to death today in Iran, that a gay man and a lesbian were killed by a firebomb in Oregon, that two lovers, fleeing from certain death in Serbia, were shot and died in each others arms. Frightened. Afraid to show my fear. Angry. Empty. Grief-stricken. Afraid to show my

grief. I put it this way, after an Inuit poem: “My entrails are turning into stone.”<sup>1</sup>

I live by a river that flows into the sea, and this is the water of life to me. It is my dream and my philosophy. I think homosexuality is like a river. At all times, in all conditions, we persist in our loving. We die; we are murdered. But we continue, despite them. Like water, we have no beginning. We have no end.

## III.

Living here, I notice that nature is much queerer than we think. Birds do not come paired, male and female, like in bird books. They come alone, in flocks, in threes, in sevens. They pair off: females; males; male and female. Barnacles are hermaphrodites. The slug, with amazing grace, is born male, has sex with other males, then changes to a female, pregnant with the seed of its male partner.

I come from a culture that says there is an ineluctable heterosexual fact at the core of nature.<sup>2</sup> It isn't so. No more than all the other, related myths. That nature is innocent, violent, illogical, endangered, female. That man pits himself against it, deciphers it, fashions it to his needs. That nature needs to be preserved.

Consider these stories:

God instructed Noah to make an ark for himself, his sons, his wife and his son's wives, and two of every sort of thing: fowls, cattle, and every creeping thing of the earth, a male and female of each. A great flood came, and all flesh died that moved upon the earth. Only Noah and every thing with him in the ark was saved.

Around here, when the flood came, they didn't worry about the animals. They made a huge canoe, big enough to carry every single child. The adults put the children in the canoe with all the food they had, and said good-bye.

When the waters finally receded the kids wound up at Mount Baker, and they started over in the Fraser Valley with nothing but what they had left in the canoe. When they realized how many animals hadn't survived the flood, some of them elected to change into animals. The world was replenished by them.

We might say that Noah had to preserve nature because he understood it in heterosexual terms. The ark protected his power over the things of the earth; it guaranteed his difference from them. Instead of a relationship between creatures characterized by kinship and transformation, Noah predicates one based on difference and reproduction. We might say, as James Baldwin did, that his God is a “profound and dangerous failure of concept.”<sup>3</sup>

#### IV.

We are the mothers of invention. We invent ourselves and each other. We live always-new, like a river. We are mutable, multiple. We go by preference. We borrow. We are capable of transformation. If we have any purpose, it is surely this: to show the element of choice, desire at the heart of all identity (kinship). To pose the challenge of community.

What binds life to the earth? The singing river; the river's song. We are born in a rush of water, and born again in our choosing. To live queer. To fit into a complicated web of lifeforms. To sustain ourselves and each other. And to transform the established patterns, seek new habitats and abandon some, live and thrive where it seems we cannot.

#### V.

Trees, after all, make air to breathe in. Rains replenish the river. The river nourishes the sea, where light transforms into life, and the food we eat begins. In the face of all the mercy in the world, it seems the least I can do is love you.

#### VI.

The economy counterposes male and female, black and white, human and nature. But we are everywhere.

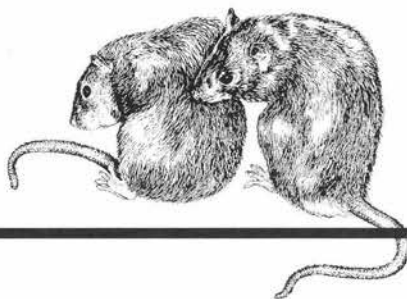
Homosexual oppression might be the matrix of all oppressions. Revealing the preposterous quality of sexual difference, we show the coercion masked by it. And we show the lie inside the heterosexual fact at the core of nature: the one that lends credence to the vilest institutions of humanity, from motherhood to the cutting down of thousand-year-old trees for apple crates.

But we also replicate every oppression inside our parallel communities, the queer planet.

I think queer identity (sameness) cannot be the basis for real community — not one which takes in and lets go, the way we breathe, the way the ocean covers and uncovers the shore. Sameness is invented by way of difference. And what are we so different from, if we have a capacity for turning? Communities of “the same” are structured by rejection of “the other.” It is a poor way to claim a patrimony, and that is all we will ever claim by it.

We have a kinship with all life, like water.

Love invents us. At all times, in all conditions, we persist in our loving. What does not change is this.



#### VII.

Can there be another kind of queer identity (kinship)? One allied with a choice for mercy? Balance? One invented by James Baldwin's kind of love, in the “tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth”?<sup>4</sup> Love that is as gracious as a drag queen, fierce as a bulldagger, and just as astonishing as a women-loving-woman, a man-loving-man.

I feel the violence and the hate the world directs at us. I feel it in my bones. It infects our lives and shapes our deaths. But we persist in our loving. So after all, we are not yoked to fear, wed eternally to coercion.<sup>5</sup>

A community that begins in passion, and not difference — where we proclaim our capacities, and not our innocence — might become a community that undoes our distance from the web of life that we are kin to. With love, this is my prayer for us, and for the friends I've said good-bye to:

*Be kind.*

*Be my kind.*

*Do not end.*

*Be like water.*

*Stay close to the ground.*

*Persist.*

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#### Notes

1 “The Song of the Girl Who Was Turning Into Stone.”

2 Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p 27.

3 “The Preservation of Innocence.” *Outlook*. San Francisco, Fall 1989, p.49.

4 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, (New York: Dell, 1967, p. 128.)

5 Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of Morning,” *Guardian Weekly*, January 31, 1993.

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