

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

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Abstract

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

Keywords: Queer ecology, space, normativity, food, sexuality, social movements

Introduction: Towards integrated ecological and sexual social movements

The social, political, and economic relationships between human sexuality and nature are entangled. Therefore, unraveling these relationships is needed to show how the ongoing intersections between sexuality and nature are contested, redefined, and resolved. Scholars steeped in queer theory and some feminist theory are critical of categories essentializing the “naturalness” of people’s gender and/or sexuality (Butler, 2004; Gaard, 2004; Sandilands, 1999). Some of these scholars also work in tandem with activists wishing to challenge society on a cultural level to reconsider notions of sexuality, gender, and nature. The struggle is largely one of challenging dominant discourse as a means to deconstructing hegemonic knowledge systems. On the other hand, many scholars are critical of governments, corporations, or other groups whose actions often lead to the material degradation of both ecosystems as well as human bodies (Shiva, 1994; Gould, Pellow & Schnaibeg, 2008; Foster, Clark & York, 2010). At the same time, scholars such as those studying the environmental justice movement are working with local communities to resolve cases of environmental inequality (Bullard, 1993; Roberts & Toffolon-Weiss, 2001; Pellow, 2004). This article sits at the intersection of two broad scholarly and movement traditions: studies and movements focused on sexuality, and those focused on the (human) environment. More specifically, this article seeks to couch the burgeoning eco-queer movement¹ within the framework of queer ecology. My goal is to contribute to budding scholarly explorations of the intersections between sexuality and nature by showing how the eco-queer movement “includes considerations of the natural world and its biosocial constitution, and an environmental politics that demonstrates an understanding of the ways in which sexual relations organize and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences, and constitutions of the world” (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010: 5). Attending to this social and ecological complexity helps link a series of disparate conversations and contested politics.

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

¹ The eco-queer movement entails a loose knit, often decentralized set of political and social activists identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or an ally of these groups, challenging binary notions of sexuality and ecology, while simultaneously transforming material and symbolic space(s) into more just, autonomous, and sustainable forms.

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

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

physical and built environments, social boundaries, and queer bodies.

More specifically, this article uses this history as a way to frame that part of the eco-queer movement fighting for embodiments of and decentralized collective efforts for just and sustainable food spaces. Such struggles are often premised on similar efforts by the food justice movement, which consists of those seeking to transform economic, political, and social relations from farm to table. At a minimum, such transformations would require a radical restructuring of dominant institutions in terms of the distribution of goods and bads, and a process requiring open participation in decisions that impact specific groups of people. However, Pulido (1994) contends that the following three issues must be addressed: “a lack of democracy over private production decisions, uneven development, and material and social inequality” (p. 921). This then requires challenging the structures that contribute to this inequality beyond just including marginalized people in decision making. Moreover, there must be recognition of cultural diversity and a fine-grained understanding that facilitates relations across spatiotemporal differences². This notion of justice brings together the concerns of those that seek to rectify injustices tied to identity, whether on the grounds of racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual differences, with those who seek to challenge political, economic, and cultural institutions that (re)produce myriad inequalities³.

Like eco-queer efforts, food justice efforts draw attention to the enmeshed and often contested struggles within eco-social relations. However, most scholarly and activist attention is given to institutionalized racism and white privilege within the agrifood system and alternative food spaces (Alkon & Agyeman 2011; Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007). Recent critical investigations also contend that gender relations need to be highlighted in studies of or social movements involving food (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Carney, 2010; Perdue, Holcomb & Sbicca, 2012; Probyn,

² Scholsberg (2004) argues for “critical pluralism” which “necessitates engagement across differences. Getting others to understand your experience and framework, and vice versa, is how pluralistic notions are learned, understood, recognised, and accepted. This is the difference between a pluralism based in simple acceptance and toleration and a critical pluralism based in more thorough recognition and mutual engagement” (p. 536).

³ Sbicca (2012) argues that an anti-oppression praxis provides a way to integrate understanding of myriad entangled inequalities within the agrifood system, and a discourse and set of strategies needed to create unity within diversity. Thus, there are efforts underway to transform economic, social, and political relations through a lens of food justice premised on anti-oppression ideology.

2000; Van Esterik, 1999). One promising feminist project argues for a “visceral politics” that takes seriously how ideologies involving food are embodied (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008). Similarly, the ecopsychology view argues that our well-being and notions of health and illness are tied to our embeddedness in the environment (Stevens, 2010). There is thus a relationship between where and who we are. This fusion of symbolic and material, mind and body, human and non-human, social and ecological, provides a springboard to investigate how such complex embodiments are (re)produced. In short, critical food studies theorizing can be expanded by attending to sexuality and eco-queer theorizing can be deepened through engaging with the economic, political and social relations of food.

Tracing the history and context of queer autonomous spaces

The space of new sexual politics

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

and men of varied sexualities wield sexual/reproductive decisions that challenge the colonization of their peoples and lands, that subvert enslavement, genocide, and heterosexism” (Stein, 2004: 7). Space and identity are entangled, and while eco-queer activism often takes place in interstitial spaces, it also publicly challenges dominant modes and forms of thinking, behaving, and organization.

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

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

A politics of recognition is sometimes viewed as an assimilationist form of politics anathema to queer politics because it can be reduced to concerning itself with stratified power relations only to the degree that it seeks to move from the social and political margins to having a seat at a pluralist political table. However, as Staheli (2008) shows, such a politics largely rests on actions grounded in transgressive, deconstructionist, and autonomous values that blur the lines between public and private space, and that challenge “normal” liberal politics with radical

forms of participatory democracy. In this way, a politics of recognition also challenges what Duggan (2003) calls “homonormativity,” which is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 50). Articulated in queer activist language, “We’re Here! We’re Queer! Get used to it!” and “Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you.” Both homonormativity and the heteronormative, capitalist, and ecological assumptions and institutions of eco-social life, then, began to be challenged by different segments of the lesbian and gay community in their experiments with rural and urban separatist movements grounded in the budding ecological ethic of the 1970s.

Space fights: Inklings of the budding eco-queer logic

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

rearticulating the landscape, symbolically and physically; developing a holistic and gender-bending physical experience of nature; experiencing nature as an erotic partner; and politicizing rurality and rural lesbian identity (Sandilands, 2004).

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

In the Western historical context, urban spaces are often deemed cesspools of degeneration associated with homosexuality, pollution, and dirty immigrant populations. Such discourse and its ideological and institutional scaffolding are used to reinforce heterosexual masculinity through the creation of urban green spaces such as parks, and rural wilderness areas (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010). These spaces are in some respects created as a means to carve out space away from the “corrupting” influence of gays and lesbians, a “natural” space meant for recreational pursuits (e.g. hiking, walking, running, swimming, and playing sports) that reinforces sex and gender roles. The homosexual, then, much like the

urban spaces they live in are often deemed “unnatural”. Moreover, there are historical moments when public displays of homosexual behavior are legally prohibited, thus further entrenching control over what is deemed acceptable behavior while walking through a park, or camping at a family campsite in the woods. However, these spaces are not fixed. Instead they are reflections of normative discourses around sexuality and space, which are contested by the LGBTQ community in an ongoing process of (re)producing queer social space(s) (Conlon, 2004).

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

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

neighborhood due to a variety of social and economic factors, but they eventually created similar spaces in the West End and now share this quasi-autonomous queer space with gay men (Ingram, 2010).

There are similar attempts to create autonomous spaces by anarchist queers who draw connections between sexual oppression, sustainability, and global capitalism. A number of queer anarchist groups in London have “engage(d) in ‘people-oriented constructive actions’ that attempt to unleash the potential for sustainable ways of socialising as queer people which are not overly mediated by the commodity” (Brown, 2007: 2686). This explicit recognition by queer activists that there are numerous cultural, environmental, and economic layers operating to produce social relations tied to strict binaries between straight/gay, man/woman, and natural/unnatural, grounds their activism. Brown (2007) notes that a network of queers called *Queeruption* engage in anti-capitalist politics whereby they create non-hierarchical modes of praxis

interested in small, modest attempts to reengage their ‘power-to-do’, which is always part of a social process of doing with others...‘queer’ within these networks functions more as a relational process, rather than as a simple identity category. A queer positional...is produced through...working collectively to create a less alienated and empowered space in which to explore a multiplicity of sexual and gendered potentialities (p. 2687).

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

These more radical queer activists are queering the boundaries between sexuality, environmental concerns, and anti-capitalist politics as a means to challenging the commodification of gay culture (Jeppesen, 2010). Reflecting a queer autonomous ethic, the actions often include squatting abandoned buildings, collective cooking and dumpster diving, creating safe spaces for queer sex parties, and hosting alternative non-commodified queer parades, which are more important as a *process* towards transforming the world into a more just and sustainable place, than as an *ends* (Brown 2007). There are also many radical queer activists in urban spaces throughout North America who similarly challenge heteronormativity and homonormativity through anti-oppression politics. The interactions that reflect

such a politics “develop sustainable social relations and value-practices, based on mutual respect, consent, sexual liberation, and non-normativity, in which people engage in open-ended processes of developing alternative ways of being, feeling, thinking, engaging, acting and becoming-liberated” (Jeppesen, 2010: 477).

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

Finding the eco queer movement: embodied and collective food spaces

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

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

mind, body, and environment:

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

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

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

as a solution to issues facing our community but which speak to the alienation many people experience in cities – how can we each contribute our individual skills and talents to serve a larger community; how can we bring a little of our love for food, plants, and animals into an urban setting; how can we collaborate with one another instead of competing with one another in the capitalist marketplace; how can we nourish our emotional needs and heal our community from inside, against the prejudice we experience in our jobs and daily lives outside our chosen families?

I quote this at length to show that there is a clear relationship viewed between the environment, food, and sexuality. Moreover, there is a clear goal of developing solidarity among the various sexual orientations and gender presentations around the experience of food and eating.

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

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

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

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

My queer politic around urban farming is one of resistance. By tearing out my lawn and replacing it with space for food production, I am resisting... By refusing to use chemicals, I am

resisting. By sharing knowledge, seeds, tools and skills: I am resisting. By growing enough food to eat, preserve and share: I am resisting. By engaging in local food justice projects, I am resisting. Resisting the agro-industrial complex. Resisting systems that multiply oppress [sic]. So, while I *grow*, I also *resist*.

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

The above discussion has focused on efforts to blend queer and food activism/action/change efforts within urban spaces. While most people concerned with environmental, food, and sexual oppression tend to live in urban locales, many groups of people within the food segment of the eco-queer movement are located in rural spaces. A recent endeavor in the United States undertaken by queer filmmaker, Jonah Mossberg, interviews queer farmers for a project whose central question is: “is there space for queerness in agricultural communities; and, if so, where and in what form does it manifest?” Specifically, the project is focused on

participants who want to share their experiences, histories, understanding and knowledge as queer members of the agrarian community...(with an openness to) self identified queer farmers anywhere along the LGBTQI spectrums – and specifically: people of color, older folks, those from many generations of farmers, CSA farmers, urban farmers...

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

I point to this project because it is a catalyst for building relationships and alliances between groups of queer identified people who care about environmental and food issues. The following is a list of some of the people/farms/food groups in rural

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

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

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

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

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

These examples are illustrative of queer identified people who care about the intersections between environmental, sexuality, and gender issues, and use food either centrally or peripherally as a way to build community, fight oppression,

and/or take better care of the planet and the human body in all its diversity.

Conclusion: The ongoing process of eco-queer space making

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

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

By taking a more fluid and spatial approach to understanding the makeup of the eco-queer movement, I have found that ideas, symbols, and discourse matter as much as the materiality of space. It is the ideology/worldview grounded in solidarity and affinity, and grounded in deconstructing binary identity categories that links various threads of the lgbtq and environmental movements together. In

many respects the eco-queer movement is not only interested in confronting mainstream eco-normal, white, straight, wealthy privilege, but also those segments of the lgbtq community assimilating into mainstream institutions and organizations that perpetuate practices and ideologies separating out humans and nature. In short, eco-queer activist's embodiment is embedded in the built and natural environments, which provides the space from which to work towards radical ecological, social, and cognitive change.

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