

# antennae

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queering  
nature



Across the three discussions, addressing the topic of *queering nature* offered a platform to interrogate, transform, and transcend existing norms and classifications deriving from the modernist divide between human culture and nature. *Becoming Tree* proved to be an innovative initiative sowing reciprocity within the more-than-human world, where Live Art becomes part of a living culture of mutual care and solidarity engaged with global welfare and earthly thriving. For the survival of ecodiversity, within and without art.

#### Endnotes

[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

[2] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003)

**Be-coming Tree** (<https://becomingtree.live/>) is a co-creation of three female/queer artists aged 36 to 75, each with independent arts practices. Jatun Risba: transmedia artist whose practice fertilises mutuality between species and Earthly kinship. Daniele Minns: sound/live/video artist using digital technologies to highlight connectedness of all phenomena. O.Pen Be: dance psychotherapist using relational somatic work as enquiry into inter-corporealities. Collectively we challenge embedded hierarchical structures to increase global interconnectedness, eco-awareness and sustainability, using technology in service of life, to create more inclusive, cooperative and sustainable structures for (Live) Art in reciprocity with the environment.

# A glossary of terms for queer ecologies

This glossary introduces new terms into the emerging critical framework of queer ecologies. It is collaboratively generated by the Queer Ecologies Research Collective (QuERC), a network of symbionts mutually invested in collaborative, research-based, and interdisciplinary practices spanning art history, biology, community organizing, filmmaking, painting, performance, poetry, sculpture, and writing. Drawn from diverse modes of engagement with ecology and queer theory, the research collective first assembled in July 2023 at the arts residency Mildred's Lane (Upper Delaware Valley, Pennsylvania), considering questions such as *What is a research paradigm for queer ecologies? And what can collective research processes generate?*

text: **The Queer Ecologies Research Collective: Nick Bennett, Alex A. Jones (editors), Nicolas Baird, Pia Bakala, Joanie Cappetta, Maurício Chades, briar coleman, Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves, Cameron Klavsen, Lee Pivnik, Darian Razdar, Cy X**

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.

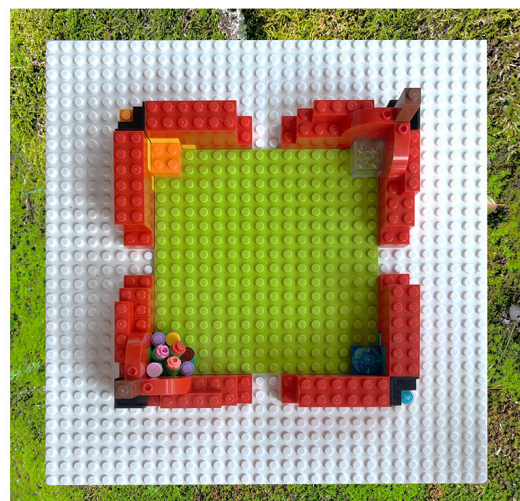
—Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*<sup>1</sup>

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**Embodied research** emerged as a central method for the praxis of queer ecologies, emphasizing the importance of embodied experience in knowledge production, exploring the mutability of the body as a physical and conceptual vessel, and centering the body as an ecological metaphor. In this glossary of terms, embodiment is repeatedly asserted to expand and subvert academic models of knowledge production that tend to objectify, abstract, or erase the body.

In the foundational work *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, theoretical physicist Karen Barad demonstrated how binaries of “self and other” are, on the quantum level, illusions of space and time. **Entanglement** is the structural dynamic of queer ecology, a discipline that enacts the fundamental breakdown of binary conceptions of the universe—a disruptive and joyful activity that yields a deeply entangled world. The form of this text, a glossary, mirrors the intersectional and ever-expanding web of queer ecologies. Ideas, like bodies, are relational, and the entries in this glossary are activated by multiple connections to each other and to the sources they recognize as ancestors.





## ANASYRMA

*Anasyrma* is a pose found within the ancient Greek sculptural tradition wherein a figure lifts their garments in the act of revealing the genitals or buttocks. It is common in depictions of the deity Hermaphroditus, the mythological offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite possessing both male and female sex characteristics. In the context of queer ecologies, the image of Hermaphroditus *Anasyrma* presents an opportunity to view Greco-Roman cosmology from a non-binary critical perspective, with implications for our own understanding of the complex and divinely-guided spectra of gender and sexuality.

The Greek pantheon is composed of figurative amalgamations of human characteristics, and deities formed to explain and characterize the world through human archetypes. Sculptural depictions of Hermaphroditus *Anasyrma* and other gender-bending deities add evidence not only to the fact that gender diversity existed in ancient Mediterranean society, but that gender fluidity was an important aspect of religious belief.<sup>3</sup> In *The Saturnalia*, Roman historian Macrobius details the traditional worship of Aphrodite, a masculine form of Venus:

“Therefore, worshipping Venus, the giver of life, whether the deity is female or male—even as is the life-giving deity [the Moon] that shines by night... Venus is the moon and men offer sacrifice to the moon dressed as women, and women dressed as men, because the moon is thought to be both male and female”.<sup>4</sup>

This quote suggests that Venus herself—a paragon of femininity in the Greek pantheon—was sometimes worshipped as male, androgynous, or intersex, a fact also evidenced by early Athenian sculptural depictions of Aphrodite *Anasyrma* with male genitals.<sup>5</sup> What’s more, the *Saturnalia* reveals that the moon, which was itself worshipped as a deity by ancient Greeks, was considered to be both male and female, and ritual acts of cross-dressing reflected the non-binary and unfixed nature of this celestial body. [SEE MUTABILITY]

Significantly, depictions of Hermaphroditus *Anasyrma* that survived antiquity were often depersonalized or stripped of their divine status, referred to simply as “statue of a hermaphrodite”.<sup>6</sup> Modern oppressive conceptions of nature remain deeply rooted in binary oppositions, with the sun typically characterized as male and the moon generally considered female, while gendered conceptions of “Mother Earth” and “nature” are rooted in narrowly reproductive definitions of womanhood. Hermaphroditus *Anasyrma* may, at the very least, act as a trans-historical reminder that ambiguous, complex cosmologies of gender have always existed and that the universe is not bound by essentialist or binary definitions of masculinity and femininity.

The *anasyrma* pose itself asks viewers to witness the queer body in its divine beauty and vitality, signifying sexual freedom and celebratory expression.<sup>7</sup> [SEE EROS] To be witnessed becomes a means for self-actualization, and Hermaphroditus *Anasyrma* becomes a mythic *trancestor* (trans-ancestor), proof of a rich yet underrecognized mythological history of the sacred existence of trans, intersex, and gender-non-conforming identities.

## Queer Ecologies Research Collective

Queer Ecologies Research Collective session at Mildred's Lane, July 6-12, 2023 © Queer Ecologies

## COMPOST

Compost is a decayed organic material, highly nutritious to plant life, which is created by the metabolic activity of decomposers, agents of the transit of matter between life and death including bacteria, fungi, worms, and insects. Humans are not decomposers when they excrete and flush, but they can become decomposers when they actively partner with a multitude of nonhuman organisms to facilitate the recycling of organic waste—when they become compostists.<sup>8</sup>

Composting is practiced when a hole or box is filled with a layer of food waste, rich in nitrogen, covered by another layer of carbon-rich material such as





**Pia Bakala**  
*Transestor*,  
oil on canvas,  
2022–2023  
© Pia Bakala

dried leaves, woodchips, or cardboard Amazon boxes. Nitrogen and carbon layers are piled up to form an airy and moist “lasagna”, ideal for the proliferation of microorganisms and, consequently, fermentation. Over the course of months, organisms in the composting system eat and excrete, breaking down available food into increasingly smaller parts. Fine black humus and dark-colored “tea” can eventually be collected, which can replace industrial fertilizers in your vegetable garden (a recommended practice to prepare for food shortages promised by global warming).

Composting teaches the ecosystemic value of soils, proving that healthy ecosystems are managed by countless actors. A biodiverse soil is a living entity with many mouths, many intestines, and many holes. [SEE HOLES] If we all became compostists, we would not be spared from climate catastrophes to come, but critical adaptations could be achieved on material and philosophic levels. Compostists learn to think of life and death as deeply intertwined, observing the transformation of waste into food for invisible beings whom they come to appreciate as agents of deeptime and renewal. Compostists actively prepare for a future of precarity by building alliances with a diversity of species that share their desire for vitality. Composting fosters symbiotic relationships that reshape the perspectives of those who engage with it daily. It brings them into coexistence with unexpected kin—beings separated from us by time and scale, yet integral to the fabric of a shared reality.

#### THE COSMIC FOLD

The Cosmic Fold is a contemporary interpretation of the universal model of microcosm and macrocosm. From antiquity into the early modern period, religion, science, and magic were widely informed by a worldview in which Earth and the realm of humankind (the microcosm) mirrored the workings of the heavens and the celestial plane (the macrocosm). Pre-Enlightenment philosophies of medicine, for instance, were based upon symmetries between the human body and the greater universe, for all were composed of the same primary elements (earth, air, fire, and water) and qualities (cold, hot, dry, and moist).<sup>9</sup> The tradition of the “Zodiac Man” appears in manuscripts throughout the late medieval and early modern period in Western medical treatises to map these bodily and cosmic correlations.<sup>10</sup> [SEE MAP]

In the 4th century BCE, Plato’s writings on cosmogony and cosmology codified the emanation of a universal spirit through all living things, from human to plant to mineral.<sup>11</sup> This philosophy was integrated into the theology of medieval scholasticism, forming the basis for a highly-ordered universe in early modern Europe. Changing notions of “God” over time barely altered the essence of *spirit*—like sonar waves or signals, energy emanated from a divine source, passing through the great chain of being. This system complemented the agrarian society with its myriad dependencies upon the Earth’s rhythms, and into the human condition, it engrained profound identification with the environment as a reflection and projection of the self.

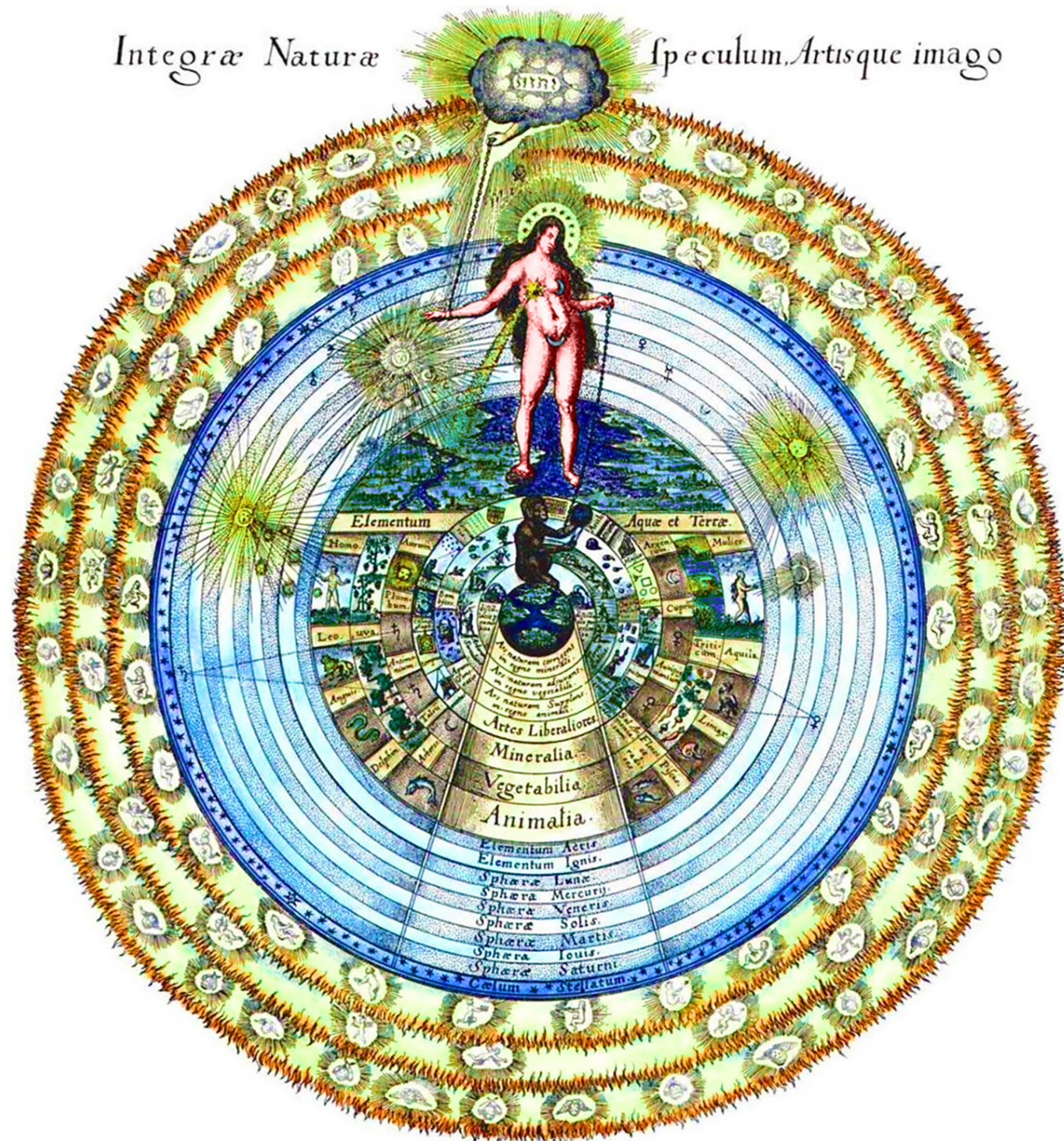
The conflict between science and spirituality—the rational and the mystical—is an artifact of modern Western thought. In the undoing of this binary, the Cosmic Fold represents the intra- and inter-relationship of a body and its environment, a concept for questioning if or where a barrier exists, which serves to parse through the immensity of creation at various scales. At a macroscopic level, it is ecology proper; all planetary life forms a greater ecosystem, a singular and complex body we call Earth (Gaia). At a microscopic level, as in quantum physics, we are reminded that all matter is “merely” the isolated electromagnetic push and pull between atoms attracted to or repulsed by one another. As the feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad writes, “The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming”.<sup>12</sup>

This “lively tension,” not so different an idea than the Platonic idea of an animating spirit, affects all matter in the same way, whether it be part of a beat-



Integræ Naturæ

Speculum Artis que imago



Robert Fludd

*Anima Mundi from Utriusque Cosmi [History of the Two Worlds]*, print with modified color by the editors, 1617–1621, Public Domain

ing human heart or the infinitesimal speck of a black hole. [SEE EROS] It animates universal relationships of creation, homeostasis, and decomposition, and may account for why the telescopic images gathered by NASA have such a striking semblance to the images of brain cells and neural activity. The knowledge we seek—the ineffable—surrounds us, folded into us and us into it.

### EROS

The ancients did not take for granted the cosmic agency of love. In Plato's *Symposium*, the classical Greek philosophers debated the nature of eros (ἔρως) as a universal force. Socrates credited eros with his skill in teaching and discourse, *artes eroticas*, by which he aroused a desire for the pursuit of knowledge. An ambiguity between carnal and intellectual longing pervades the erotic dialogue, suggesting both spring from the same source. Socrates and Aristophanes also emphasize the relationality of eros, locating it neither in the lover nor the beloved, but within the action of their love.<sup>13</sup>

As an animating force of the universe, eros is the fire that drives bodies into creative encounters, found wherever life manifests. Phallic hydrothermal vents on the deep ocean floor spew heat and alkaline fluids, which are rumored to be the spawn of life itself. The floating caress of a honeybee touches the genitals of a flowering plant that has evolved specifically to attract it. A special, slippery mucous coats the skin of a clownfish, making it immune to the sting of anemone tentacles so the two organisms can live mutualistically.<sup>14</sup> [SEE MUTUALISM]

Sexual selection is an evolutionary concept conceived by Charles Darwin to explain how some traits evolve not because they directly enhance an individual's survival (natural selection), but because they make the individual more attractive to potential mates. These traits can be physical, such as the tail feathers of male peacocks, or behavioral or cognitive. Contemporaries of Darwin rejected the aesthetic agency implied by this theory, skeptical that nonhuman animals could be motivated by *beauty*, but in recent decades the importance of sexual selection has been scientifically demonstrated in many species, particularly among birds, fish, and insects. Sexual selection likely played a role in the runaway cognitive development of *Homo sapiens*, recalling Socrates' belief that eros fuels the intellect.

Eros is the universal longing for wholeness. A pollinator does not seek a flower *because* it is lovely, but because it is hungry for the nectar inside. This is not to say that eros is deterministic—the story of Eve in the Garden of Paradise explains that humanity is driven fundamentally by desire, not need. And like the myth of Paradise, the story of Eros has a tragic heart—a pit at the center of the fruit—for we always desire what we lack. [SEE HOLES] At the middle of our galaxy is a black hole, and everything erotic—which is to say, every living in motion—spins out from this centrifugal center. Georges Bataille once described the planetary proportion of eros:

From the movement of the sea, uniform coitus of the earth with the moon comes the polymorphous and organic coitus of the earth with the sun. But the first form of solar love is a cloud raised up over the liquid element. The erotic cloud sometimes becomes a storm and falls back to earth in the form of rain, while lightning staves in the layers of the atmosphere.<sup>15</sup>

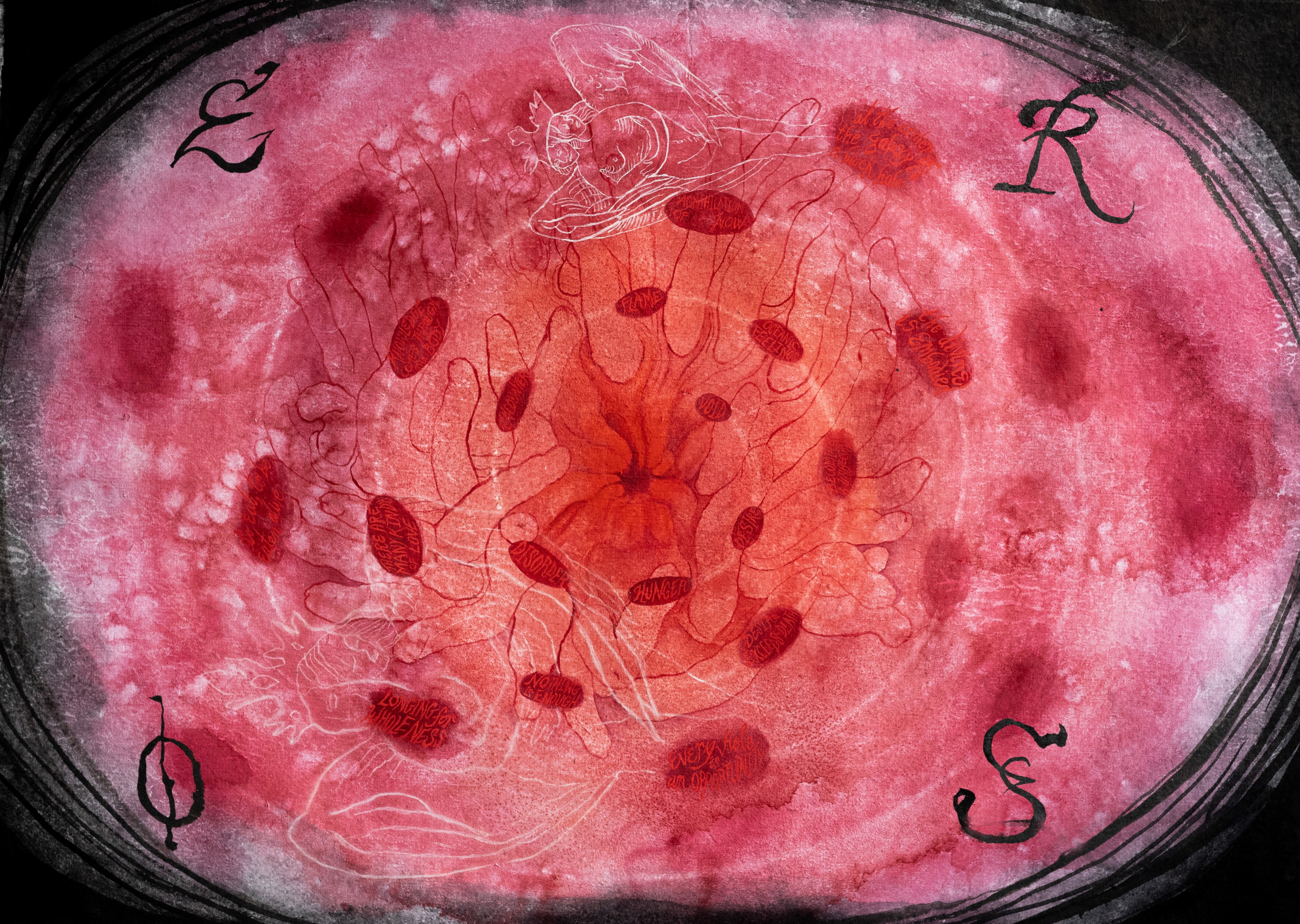
### HOLES

Behold a gap  
an orifice, a wound  
Portal to the unknown  
Sign that beyond  
there is another world,  
potential for so much more.

How many holes are in the human body? There's the mouth, the ears, the nostrils, anus, vagina, urethra, umbilicus. Any piercings one may have. Once you include the pores of the skin, there are millions of holes.

We stuff our holes. We avoid them. We fantasize about them. We push life out of them. We hide things in them. We fear them. We release fluids through





**Alex A. Jones**  
*EROS Map*,  
 watercolor, ink,  
 and salt  
 on paper, 2023  
 © Alex A. Jones

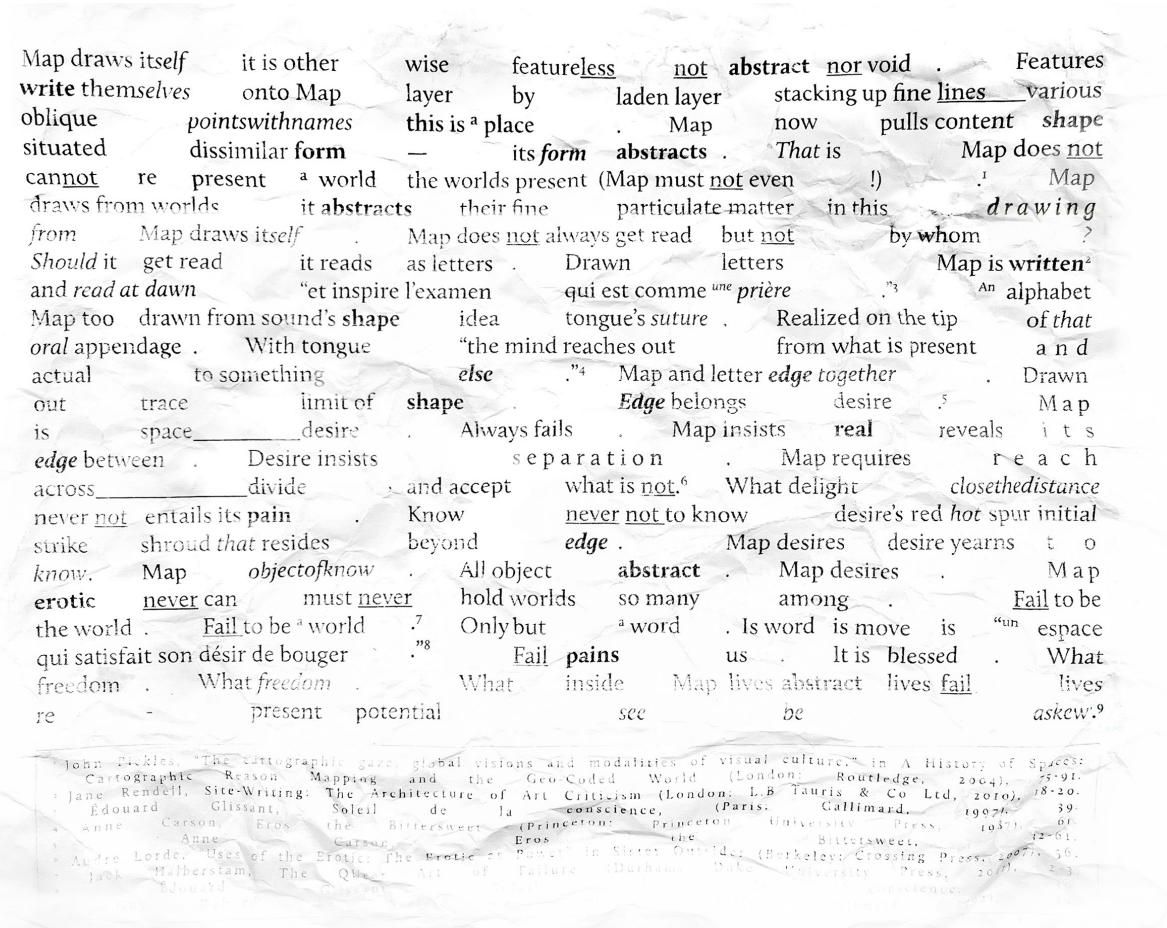


them. Sometimes they leak, ache, quiver— pulsing rhythmically as if to send a message to us... no, to the great beyond. Some believe that the universe itself was birthed from a giant hole. According to cosmologist Nikodem Popławski, the Big Bang may have been the ejection of matter from a black hole in another universe. The story itself is full of theoretical holes, existing in the unprovable realm of things since no one knows what lies beyond an event horizon. The ultimate hole contains the ultimate mystery.

Perhaps a goddess of some kind, overflowing with tremendous desire on their side of the Universal divide, created a most glorious hole and began to fill it with everything we know, love, and hate, thus instilling the primordial need for filling, filling, filling holes.

Holes are the universal manifestation of all that we, humans and other-than-humans, desire, fear, and need to survive. [see MONSTER] A hole is the puncture we make when placing a seed into fertile soil, implanting the desire for abundance. Rodents, rabbits, raccoons, and snakes all stuff their bodies into holes for safety and warmth. Every hole is an opportunity and for that all holes are risky. Not all seeds grow, not all holes make good homes, some holes go viral, and some have enemies on the other side. To holes, we bring our hands, mouths, and genitals with hope that we will be met with pleasure, with a taste of what we lack. Will we encounter emptiness, pain, pleasure—or even glory?

## MAP



Darian Razdar  
Mapping exercise / concrete poem, digital print, 2023 © Darian Razdar

## THE MONSTER

Godzilla first rose out of the ocean onto the silver screen in 1954 in direct response to the environmental destruction caused by American H-bomb testing in the South Pacific. In the film, Godzilla destroys the rapidly-urbanizing city of Tokyo as retribution for the destruction of its habitat, and as a warning that technological dominance in the nuclear age would only end in pain and suffering.<sup>16</sup>

A monster is not defined by its terrifying countenance or tendency toward violence—these are just tools of monsterring. The Greek and Proto-Italic etymological origins of “monster” in fact define it as a teacher (*monstro*, τέρας, to advise, teach, show) and a soothsayer (*moneō*, to admonish, foretell, warn).<sup>17</sup> When we meet a monster, we ought to ask, *what are you teaching? What do you warn of?*

In most stories we are faced with a binary of the hero and the *nemesis*—on the one hand a savior, on the other a destroyer.<sup>18</sup> For the queer ecologist, who has likely been accused of destroying the sanctity of the status quo, the false binary of hero and villain is familiar, and the “monster” becomes a matter of perspective.

In the Northeastern U.S., recent swarms of Spotted Lanternflies are seen as an unnatural invasion, but from another point of view, we see the monster in giant residents of New York City wildly stomping errant lanternflies (at the behest of the city government no less, despite laws that prohibit harming wildlife). The silhouette of the lanternfly stomper recalls Godzilla crushing buildings and humans beneath its feet.<sup>19</sup> [SEE RAGE]

Outside the city, the same fear and hatred is directed toward the black-legged tick, an unknowing carrier of Lyme Disease. Monsters are made from a society's fears, often unconscious or unexamined. Behind the loathing of invasive and pathogenic insects lurk neglected problems of human ecology.

Queer ecology attempts to see beyond what is “natural,” perhaps to destroy the term nature and its implicit binaries altogether, for queerness has often been villainized in the same terms of aberration used to define monsters:

- a. an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure.
  - b. one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character
- (Merriam-Webster)

Jack Halberstam characterized the monster as one who “always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities, and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities.”<sup>20</sup> To embrace the monster, queer ecologists must utilize its powers of teaching and foretelling, whether to emulate the flamboyant destruction of Godzilla or the invisible disruption of the black-legged tick.

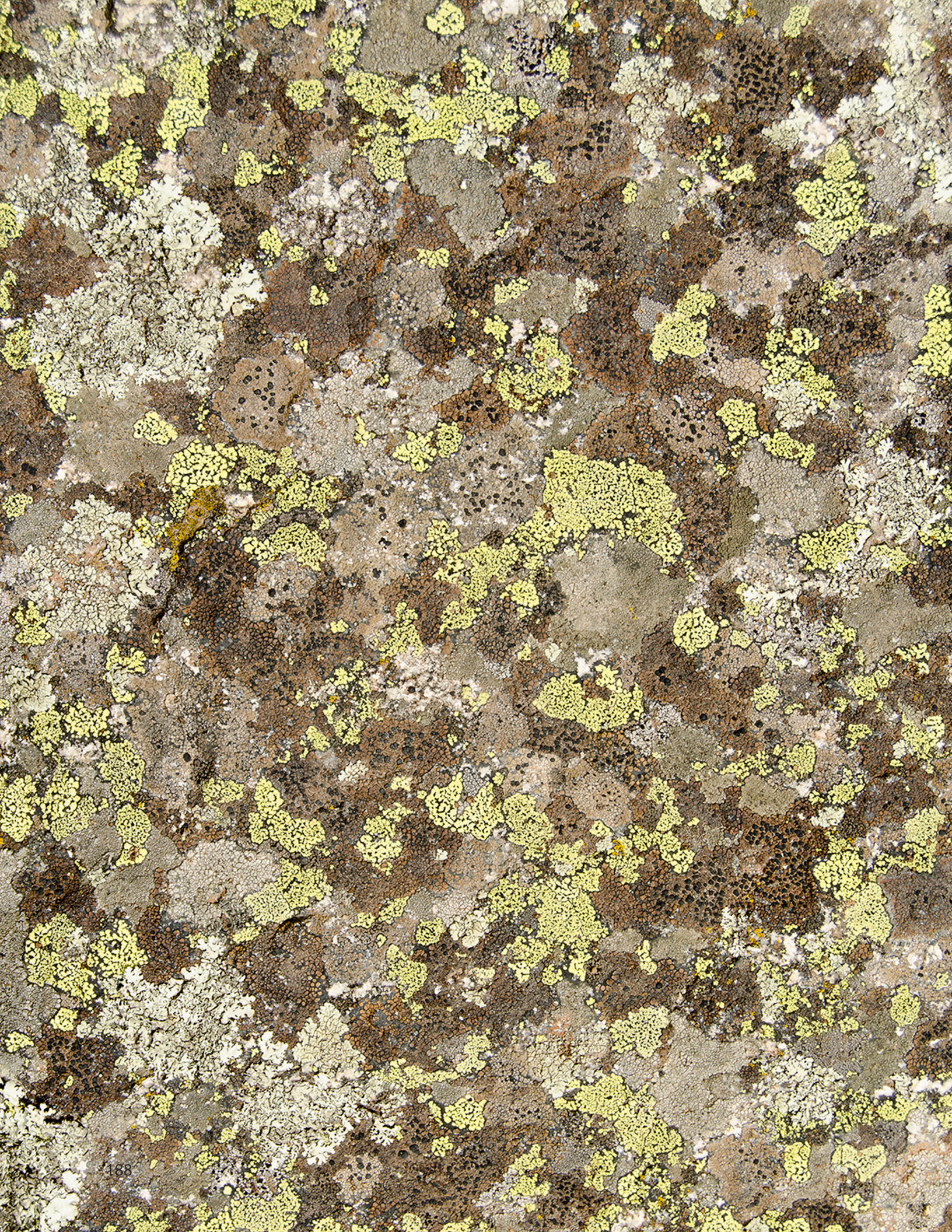
## MUTABILITY

I'm trying to be more tidal. To embrace change. It's a thought I have as I curl up, marooned at the bottom of this tide pool. The water is calm, and as I move it through the siphon on my mantle I realize my breath has synced with the waves. [SEE SUBMERGE]

Shattering my breathwork, a shadow consumes the tide pool, and a hand plunges in! I spot a blob of *Sargassum* and frantically become it, painting its color and texture onto my skin. The hand reaches for me and I jet away, throwing myself over the edge of the pool and running up the shoreline. I try to balance as my suction cups hit the asphalt and contort into clumsy feet. I feel my eight limbs merge into four and split into digits at the ends. My head has deflated, and my mouth slides up my face. I realize I am fully nude and alter my pigmentation again to give the illusion of a shirt and pants. Nothing crazy: a gray vintage tee and jeans.

I pass a woman on the sidewalk and (eager to try out these limbs) I use both arms to wave at her. She shoots me a look of primal fear, as if I'm threaten-





ing, or horrible. I get the feeling she sees through my disguise but isn't seeing *me*. In her eyes, I'm like The Thing infecting crew members on an Antarctic research station, hunting and becoming them at once.

I wonder when humans and my species split. In a strange, timeless memory, I see two aquatic flatworms crawling along the Proterozoic shore. As the tide went out, one dove deep into the cool waters; the other remained near the rocky shallows, eventually coming out terrestrial.

I look backward at the woman who scorned me and I become her. I take her form but not her anger and the next person I pass greets me with a smile. I am getting good at giving human. I will continue to mimic, to learn slowly and closely, before I reveal my true form, which is formlessness made flesh. [SEE MIMICRY] A cephalopodic code switch, I will walk among people until I can teach them the beauty of mutation, and trust that they'll listen.

### MUTUALISM

Frog and Toad are friends. Frog rakes the leaves at Toad's place, while Toad is over at Frog's house doing the same. It's not about every frog and every toad being friends. It's about *this one* and *that one*. Mutualisms make strange relations, coming together to create something more than themselves.

*Mutualism is the mutation of the individual into the collective. Microbiomes blend: we are shaped by whom we hold close. We're spinning in a circle with our hands held tight—feel the counterbalanced pull between you, the earth, and every beloved body as you fall.*

When I map my mutualisms, I first consider what is nearest. [SEE MAP] A bloody ocean blooms within me; my microbiome is me, my health—it coconstructs my being. I cannot tend to other relationships until I shape this first one, internally.

*What does mutualism look like as an economic system? As a city? Mutualism is leaving the place cleaner than you found it. [SEE OIKOS] It's the sphere of eye contact and empathy, reciprocity, and collaboration. It's a cleaning wrasse, and the moray eel opening its mouth tenderly, so tenderly. It's the forest fungal network, it's the rhizome and the tree. It's you and me.*

Mutualism emerges. This phenomenon of coming together and sharing in something that ripples out, boundlessly, is a generative process. It is a driver of emergence: complex systems arise from spontaneity and chaos. Perhaps the earth itself is an organism like this, a mutualistic web of interactions. The world is born of collaborations.

*Is mutualism necessary? Mutualism is the joy of multiplicity, the syncing of two clocks. It's harmony, a universal chord. Mutualism is the symbiosis of lovers, of pieces fitting into place, of double-bonded atoms, transference, and generosity. Mutualism is moving through the world in a million duets with everything you share breath with, which is to say, with everything. Mutualism is home again, even after all this time.*

### OIKOS

Oikos (οἶκος) is the Greek root for *eco*, meaning *house*. Ecology is thus the study of the house. Houses are not neutral spaces, as any queer person could tell you. How we conceptualize the house is arguably related to how we conceptualize *Nature*. It has been pointed out that nature has, by exclusion, come to involve a binary separation from *the human*. If nature is like a house, it contains the hidden premise that humans can enter and leave it, and thus are fundamentally separate from it. The house and the human are enclosures. This ideology is apparent in the way houses are designed and what takes place in them; the desire for shelter is complicated by power, fear, exclusion, and violence.

The modern house is designed for the hierarchical nuclear family—to keep the *unNatural* at bay. This is hostile architecture for queer people; from childhood to adulthood, its structure is a conversion of assimilation. It helps to *produce* the

Nicolas Baird  
Lichen painting,  
photograph,  
2014–ongoing  
© Nicolas Baird



nuclear family. The house is designed and maintained for sterility and separation from *the other*. Here the other is an enclosure, both social and ecological, itself a construction-by-exclusion of the enclosing walls of the house. The house also stands as a metaphor for *the body*, from the controlling center of the master bedroom as the *head* to the bathroom's *anus*. The conceptual walls that enclose the human are myths that do not serve the world. People of color are systemically excluded from housing as well as from humanity. This is not a coincidence—this is the house that whiteness built. (Ernst Haeckel, who coined the term ecology, was a racist and eugenicist.) But everywhere the house is failing in its duties: it can't keep the other out. It has never been sterile. It is forever contaminated. Queerness perennially blooms from within. More-than-human and para-human beings enter and leave freely despite massive efforts at extermination. The materiality of the houses that we live in, which are considered to be safe havens from *the wild*, are themselves alive and vibrant matter. Houses, like our bodies, are multi-species and agential-material, queer kinship assemblages. The Oikos is compost. [SEE COMPOST]

### RAGE

There is a minor goddess in Greek mythology called Lyssa. Goddess of rage, fury, and rabies, she occupies a liminal space between civilization and the wild. Lyssa, seldom mentioned in mythological literature, seems fairly even-tempered for a goddess of fury, only reluctantly introducing rage into the house of Hercules.

Rage is embodied negation. It is affective, difficult to qualify in language, and therefore seldom valued (“I have no words. My shaking hands cannot express my fury.” —Derek Jarman, *The Garden*, 1990). But rage has a depth, and breadth of hue—it can be aesthetic. Rage can be utopic, or apocalyptic, like wildfire exploding after years of suppression. Rage can be born from grief. It can lend unparalleled clarity and utter unintelligibility. If we let it, it can light our way through deep tunnels of hopelessness and despair toward *jouissance*.

Rage is an important affect as it relates to queerness and ecology, both of which confront violence and the threat of collapse. Rage can lead to beautiful ruptures like Stonewall, to the burning of the third police precinct in Minneapolis during the George Floyd protests, to acting up, bashing back, and to eco-sabotage. Rage can be contagious, suddenly blooming everywhere. In plant ecology, disturbance-adapted species are called ruderal species. These plants are weedy—after an environmental disturbance, they are often the first to move in. Though their tiny seeds may go unnoticed, they initiate new landscapes.

Rage can be scary. It can go *too far*, becoming dangerous; rage is not inherently *good*. Although it is a part of us, it should not be fetishized. Fighting back against injustice is not safe, but it can be beautiful, and *queer* rage can be *extral*.

Rage forces us to consider alternatives, to change the current narrative.<sup>21</sup> What if Lyssa, daughter of Nyx, goddess of night (or in some stories, daughter of Gaia) became infected by her own rage? What if Lyssa went feral? [SEE ANASYRMA.] What would a ruderal myth look like? Let's write it together. I'll start: *Mad with the grief of generations, at the continuous unspeakable loss around her, as she beats her breast and tears her hair, Lyssa's queer rage is contagious. We feel it now too. May the weeds of her contagion spread.*

### SUBMERGE

You enter the ocean from a beach. The water is cool and brings the edges of your body into sharp relief. You become aware of every inch of submerged skin surface as you wade further, and the water holds more of your body until at some point you cast off into a breaststroke. You swim out. It's early summer in the Atlantic, small waves pass every five or six seconds, and a light wind textures the surface. Think about how your body behaves in the water like that, if you can. What kind of effort do you need to sustain in order to float? You swim one

hundred feet offshore, how many room lengths is that? Your head is just above the surface of the water, and as waves pass, the beach comes in and out of view. What does this distance feel like to you? and how does your brain measure it? In breaths? In effort? In strokes?

In water, space, and distance become reoriented. Lungs and arms become differently important, gravity is turned off, and our legs seem to change their function as well. Our relationship to the body changes in the water: its seemingly-prescribed, biologically- and genetically-fixed land functionality dissolves. The threat of predation and the possibility of communion are directly related. To enter a body of water is an act of vulnerability that puts us out of our element. In that vulnerable state: isolation, but also: connection. A tangible substrate unites the body to both the shore it came from from and to the next continent, as well as to every living and non-living thing in-between. [SEE COSMIC FOLD.]

Ryuichi Sakamoto recovers a piano from the Pacific Ocean after the Fukushima Disaster and composes with its altered, detuned body on the album *async*. Submerged, re-emerged changed, new sounds become possible.

Underwater, one's body is placed in direct co-existence with a soup of molecules, microorganisms, and history—it all runs off into the sea. To submerge is to open one's self—body, mind, soul—to the whole of it.

“The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organization”.<sup>22</sup>

### Endnotes

- [1] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), preface.
- [2] The idea of a research paradigm, particularly one that critiques or expands upon established academic value systems, is inspired by Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fenwood Publishing, 2008). The interest in examining research methods for the interdisciplinary field of queer ecologies is also prompted by Timothy Morton in the article “Queer Ecology,” where they write, “Scholarship must research the ways that queerness, in its variegated forms, is installed in biological substance as such and is not simply a blip in cultural history.” (*Modern Language Association of America* 125, no. 2 (2010): 273–282. Accessed October 30, 2023, doi:10.1632/2010.125.2.273.
- [3] For a deeper historical consideration, see Dyer, Jennifer and Allison Surtees, eds., *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 157–168, and particularly Evelyn Adkins, “The Politics of Transgender Representation in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* and Loukios, or the Ass,” 157, in which the author explores textual references to priests of the Syrian Goddess (*Galli*), many of whom were eunuchs, who adopted feminine social roles and garments and referred to themselves and each other as girls: “In their own words, they construct feminine identities, adding to the evidence that some of the followers of Cybele and the Syrian Goddess—commonly referred to as *Galli*—were transwomen and other assigned-male-at-birth individuals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.”
- [4] Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 214.
- [5] The myth of Hermaphroditus is a later Roman addition to the pantheon, first seen in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius (*The Golden Ass*) in the late 2nd century CE. It is likely that the story was an adaptation or expansion upon earlier traditions of Aphroditus, the male or intersex Venus.
- [6] The Louvre's famed *Sleeping Hermaphroditus*, the Roman marble statue for which Gian Lorenzo Bernini carved a tufted mattress in 1620, is commonly referred to as the “Borghese Hermaphrodite” to this day.
- [7] The joy and reparative power of sexual liberation and the queer body can also be explored through representations of Baubo, the crone goddess of mirth, who is sometimes represented in the Anasyrma pose. Baubo is said to have made the grieving Demeter laugh by showing her vulva to the Goddess. See “Baubo, Truth, and Joyful Philology,” *The German Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (Summer 2020), 359–373, accessed October 30, 2023, doi: 10.1111/gequ.12145
- [8] Donna Haraway introduces the term “compostist” as an alternative to “postmodern” in *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 144–168.
- [9] C. H. Talbot, “A Mediaeval Physician's Vade Mecum.” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 16, no. 3 (July 1961): 213–233.
- [10] As seen in the illustration by Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi* (Oppenheim: Heironymous Galler, 1617–1621). Other notable illustrations include the well-known folio by the Limbourg brothers, “Anatomical Man,” *Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry* (1411–1416), and the fascinating history of folding manuscripts known as vade mecum, worn by physicians used in their traveling prognostications, one of the best examples being the “English folding almanac in Latin,” ca. 1415–1420 in the Wellcome Collection, London.
- [11] These concepts of Organicism (the position that the universe is orderly and alive) are found in Plato's *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*, as found in “Plato: Organicism,” Internet Encyclopedia



of Philosophy, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/platoorg/>.

[12] Karen, Barad, "Transmaterialities: Trans\*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings." In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (June 2015): 387-422, accessed October 30, 2023, doi: 10.1215/10642684-2843239

[13] For a full exploration of eros in the *Symposium*, see Marina Berzins McCoy, "Eros, Woundedness, and Creativity in Plato's *Symposium*" in *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114-139.

[14] The mutualism of clownfish and anemone is dependent on symbiotic bacteria which generate an epithelial mucous signature matching that of the anemone so that its nematocysts (stinging cells) are not triggered by the fish. Because the mucous signature varies on an individual basis among anemones, the mimicry of the clownfish and its microbial symbionts is even more sophisticated than initially thought. Audet-Gilbert Émie et al., "Microbiomes of clownfish and their symbiotic host anemone converge before their first physical contact," *Microbiome* 9, no. 1 (May 2021): 109, accessed October 30, 2023, doi: 10.1186/s40168-021-01058-1

[15] George Bataille, "The Solar Anus," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Manchester University Press, 1985), 7.

[16] Ishir Honda, "Godzilla, The Uncut Japanese Original (Gojira)," YouTube, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nn-Wg1NU32I> (0:24:43-0:28:09)

[17] "monster, n., adv., & adj., Etymology," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed October 30, 2023, doi: 10.1093/OED/7407360444

[18] The term nemesis has evolved to mean enemy or villain in common practice, but the original word refers to the Greek goddess Nemesis, who operated more as a stand-in for a contemporary legal system, bringing justice and retribution to those who defied the gods, as found in "nemesis," Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/nemesis>

[19] NYC has put out a bulletin asking citizens to help stop the spread of the Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) by stomping them on sight, despite existing laws that prohibit the harming of wildlife, as found in "Spotted Lanternfly," NYC 311, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://portal.311.nyc.gov/article/?kanumber=KA-03449>

[20] Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 27.

[21] Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine call us to write new myths and tell new stories of uncivilization in their 2009 self-published "The Dark Mountain Manifesto," accessed October 30, 2023, <https://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>

[22] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 30.

# Permeable bodies

This correspondence between artist-geographer Sage Brice and storyteller-social practitioner Helen J. Bullard retrospectively examines the increasingly queer turn Brice's work has taken since making *Unruly Waters*, a series of drawings and sculpture documenting and responding to performative engagements with the changing river-scape of the Bristol Avon (2013). This body of work employed a number of techniques - collage, speculative fiction, superimposed temporalities, and boundary transgressions - that with hindsight align closely with queer-feminist approaches to interrogating nature-culture entanglement.

Exploring "email exchanges" as a method of co-authorship, collaboration and reconnection after an interval of fifteen years, Bullard and Brice begin to unravel their paths through human and non-human landscapes and questions that were always queer and trans, and critical to their personal and creative journeys.

in conversation: **Sage Brice and Helen J. (Hj) Bullard**

**8 March, 2023**

Dear Sage,

*I remember the thunder rumbling along the shoreline when we met sixteen years ago on Creag nam Bathais. We were engulfed by the clacking of gannets. The storm felt like deep voices in my ribs. Everything felt unregulated. Egg shells on magmatic ledges: calcium crystals and silicate. Urchins, water, a silver sunscreen. Flight paths became thick, like pine sap. And at the end of the day, I remember discussing zugunruhe - migratory restlessness. Because I had no visual evidence of my day, nothing to share, but far too much.*

*What I knew of you back then was dandelions and maps, and a tin can kingfisher. But what remained throughout the years was how you spoke of life and work as the same. No boundary. We were both building a language. I would not have said "social practice" back then. Would you? I hadn't learned about that yet. I would have said "(extra)ordinary" or "displaced" to explain the animals and environments I was drawn to. But I was moving toward a remapping, nurturing an urgency to dive, to move, to resurface elsewhere like the seals watching me watch the guillemots.*

*Can you tell me about Unruly Waters?*

**24 April, 2023**

Dear Hj,

I recall so vividly that sense of overwhelm, of too-much-yet-not-enough-ness that for me has always been part of drawing birds and their ecologies, especially at sites such as Creag nam Bathais (thank you for teaching me the Gaelic name!) and the Huleh valley where I did my PhD fieldwork. My memory of our encounter through the Seabird Drawing Week is almost one of ships passing in the night - I think we overlapped only very briefly in our time there - and yet also one of a lasting impression. I loved the way your work really seemed to build on the strong 'artist-naturalist' underpinnings of that particular setting yet branched