



dear friend,

I would like to share a few things with you before you read this zine. This zine is one in a series of six, made in six days, during my stay at PAF residency in France in the very sunny October 2022. I made these zines out of a desire to trace entangled thoughts, to assemble and disassemble experiences and theories, to weave a container of ideas to hold my relation to queer ecology.

These texts are epistemologically rooted in my own experiences, and therefore also in my affinities with the written word. I want to acknowledge the written word as a white + colonial + patriarchal tool of existing power, and my (inherited) affinity with words as a privilege in these systems of oppression. To offer a small way of breaking through the paradigm of the written word, as offering "truth" and "universality", these texts are being edited with associations, contradictions, anecdotes, by hand after print by me - and, as I'd like to invite you to, also by you. My hope is for this ongoing editing to destabilize and reimagine the printed texts.

I would also like to think of "the importance of 'mistakes' in queer reading and writing". I am most likely wrong about things - and I did not write these texts with an intention of being smarter or "more right" than others, but for making relations and rupturing open "rooms to realize that the future may be different from the present". (Sedgwick, Paranoid vs. Reparative Reading). I'd like to invite you, as you read this, to consider this the subjective and personal project that it is and to allow for ambiguity in your reading. As in queer ecology, let's get lost together in the web of tentacles, hyphen, entanglements.

With the form of zines, I align myself with the radical tradition of self-publishing arising from feminist movements. Zines have long been a cherished tool for sharing with small and large communities, for political agitation, for forming knowledge, for distributing art, without the apparatus of "legitimation" by institutions. Zines thus enable and invite "illegitimate", autotheoretical, activist epistemologies and the distribution of those knowledges in accessible ways for the addressed community. Embedded in this tradition, I made these zines to now share with you.

And one more tiny thing: some of these zines are very personal, so please be gentle & I trust you with this.

Warmly,

Toni

03 lavender stories



How could I tell my stories about queer ecology without letting the plants tell their stories, too? I'd like to turn to my teacher and companion in queer ecology: Lavender.

Lavender grows all around me now: seaming the edges of the terraces, the stairs, in all corners of this place. The scent of it, deafening my mind, is wafting through the rooms of the castle. Little bundles of lavender, cut from the garden and dried, are scattered everywhere.

Outside, the lavender grows in sturdy bushes, evergreen-pale leaves like stars from the branches. The stalks with the flowers rising skywards, proudly. Underneath the lavender, ground ivy grows... Originally from a mediterranean climate, many kinds of lavender can survive in a lot harsher climates. They have been used as medicine since time immemorial, and if planted in front of a house, will ward off evil spirits.

Their scent is calming, lulling me to sleep... the name lavender is derived from lavare: to wash. Lavender soap, lavender sacks in linen, lavender baths trigger quite feminine, cleanly, traditionally wifey associations. Lavender, though, will not easily be defined, and instead lends its name to radical queer politics...

Once, when I was going through a hard time some years ago, I sought shelter in the apartment of a close friend and lived with him for some weeks. Every evening, before I went to bed, he sprayed my pillow with lavender scent. It is one of the sweetest acts of care I have ever been blessed with. (His name is Ken.)

Lavender, when planted around the house and close
→ ! to the entrance, wards off evil spirits. (Lavender is
not only a signifier, an ally - but also a guardian...)

green used to be the signal color for
gay men... These carnations were dyed
green, an "unnatural" color for a flower.
In a single symbol, Wilde incorporated
the whole paradox of queer-native
relationships / narratives.

Derek Jarman teaches us that "a sprig of lavender held in the hand or placed under the pillow enables you to see ghosts, travel to the land of the dead". (Modern Nature). So let us ~~at least~~ travel back in time, the lavender scent transporting us to the realm of our queer ancestors.

As lavender is also the name of a color, other flowers of the same purple will tell this story, too. Violets are among them, "roses and crocuses / ...together you set before more / and many scented wreaths / made from blossoms / around your soft throat... / ...with pure, sweet oil / ...you anointed me, / and on a soft, gentle bed..." - Sappho was writing of purple flowers already, and, almost miraculously, they still bloom in queer circles. Violets and lavender are resilient, like their queer and trans siblings.

Their human-plant siblinghood was bound stronger together in the 1890s, through gay icon Oscar Wilde... Aside from the green carnation in his buttonhole, he and his friends were known for wearing purple clothing - purple/lavender/violet became associated colors of queerness, and of gay men in particular...

A few years before, lavender was simply a fashionable color without the gendered ballast, but since Oscar Wilde's trial a wave of homophobia swept over the world. Caspar Heinemann explains "The pansy has remained a staple in anti-queer lexicon since the last century, the humble violet symbolising weakness, effeminacy, all things effete, wimpy, and generally flowery."

Lavenders, violets, and their color were inextricably entangled in queer history from here on.

Around this time, the idiomatic use of "a streak/a dash of lavender" established itself as a signifier for gay men, most notably used in a Lincoln biography - stating that one of his friendships had "a streak of lavender, and spots soft as May violets".

Then, throughout the 1930s and 40s, so many of the folks of the queer subculture in Berlin (and Europe) were murdered in concentration camps, wearing pink patches on their arms as a signifier for their queerness.

After the war, both in Germany and in the US, the 1950s constructed an image of the nuclear family that could not be more patriarchal and heteronormative as the ultimate and desired norm for the post-war economy boom. This was not only necessary for economic reasons in the Great Acceleration, as Silvia Federici taught us, but also connected to a bizarre streamlining of social behaviours in the vague post-(or still)-fascist beliefs of "the modern man/woman". A stable, modern society was to be built, and Foucault famously proved that queerness has long been positioned as a deeply destabilizing force.

And somehow, Senator McCarthy, who thought that "every active communist is twisted mentally or physically," found that queer people are similarly "twisted" and must be communists. Both communism and homosexuality were „threats to the ‚American way of life‘.“ Charles Seib, a junior senator famously said, „If you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker.“

Thousands of queer folks, mostly gay men, lost their jobs and livelihoods as results of what was soon named "The Lavender Scare".

but also lesbians!

* In "chroma".

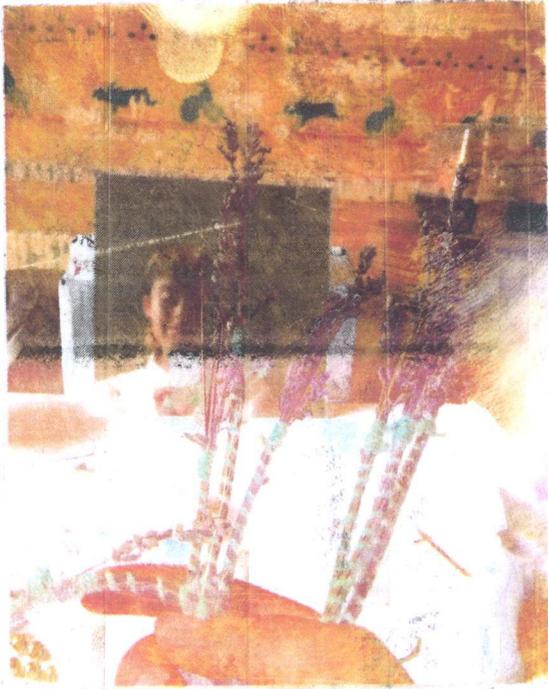
Derek Jarman writes of "the blue of men and the red of women" blending into purple together. He also wrote that "If anger is red, then rage is purple". In the 1970s, a radical lesbian group wrote in their manifesto: "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion".

This radical lesbian organisation called themselves "The Lavender Menace".

And with the Stonewall riots, the gay (and queer) liberation movement began, also named - you guessed it - the Lavender Revolution.

"The faggots and their friends between revolutions", a truly magical book about queer communal living in pre-AIDS times, already knew about their plant entanglements: they are planting gardens, worshipping their plants, and sometimes they "are so overcome with love and passion that they lie in the watermelon patch and masturbate".

After one of them, "Heavenly Blue", recovered from a sickness, the faggots and their friends "painted the house pink and the trim lavender. They carved peacock feathers in the wood around the door and planted roses in the front yard. Then they all began again to be who they were. Quickly, they all go out into the neighborhood to discover their friends and find a faggot world being made."



writing this in the garden with the peacocks and roses and fruit trees,
and imagining myself to a place that looks exactly like this one...

In the 1970s, many faggot worlds were being made. The author and illustrator of "The faggots and their friends" lived in the Lavender Hill Commune, and many more queer communes popped up. The Radical Fairies got together and founded communities of "faggot farmers, workers, artists, drag queens, political activists, witches, magickians, rural and urban dwellers who see gays and lesbians as a distinct and separate people, with our own culture, ways of being/becoming, and spirituality". A whole lesbian back-to-the-land movement emerged, with many lesbian communities founding farms and other rural communes all over the US. Lesbian zines like "Maize" or "Country Women Zines" connected these communities, sharing knowledge and systems of care.

I do not want to gloss over the fact that those back-to-the-land movements are problematic due to their colonial entitlement: even if they initially seem like great environmentalist ideas, more often than not they "assume access to Indigenous Land and its ability to produce value for settler and colonial desires and futures" (Pollution is colonialism, Max Liboiron). It is crucial to remember and acknowledge whose land the Radical fairies and others meet on, and it is crucial to decolonize even the queerest communes on the countryside. After all, "Colonialism lurks in assumptions and premises, even when we think we're doing good." * Liboiron

The "faggot world" that Heavenly Blue and their friends find being made takes place "between revolutions" - implying that many more revolutions are necessary. (Maybe a queer ecological revolution?) - this faggot world, as the lesbian communes of the 70's, are no perfect places, they are "always in trouble". This should not be mistaken as a spirit of hopelessness, but as a potential for doing better in intersectional solidarity.

Muñoz: "they are already becoming undone in relation to a forward-dawning futurity."

The Radical Fairies have also appropriated native beliefs and spirituality in exploitative ways and have been criticized for this colonial practice by indigenous community (ies) from the start.

Another major issue I take with the lesbian back-to-the-land movement was the transphobia present in some of these communities. As part of their often quite strict no-male-access policies, they made the unsolidaric and utterly transphobic mistake of not allowing trans folks. Thinking of Jack Halberstams work, this is not to be read as a "sign of the time", but as a transphobic and honestly dumb decision.

My aim with this critique is in no way to discredit these queer legacies, but to emphasize that our relations to land and to each other are entangled in complex ways. A "faggot world" needs to hold space for these complexities.

as transmasculine folks have always been around

Coming back to Lavender teaches us how - Catriona Sandiland wrote this in the fantastic essay "Lavender's green?":

"Such a project lies at the core of refiguring 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 an unchallengeable privilege of a superior social position and moral ontology", but one emerging from enhanced appreciation of dissonances within our own identities." Not a rigid boundary between Self/Knowledge and Other/fear, but movement in the world through a multitude of queer environments." (Catriona Sandiland in Lavender's green?)!

This is a faggot world - a bright spot:

** read: whiteness as "ownership of the earth" (OnBair)*

The Queer Nature education project, based in the mountains of the Northwestern US "envision(s) and implement(s) ecological awareness and outdoor self-efficacy skills as vital and often overlooked parts of resilience-building for populations who have been silenced, marginalized, and even represented as 'unnatural.' Our curriculums necessarily go beyond recreation in nature to deep and creative engagement with the natural world to build inter-species alliances, ecological solidarity, and an enduring sense of belonging, even in strange and scary times on earth." It is a space decidedly for mainly LGBTQI2S+ folks and QT BIPOC, dedicated to "acknowledge(ing) the histories of specific technologies that we might work with, and (...) put(ting) earth-based skills and skill communities in conversation with whatever histories of oppression and repression exist on that land".

The histories of queer ecology is ancient, much older than we can imagine. In many indigineous tribes such as the Ojibwe, Two-Spirit people held positions of significant spiritual meaning, connecting to the more-than-human and animate world.

There is an ongoing debate about the term Two-Spirit, as one english word cannot possibly encompass the many identities and stories that are implied. Interestingly, Harry May, a key figure of the Radical Faeries movement, was involved in coining this term - with allegations of cultural appropriation of native spirituality amongst the Radical Faeries.



The ghosts of the lavender baskets...

Lavender continues to be entangled in queer stories. Only in 2009, a study was published by Derek Henley, Natasha Lipson, Kenneth Korach, and Clifford Bloch that linked the use of Lavender as an essential oil to pre-puberty breast growth in boys. Let me underline this: a contemporary study that said that using lavender as an essential oil makes young (cis) boys grow breasts. The study was quickly dismissed as unscientific for many reasons. However, it shows how persistent the connotation of Lavender and Queerness is. The "unnatural" breast growth linked to a "natural" product like Lavender essential oils points to the bizarre use of "Nature" as a weapon against queer folks, varying from queers as "uncivilized" and queers as "unnatural". Lavender will not make boys grow breasts.

really
WTF

But Lavender will continue to be a queer ally plant, to all the boys and faggots and fairies and dykes and all the other queers. ♡