



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

**05 queer landscapes**

I want to take a trip to queer landscapes, where coexistence flourishes in unexpected encounters, where more-than-humans engage with each other queerly in what Anna Tsing calls "assemblages as open-ended gatherings".

Together with my partner, I spent a scorching hot summer in Greece, on the Peloponnes. The summer was slow and lazy, we were mostly laying in the sun, unable to move in the heat. Yet, the landscape was surprisingly green and diverse: next to each other grew invasive bamboo, blooming Agave, and Eucalyptus trees, shedding their barky skin in long white stripes. The assemblage of plants coexisting in Greece, thousands of miles away from their native ecosystems, was striking. It was a queer summer, and I was trying to live in my sweaty, exhausted, weighted body. Amongst these plants, I was trying to find shelter in a unfamiliar landscape - and I imagine that they did, too, finding ways of living together in the wake of globalized trade routes that brought them to this unlikely home.

My curiosity for these landscapes grew.

I am now at PAF, located in St Erme. This landscape surrounding me now was ravaged by the first World War, and the bombs blowing up craters in the ground left this swath of land virtually soil-less after 1918. From the whole world, soil was imported to the Northeast of France, trying to undo the damage. With these soils, new species were introduced, their seeds waiting in the ground and waiting to grow anew. The forests here are young, the canopy is light and patchy, but the soils are sprouting with mushrooms of all kinds...

What are these landscapes, patched together out of salvaged parts? Humans have disturbed landscapes all over the globe, "untouched" wilderness is a "past that never existed". There are places where this is most evident, where the landscape has been disturbed/destroyed beyond recognition - and yet, sometimes, those places become new ecosystems: queerly coexisting in unexpected bursts of life. These places are called "novel ecosystems" or "ruderal ecologies" or "hyperecologies": "practically unrestorable ecosystems", that have been altered so much that they form new, stabilizing patterns of coexistence. My image of queer landscapes, though, is a broader term that includes those hyperecologies as well as patchy assemblages of unlikely and queer cohabitation in landscapes. Queer landscapes are also not "necessarily characterized by an absence of cultivation" (Stoetzner), but rather by unruly forms of cohabitation that radically differ from human-plant relationships of control, "that do not adhere to the places assigned to them in official definitions of public space, private property, and multiculturalist schemes. It is in this sense that (queer landscapes) carry seeds of change." (Stoetzner)

Derek Jarman, walking the shorelines of Dungeness, collecting flint stones and driftwood, cutting branches from lavender bushes he passes by on his walk. He has long known of hyperecologies, of landscapes patched together, of new wilderness.

After his AIDS diagnosis, he moved to Prospect Cottage: a small house on the Northeastern tip of England. It is a landscape awash with beautiful lights, but also a landscape ravaged by salty winds and ferocious storms. The soil is barely fertile. Visible from the cottage is a nuclear power plant, „glitter(ing) under a scarlet and black sky, slashed with orange and vivid blue.“ Dungeness, he writes, „is essentially a landscape of past endeavours: two lighthouses, two lifeboat stations, even two nuclear power stations.“ (Modern Nature)

This is where he settles down to build a garden “for dear friends / Howard, Paul, Terence, David, Robert, and Ken / And many others, each stone has a life to tell / I cannot invite you into this house”. Derek Jarman moved to Prospect Cottage in 1989, in a time where the queer community had become a ghostly landscape: with so many people dying/dead from the AIDS epidemic, largely ignored by the governments. At this point, he began building his vision of a wild garden, with the help of any plant that was willing to survive the harsh conditions.

*The nuclear power station so close by revokes the association with the Chernobyl catastrophe only a few years earlier - what Jarman did not know yet is the astounding rewilding on the poisoned site of catastrophe: wild horses, wolves that returned, fungi eating radioactivity - painting a picture of the possibility of life after catastrophe.*



*Derek Jarman in his wild garden.*

„I plant my herbal garden as a panacea, read up on all the aches and pains that plants will cure - and know they are not going to help. The garden as pharmacopoeia has failed. Yet there is a thrill in watching the plants spring up that gives me hope.“

Why there? Why in the bleak soils of Dungeness? What might grow in a life's landscape, ravaged by the AIDS epidemic, the death of dears, state-sanctioned dying and killing? How might life be possible in those ruins?

Jan Zita Grover, who was an AIDS worker during the same time, named those ruins "AIDS and other clearcuts". And yet: the garden of Prospect Cottage is still there, beautiful, thriving, full of wild colors - a thriving island in a stormy, bleak landscape. The hope that Derek Jarman describes in "watching the plants spring up" resonates with Grover's formulation of a "geographic cure": some kind of landscape that was alive, despite disturbance and destruction. The resonances of scarred and wounded landscapes with the experiences of the AIDS epidemic bound Grover and Jarman to their places, connecting them deeply with the ones that were surviving there, too. A "queer ecological sensibility" (Sandiland) that made Jarman "chain (him)self to this landscape": bound to stay with the trouble, but also evoking an image of protecting the place with one's own body.

Jarman and Grover have been finding ways to make meaning out of human disturbance of nature, and more than that: formed hyperecologies, monstrous and beautiful thriving worlds. In these landscapes, queerness and ecology meets in radically transformative and hopeful ways. He writes:

"It isn't a gloomy garden, its circles and squares have humour, a fairy ring for troglodytic pixies - the stones a notation for long-forgotten music, an ancestral round to which I add a few notes each morning".

There are more queer landscapes. Parks, too, are subject to human disturbance, even though in a much more planned and intended way. But there is no way of making the plants stay in line, and ecosystems tend to go their own paths, forming desire lines through their more-than-human agencies. Some of these queer(ed) landscapes, ironically, have arisen out of the very purpose of perpetuating/protecting heterosexuality. Public Parks and Nature reserves meant for recreation are human-made ecosystems and therefore tainted by all sorts of assumptions and technologies.

Catriona Sandilands writes that "the early parks movement was (...) born partly from a desire to facilitate recreational practices that would restore threatened masculine virtues. Of course, this desire was also planted in the assumption that cities were sites of the particular moral "degeneracy" associated with homosexuality." - Queerness has long been positioned as "unnatural" and therefore linked to the landscapes queers moved in: most visibly, those were cities, as they provide subcultures that create a sense of safety and solidarity. By allowing city dwellers regular options to be in Nature, Nature parks were "understood partly as a therapeutic antidote to the social ravages of effeminate homosexuality".

This obviously backfired.

These landscapes of public parks were often assemblages of introduced and native plants, that somehow arranged their coexistence. In Europe, public parks often emerged as an extension of botanical gardens: colonial projects of classification and theft, that caused an array of unforeseen effects and "lines of flight". In the US, on the other hand, it was often attempted to "recreate" idealized european landscapes (on stolen land). In this encounter of plants from all edges and ends of colonialist empires, and the planting of "exotics", novel ecologies arose, re-forming the landscapes through unforeseen relations.



However, these public parks were not only constructed to serve the "moral and physical fitness" of white people (settlers) specifically and to hereby affirm ideals of the white Man as "Master over Nature" - but also established heterosexuality as the norm along with it. Gordon Brent Ingram writes: "many of the city centre parks in North America and Europe were first established or were redesigned in the late nineteenth century with an emphasis on the public promenade, the male gaze, suppression of public sexual contact, and team sports as a means to lift up working-class morality. Such public parks have usually been programmed for what are sometimes conspicuous displays of heterosexual desire, courtship, and conquest."

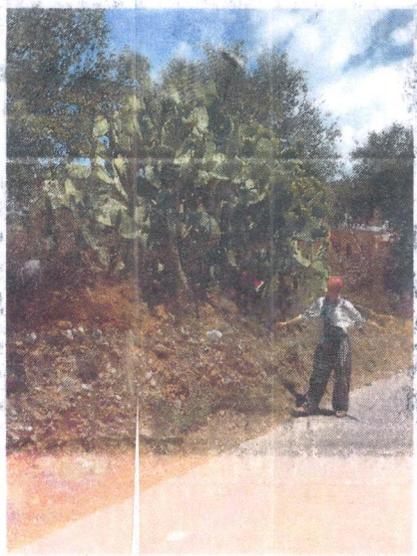
(Thinking of the german city of Karlsruhe; whose founder literally had the whole town built so he could have the best view on women in the streets...)

And vice versa did the queer community protect the trees: "a popular cruising area in Queens, New York, was badly destroyed by extensive tree cutting. Within a week, there were public actions showing conscious visibility, and the first gay liberationist environmental group, Trees for Queens, was formed to restore the park." (Ingram)

Public parks were meant to be spaces of "recreation" affirming white supremacy and heteronormativity, but plants are unruly. Instead, queer landscapes emerged:

Most public parks are eccentric assemblages for all sorts of introduced, invasive and native species, mingling in unforeseen ways. The often quite strict urban planning of parks is continuously subverted by plant's agency and the forming of hide-outs, dark, unlit spaces in public parks. Green caves form, and those again make home for queerness in the form of cruising areas. It needs to be acknowledged that this practice is born out of an oppressive society that criminalized and persecuted homosexuality and therefore drove the queer community into unseen places, and that cruising in parks can be dangerous. But it also is a part of queer culture. One of these places is the Hampstead Heath in London, that Derek Jarman writes about: "I have visited the Heath several times recently, it is always exciting and joyous. The deep silence, the cool night air, the pools of moonlight and stars, the great oaks and beeches: all old friends. The saplings I've watched grow to trees forty foot high in the years since I first came in the sixties. The place has changed, there was a time when any number of friends were out on a warm weekend. Sometimes it almost resembled a garden party." How beautiful to call the trees in cruising spots friends in the same breath with your queer community! Those places and their more-than-human inhabitants are the landscapes where queer culture was being made through encounters, sexual and otherwise. The trees of the Hampstead Heath are quite certainly gay allies.

The masculinity that these parks were trying to foster brought about many unruly and queer siblings as well: long before queerness was construed as “unnatural” and “an urban phenomenon”, parks and nature reserves were, especially in the western US, “spaces heavily dominated by men. These men frequently engaged in homosexual activity” (Sandiland). But also female masculinities found themselves in these spaces: When Greta Gaard speaks of “the butch resonance of rhydite under my fingers when I am rock climbing”, there is an ecosexual excitement speaking to the many ways that nature is always already queer.



*as in La person's take of Audrey Cordes famous statement.*

I want to frame this as a case of plant agency, of a tool betraying its master. When parks and the plants that constitute them thrive better than anticipated, despite their strange patchiness, they form understories, groves, darker spots, refusing to be kept in displayable lines. These unexpected spots became havens for queer folks to meet with less risk, and yet reclaim pieces of public space. Cruising spots in parks, where often the plants grow slightly better and messier than in other areas, are “edge effects” of normative urban planning. These “ecologies of unexpected neighbours”, as Bettina Stoetzner wrote in “Ruderal ecologies”, are sites where landscapes are queer(ed) and complexified, with and despite human disturbance.

How might these landscapes, these queer modes of coexistence, influence us? Fahim Amir writes that “such ENCLAVES OF DISORDER are habitats for unexpected forms of sociality. The “wild commons” of urban nature are, in a sense, “the spatial equivalent of free time: a sphere of existence” that has not yet been leveled by the bulldozer of profit maximization and swallowed by extended reproduction.”.

The array of plants from four different continents I have seen in Greece, Derek Jarmans insistence on making life possible in the bleak landscape of Dungeness, Cruising spots in public parks, and many more strange cohabitations, show us the world-making potentials of unlikely assemblages: it becomes visible that different worlds are not only possible, but already exist on the edges of anthropocentric infrastructures. These wild socialities resonate with the experience of chosen families that many queer and trans folks share. How do these queer families (human and more-than-human) assemble themselves, how do these systems of care arise on the edges and then function as sites of hope?

Queer landscapes can be a lense for thinking past destruction and desiring new connections into existence. Heterogenous, unruly landscapes that escape classification and order, and instead cave out many eco-social niches for people to find shelter in. In queer landscapes, disturbance, trauma, toxicity are no end points for life, but contamination and diversity rupture open microclimates, islands of alive-ness, or to borrow Michelle Murphys term: "Alterlives".

"Alterlife resides in ongoing uncertain after-maths, continually challenged by violent infrastructures, but also holding capacities to alter and be altered - to recompose relations to land and sociality, to love and sex, to survival and persistence."

These queer landscapes refuse notions of purity and instead build on "contaminated diversity" (Tsing), holding space for both pain and potentiality. Diverse relations overlap, entangle, gap, leak into each other and form landscapes where one might expect destruction and instead finds collaborative survival. Queer landscapes are hospitable places for unexpected intruders, contamination is welcome, surprise visitors at Prospect Cottage". Read against the ideal of "untouched wilderness", queer landscape are radically collaborative worldings, holding the seeds of many futures in the ravaged landscapes of the Anthropocene.