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IN THE CREVICES OF CAPITALISM: RURAL QUEER COMMUNITY FORMATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Women's and Gender Studies

Written under the direction of

Ethel Brooks

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

MAY, 2016

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

In the Crevices of Global Capitalism: Rural Queer Community Formation

By STINA SODERLING

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“In the Crevices of Global Capitalism: Rural Queer Community Formation” is an interdisciplinary study of a cluster of intentional communities in Tennessee, referred to by residents as the “Gayborhood.” As an interdisciplinary project, the dissertation draws on multiple methods, primarily ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, oral history, and media analysis. The project studies the Gayborhood not just from an LGBT history view, but more crucially from the perspective of the history of the land on which it is located. It argues that the creation of a queer community in rural Tennessee is predicated on several waves of displacement of other groups from the land, through an ongoing process of settler colonialism and capitalist exploitation.

The dissertation makes four main interventions in the field of Queer Studies: First, it provides a reading of the concept of “labor of belonging.” The Gayborhood is created through constant labor, which is for the most part unremunerated, and not always acknowledged. This labor creates a multifaceted belonging: people belonging to a community, land belonging to people, and people belonging to the land. Second, the dissertation presents a theory of materiality and excess. The Gayborhood is in several

ways built on waste: the utilizing of literal trash in building, discarded food in cooking, and also being located in a metaphorical post-industrial wasteland. Third, the project places rural queer intentional communities within the landscape of settler colonialism. The dissertation shows how the claiming of land by queer groups is predicated on the naturalization of white US citizenship, and the erasure of histories and presents of Native presence on the land. Fourth, the dissertation uses the concept of fermentation as metaphor and method. It poses that the process of fermentation, whereby microorganisms interact with feedstock materials in a process that combines decomposition and creation, can be used to explain how locations such as the Gayborhood become possible, and how they change.

## **Acknowledgments**

The first and foremost thank-you for this dissertation getting written – and the process being intellectually exciting – goes to all members, past and present, of the bio.cultures writing group: Kim Cunningham, Kate Jenkins, Alison Cool, Miriam Tola, Grzegorz Sokol, Carolina Alonso, Aaron Weeks, Jasmin Young, Bryce Renniger, Sasha Rodriguez, Paul Edwards, and Jenna Brager. bio.cultures is the dissertation support network of dreams: always seeing the best in each other and our writing, constantly asking incisive questions and helping each other make our work the best it can be. It is the kind of collective that gives me hope for the possibilities and realities of cross-disciplinary intellectual collaboration and partnership.

Two other writing groups have also been important along the way. In the early stages of writing, while figuring out what this dissertation was about and why I wanted to write it, I received immensely important support and feedback from the Writers Solidarity Project group. Thank you especially to Natty, Asoka, and Kylie for co-creating such a wonderful space for writing as a mutually nurturing yet challenging process. A group of Rutgers WGS alumnae have continued to meet to read each other's projects; thank you to Ashley Falzetti, Anahi Russo Garrido, Stephanie Clare, and Agatha Beins.

The members of my dissertation committee have encouraged me to explore the sometimes unconventional paths I stumbled upon in my writing and research, and gently nudged me back when I strayed too far. Many thanks to Temma Kaplan, Jasbir Puar, Kyla Schuller, Nancy Hewitt, and Karen Tongson, and especially to my advisor, Ethel Brooks.

Some of the key ideas and methods I engage with developed during a year-long

seminar on “Generations and Degenerations” organized by the Institute for Research on Women at Rutgers. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Sarah Tobias, and Marlene Importico created a friendly and collegial space for sharing ideas and thinking together.

In the Women's and Gender Studies Department office, Suzy Kiefer and Monique Gregory guided me through Rutgers bureaucracy. Without them, none of the work of the department, including this dissertation, would be possible. Thank you both.

Much of the writing of this dissertation took place during a Five College pre-doctoral fellowship year at Mount Holyoke College. At Mount Holyoke, Christian Gundermann, Angie Wiley, Jacquelyne Luce, Susanne Mrozik, Becky Packard, and Bridget Barrett provided collegiality and material and intellectual resources. The MHC young faculty crew reminded each other of the importance of work-life balance with hikes and rock climbing, which made me a better writer and thinker. Thank you to Sue Dickman and Nate Therien at the Five Colleges for organizing the fellowship program, and to Catherine Chou, Valeria Jimenez, and Lokeilani Kaimana, the kindest and friendliest “fellow fellows” anyone could ask for.

At Rutgers and Mt Holyoke, the amazing Women's and Gender Studies librarians, Kayo Denda and Julie Adamo, helped me find invaluable sources, including many I didn't know I was looking for. Likewise, the staff at county and state archives in Tennessee helped locate land deeds and other records.

Before going to graduate school, my love of Women's Studies was kindled by the faculty at Smith College, in particular Elisabeth Armstrong, Jennifer Guglielmo, Helen Horowitz, Martha Ackelsberg, Marina Kaplan, and Chaia Heller. They taught me that Women's and Gender Studies research and teaching at its best is expansive yet rigorous,

tied to social justice but not dogmatic. Professor Mohammad Jiyad gave me my first teaching job, sparking my curiosity for a career in adult education.

The people living at all the land projects I visited in my research were extraordinarily welcoming, feeding me, engaging in conversation, and putting me to work. From the gayborhood, I would like to thank MaxZine, Spree, Clutch, Neighbor Lee, Talka, Tom Foolery, Mona, Beef, Becca, Merril, and Emily. From HOWL, thank you to Vanessa and Laura, and to Crow who was an active member of the women's land community up until her death earlier this year. A big thank you to Sacha at Fancyland, who not only showed me around the land, but also asked questions and shared thoughts that deepened my analysis of queer land.

In the Gayborhood and the other places I did research, I met many people who engaged me in conversation and pushed my thinking further. My thinking about queer land has been provoked and expanded thanks to Hanna King, Shawna, Ramona, Wye, Chi Mei Tam, Finn Cunningham, Finn McLeod, Ellice, Howl, Che, Janey, Aren Aizura, and Simon Strikeback. I was also joined on some of these fieldtrip by companions who drove cars, shared ideas, and last but not least provided bus-ride entertainment: Emma Roderick, Ellice Litwak, Amy Seidenverg, Elvis Bakaitis, and Elsbet Servay.

Researching and writing a dissertation would not have been possible without a great deal of invisibilized labor. I want to especially thank all the Greyhound and Amtrak drivers and conductors who got me to my fieldwork sites, and the people who operate the post office and bus stop in middle Tennessee where I arrived and departed and conducted correspondence. They went above and beyond in locating lost luggage, holding buses when I was running late, and sending and receiving packages.

During the 2011-12, I did much of my thinking about community and property in Zuccotti Park. Neither the dissertation nor graduate school would have been the same were it not for the work and play that took place there. Thank you to Caro, Miriam, Ethan, Amy, Marlisa, Benedict, Joshua, Conor, Samantha, Mark, Sully, and everyone else who made that space both home and strange. And an especially big thank-you to everyone, named and unnamed, who participated in the People's Kitchen, day in and day out practicing the work of feeding community and dislodging objectifying relations.

Being a doctoral candidate at Rutgers has meant teaching throughout almost the whole process, and this has continuously shaped and reshaped my research and writing. Even more importantly, teaching constantly reminds me of what is worthwhile about academia. Thank you to all of my students, and especially to everyone in the Queer Ecologies course at Mount Holyoke, who thought through big questions of time and materiality, and indulged me in exploring the boundaries of feminist and queer learning.

While subject to the ever-increasing constraints posed by privatization and corporatization, working conditions at Rutgers are made bearable by the amazing efforts of labor activists on campus. For fighting together for decent conditions, and for dreaming about a post-capitalist university, I thank especially Carolina, Dilara, Rosemary, Nico, Katy, JB, Sherri, Joe, and Anna.

I have had a wonderful support network of friends and housemates outside of academia, who have made it possible to do this work and also enjoy other aspects of life. Immense thanks go to Elvis, Kate Angell, Kira, Emma, Naomi, Lynnea, and Alisa. My family – mamma, pappa, and Linnéa – have as always been supportive of my endeavor, even though it took me far away from home. They have provided encouragement, sent me



much-missed foods, and read drafts in the doubly foreign language of academish. Tack och bamsekramar.

In the final year of writing, when I often doubted whether this was a worthwhile project, Joe Rinehart repeatedly challenged me to articulate the political stakes of this dissertation, and constantly reminded of why the questions raised here are urgent and exciting. Most importantly, he consistently urged me to leave my computer to go dancing instead.

During the at times frantic last push of writing and editing, Tristan Gordon listened patiently to what mostly resembled a months-long Joseph Hart mono/dialogue, and made sure I ate, slept, biked, and of course sang. It is finished, and while perhaps not all my help must come from thee, a fair bit still does.

It is not by accident that Miriam and Carolina are mentioned repeatedly in these acknowledgments. With constant insistence on community and friendship being at the core of feminist scholarship and of life, they have been there for writing sessions, bus discussions, hugs and tears, and Zuccotti dance parties. Graduate school became an infinitely better place once these two (more-than)humans showed up. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

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## Arrival

*Imagine the stubborn occupation of a home always subject to encompassing forces and the vicissitudes of history yet stuffed full with the countervailing force of a local social imaginary.*

– Kathleen Stewart, 1996, 50

My first night at Bucky's<sup>1</sup>, the queer land project that will eventually become my main fieldwork site, K tells me, while sewing a tutu out of scrap pieces of tulle, that he's excited I got here after dark. He always loves when people arrive in the pitch-black of no electrical lights, loves seeing them discover the place in the morning, wide-eyed at the splendor of what was hidden in the dark of the night. And I am wide-eyed, yet not surprised, because already from the first glimpse, no matter how dark, I know that this place is spectacular. Things are out of place: someone is building a porch wearing a black slip, the shower is in the vegetable patch, the shitter is the most beautifully painted building on the land. Yet it all fits. An uncomfortable, discomfiting fit. It thrives on senselessness, on not just possibilities for a queer way of living beyond consumption-driven metronormativity, but the *actuality* of it.

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"Bucky's" and "Hickory Knoll" are both pseudonyms. The pseudonym "Hickory Knoll" was first used by *New Yorker* contributor Burkhard Bilger, after some of the residents at "Hickory Knoll" request that he use a pseudonym for the community. Other residents did not mind having the community's real name in print. Bilger also visited "Bucky's" while doing research for his article, and "Bucky's"'s residents gave their community's real name to Bilger (he ended up not including any references to "Bucky's" in his article). During the time that Bilger was writing his article, I discussed the issue of pseudonyms with a couple of "Bucky's" residents, who supported people's wishes to remain anonymous, but questioned whether it was actually possible; given the small number of queer land project and their fairly high profile within certain circles, if the reader is at all familiar with queer land or Radical Faeries, virtually any writings about "Hickory Knoll" and "Bucky's" is going to contain enough information to identify the communities. I maintain the use of pseudonyms here, but acknowledge that they do not provide much protection in this case. The issue is further complicated by other scholars having written about these communities using their real name.

I wake up the next morning to find that the house I am staying in is painted blue with yellow stars and moons. To the left of the house is a creek, to the right an outhouse shaped like a rocket ship. And everywhere a thick layer of green, the vegetation reclaiming the ground the humans have borrowed. To the back is a barn, a swing, and a dipping hole, and even further back, up toward the waterfall, is a *SEB*, a tiny little structure of a “special extra bed”: a raised floor, screens instead of walls, and a ceiling so low you cannot stand up under it. A path leads to the front of the property, past a bridge with paintings of dolphins and unicorns, then a silver Airstream trailer, dogs and cats, an old house with the quirkily sloped roofs so common in this region. And then the kitchen, a whole building to itself. Someone is eating breakfast, somebody else frying eggs collected from the chicken coop in the front yard. Outside the kitchen are the gardens, at this time of year – early summer – so lush the rows flow into each other. There are strawberries and basil and eggplants and beans and dozens of other edibles, not to mention stunning flower beds. The early risers are out gardening, enjoying the last hours of mild weather before the midday heat sets in.

Founded in the early 1990s, as an off-shoot of nearby Hickory Knoll, a Radical Faerie sanctuary<sup>2</sup>, Bucky's is enveloped in a thousand acres of queer-owned or -occupied land – the “gayborhood,” as the residents lovingly refer to it – tracing histories to the hippies of the sixties, through the Radical Faeries and trans-activism of the 1980s and 1990s. Below and around this gayborhood, a landscape that holds stories of drug wars,

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<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Native American spirituality and the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s, in 1979 gay rights activists Harry Hay, John Burnside, Don Kilhefner, and Mitch Walker put out “A Call to Gay Brothers: A Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries.” The group that grew out of this conference, the Radical Faeries, have created a gay masculinity based on connection with the land (Morgensen, 2008). Originally an all-male movement, many Faerie sanctuaries have now started allowing female-bodied people into their space, though the inclusion remains tense and tenuous.

the Trail of Tears, sharecropping and the Ku Klux Klan. Now, here are sanctuaries for dying hens and ailing humans; New Age altars and Evangelical revival tents. Abandoned farms and start-up moonshine distilleries; WalMarts and pawnshops; a juvenile rehabilitation facility and a taxidermy business. “Don't-say-gay”-bills in state congress, and a brand new Pride parade in town. Twenty years ago, Bucky’s could nestle in here, put down roots in the hollow<sup>3</sup> at the end of the road, where the sun sets an hour earlier than in town, and the world can sometimes almost be forgotten.

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<sup>3</sup> A hollow is a small, narrow valley, a common feature of the Appalachian landscape.

## Prelude, Compost: Land as the holder of stories and silences

*You need to speak more loudly to be heard above the creek.*

– T. Fleischmann, 67

*I'll tell you more about that later...or maybe I won't because some wounds just don't heal even if you talk them out. On the contrary, the more you dress them up in words, the more they bleed.*

– Subcomandante Marcos and Paco  
Ignacio Taibo II, 17

The stench spreads rapidly, every gust of wind – not that there are many of them on this blistering hot summer day – carrying yet another waft in our direction. In a few days, this peaceful hollow will be overtaken by hundreds of festival-goers, and the shitters have to be cleaned out by then. We tie bandannas over our noses, and I silently thank the powers-that-be that my task for the day involves digging soil, not excrement, even though I know that this year's shit is next year's compost for the surrounding forest. Loud noises emanate over from the shitter, the sounds of city boys not knowing whether to laugh or vomit at their luck of spending a summer week in the boondocks, carting around the most foul-smelling substance they have ever encountered.

This land is not just a “physical locale” but a material actor. It recycles our feces, and it also provides food, limits communication with the outside world, and plays an active part in healing practices. Destruction and decomposition are turned into something enjoyable, creative, productive, without taking away the discomfort. That shit will be buried in the ground, giving the trees on the hillside nutrients to grow. But how will they grow? What will this landscape look like five, ten, a hundred years from now? Who will it nurture?



## ***A joke***

“So...do you want to hear how things went with that conversation Alda was supposed to facilitate?” Chi Mei asks with a sigh. We are back to the topic that has to be brought up in every single one of our transcontinental phone conversations, what I have come to refer to, for lack of a better term, as “the incident.” Neither of us wants to talk about this any longer. It has been six months. The chaotic days of summer are over, people have come, gone, and returned. There is really no excuse any longer.

## ***Stories slipping***

This prelude (and to some extent the dissertation as a whole) is, like so much queer and feminist writing, a story about silences, about fragments and incoherent narratives, about looking in-between. It focuses on what has fallen into the crevices of late capitalism and of the Appalachian mountains. What grows.

Silence is, of course, nothing new in theorizations about queer lives. People have written about coming out (cf. Chirrey, Decena), being on the down low (cf. King), the closet (cf. Manalansan, Sedgwick). But the silences I think with and write about here are not the usual ones: they are not silences primarily about being out as queer or not. My informants are out, even if they do not speak about their sexuality with all people (who does, after all?). On the barn wall right at the entrance of Bucky’s hangs a sign: “Welcome Homo.” One does not enter this world thinking it might be straight.

But listen here to what that sign caused (or, rather, what decades of ideas about what those words mean and how one should interact with them, caused): After a torrential summer downpour, the road needed grading<sup>4</sup>. The county sent someone out to do the job,

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<sup>4</sup> A method for evening out roads in hilly places.

but when the road worker saw the sign he would be working under, he refused and left. He did not feel welcome at all. So the weeks go by, and entering and leaving the hollow is a mess. Eventually Malin calls the county road department, and says we really need the driveway graded, can you please send someone again? What's the address, the lady on the other end of the line asks her. Harwell Hollow Road, Malin answers. What?, says the county lady. Harwell Hollow. Oh, you mean Harwell Holler. Honey, there are no *hollows* around here, just *hollers*.<sup>5</sup> A day or two later, the county sends someone out to grade the road.

Malin has a clear analysis of what happened in this interaction: her (mis)pronunciation labeled her as a Yankee, and thus as an authority figure, someone to be respected. I wonder what would have happened had Malin gone into the office in person and asked for assistance, rather than doing so over the phone: head half shaved, the remaining hair part brown, part bleach-blond; cut-off t-shirt showing tattooed arms; the body odor of infrequent showers. Would she have garnered the same respect?

But I have gotten off topic. The stories wander, connect, and slip away from their start. Cause silences. You are sitting around talking and then you realize it has been hours and what needed to be said still has not been said. Then again, there's always tomorrow. There will be more time to talk then. But soon it is no longer tomorrow. Months have passed and things still have not been said. And then it is years, decades.

This is a story about stories, then, but it is also a story about land. About the way this land keeps stories, buries them, lets them unearth. Some stories are nurtured, planted

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<sup>5</sup> I will refer to hollows/hollers throughout this dissertation, and usually use the "standard" spelling: hollow. This is partly in deference to academic spelling norms, and partly an acknowledgment of my positionality as an immigrant trained in the US Northeast, who cannot claim a Southern/Appalachian identity, and who comes to this project as an outsider, though one with an ongoing involvement in the community I am writing about.

among the pansies, retold while weeding and harvesting. Others are left in corners of barns and fields, where they are covered by dust and ground ivy, seemingly gone, yet still there. Stories hidden like family secrets, known but kept from the outside world, even when the outside world might already know. The family secrets here are those of the hurt the community can cause, the exclusions and the negligence. The family secrets are whiteness and normative citizenship status. But they are also stories of moments of magic, held gently and quietly, not shared until the end of long meals. I collect stories, tell them to myself over and over again, savor the words.

Further, this is about how words and gestures draw borders through the land, onto bodies. Show who is in, who is out, and who is stuck in-between. This is where the (story about the) “incident” comes in. How, in the refusal to provide easy answers to seemingly simple questions, somebody got stuck in the middle. How the refusal to speak illuminates the untold stories that make up this place. But I cannot talk about that just yet.

### ***National belonging***

I choke on silence, just as the hollow does. I try and try and try to write this story, and fail over and over again. Maybe I don't *want* to write it? And I have been taught not to.

When I came to this country from somewhere else where race and sexual identity function differently than here, my position in the U.S. racial schema was quickly asserted. It had everything to do with my queerness. Although there was an active international student body at the elite New England college I came to the U.S. to attend, I felt more comfortable in the (predominantly white) queer community on campus. It was a largely white, almost completely U.S.-citizen community, and I realized that in order to fit in, I

had to be like them. Somehow, in order to be accepted as a legitimate queer<sup>6</sup> person, and not a curious oddity, I had to perfect a North American accent. For years, I worked diligently at removing every trace of Sweden and Malaysia from my English. I learned to hear “I didn’t even realize you were a foreigner!” as a compliment, because it asserted me as a person, not a cliché. This New England WASP accent stuck to me, bled over into my native language, to the point where I got rejected from a job in Sweden because I had a supposedly foreign accent (or was that Stockholm reading the northward forests as a different country?). I learned to pass as a white U.S. American because I never again wanted to be asked about Scandinavian health care, a subject I know very little about, or be told by a woman that she’d “never had a Swede in her Volvo [vulva] before.” And so I learned that queerness was U.S. American, that it was white, was unmarked by differences other than those pertaining to sex and gender. A national non-belonging is the secret I still frequently (attempt to) hide, when disclosure is too tiring.

It was this work of learning to pass, to fit in within white US American queer culture, that allowed me, a few years later, to blend right in at Bucky’s. I can’t claim to have quite grasped the proper cut-off-pants fashion, nor do I have a farmer’s/train-hopper’s tan, but for the most part I look and sound like the other dykes who pass through this space. So although I have known from the beginning that the hollow holds a culture of white supremacy, I didn’t feel it, because I had trained myself to see this as normal.

And then one evening my foreignness came back. At least I was mostly protected

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<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation, I use “queer” as an identity category to describe non-heteronormative bodies and groups. It is (one of) the term(s) used by IDA and Short Mountain Sanctuary to describe their own communities (IDA, Fellowship for Intentional Community). As long as physical and discursive violence are inflicted upon bodies and groups for not living up to the norm, I believe that identity formations are a useful and perhaps even necessary tool in the fight against this violence. Claiming either that “everyone is queer” or that “queer is not an identity” is insulting to the people who face the consequences of a homophobic society, invalidating very real, material experiences.

by that absurd title, “non-resident alien.” It was legitimate enough.

The “incident” took place only hours before I left “the field” at the end of the summer of 2011. It illustrated with unusual clarity issues of queerness, race, and citizenship that I grapple with in this dissertation; it would, in this regard, be the perfect thing to write about, the kind of moment I could build a chapter around. But instead, I found myself, together with two other visitors, writing a letter, clumsily figuring out a response to something none of us would have wanted to see happen, yet were not surprised had actually taken place.

This retelling is vague, I know. My point here is precisely that this is a moment that I in some ways cannot responsibly write about, something that is there, but now a haunting. And, still, as an academic-in-training, the mode I have learned for dealing with these conundrums is to write through them. I have to work through my ambivalence by combining the discourse/world-making/etiquette of the gayborhood and the wider community where it is located, with the academic, and in particular feminist, theories I feel at home in.

One option would of course be to drop the topic (the incident, the gayborhood) altogether, but this does not strike me as any more responsible than a tell-it-all narrative. These are important questions, issues that queer intentional communities need to address. The “incident” at hand was an anti-immigrant, racist “joke,” involving the physical bodies of the people present. I assume it is obvious why I am putting “joke” in scare quotes; any action that maps immigration status, race, and gender onto bodies in a way that privileges white maleness is never a joke. Of course. Though this was not clear to everyone.

Part of what made the “joke/incident” possible is a discourse within the

gayborhood – and in much of white middle/upper-class U.S. queer culture – of what Jasbir Puar refers to as “the foundational analogizing argument of gay and lesbian civil rights discourses” where “mainstream gays, lesbians, and queers [are relieved] from any accountability to antiracist agendas, produces whiteness as a queer norm (and straightness as a racial norm), and fosters anti-intersectional analyses that posit sexual identity as 'like' or 'parallel to' race” (118). This rhetoric is frequent (though also frequently challenged) in the gayborhood: queer people are oppressed and discriminated against, and therefore fall in the category of good people, those who are wronged against and hence do no wrong. By being seen as parallel, race and sexuality are also seen as distinct, and the intersectional aspects of discrimination and exclusion – within the gayborhood as well as outside – are not acknowledged.

At the same time, the residents of the gayborhood are for the most part not the “highly privatized, monogamous, and white(ned) docile [subjects]” (Agathangelou et.al., 124) of homonormativity; life here, as we shall see in the coming chapters, is only partly “decriminalized and ostensibly invited into the doors of U.S. national belonging” (ibid). Life in the gayborhood is to a large extent structured around a communal rather than private ethos, be it through mutual aid, care for the sick, or public sex. And visits from the FBI highlight just how fragile residents' relationship with the realm of legality is. Still, the overwhelming whiteness and male-dominance of the gayborhood make it all too easy for many residents and visitors to ignore their racial, sex, and gender privilege. Indeed, the Radical Faeries – the main group within the gayborhood – are notorious for their white appropriation of Native American culture and spirituality, and their stubborn unwillingness to examine this appropriation (Morgensen, 2011, ch 4; Povinelli, 2006,

104-8).<sup>7</sup> This stubborn ignorance can be witnessed in the gayborhood at large, not just in its Faerie contingent. When the person who made the anti-immigrant “joke” was confronted later that evening, s/he expressed how hurt she was at being called a racist, and equally hurt at being attributed male privilege she did not consider himself having. This attitude foreclosed any further discussion at the time, while also emphasizing just how important it is to address the “joke” and the larger implicitly racist culture it is part of.

Further strengthening the white hegemony of the gayborhood is the notion of the rural as a white space. This notion is not altogether inaccurate: according to the latest census, 78 percent of the US small-town and rural population is white, as compared to 64 percent of the total population of the nation (Housing Assistance Council, 1). Middle Tennessee is even more white-dominated, with some of the counties around the gayborhood having over 90 percent white populations.<sup>8</sup> Most research available on rural white hegemony discusses the British, not the North American, context, and hence is not always applicable, but we can still draw valuable insights from this work. Sarah Holloway argues that the assumed whiteness of British rurality is part of a certain narrative about the nation: “a rural consensus which developed as a symbol of security in

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<sup>7</sup> When I mentioned this unwillingness to examine and address appropriative practices to Mark Rifkin, a prominent scholar of queer settler-colonial studies and active participant in the Faerie movement, he adamantly disagreed with my statement, and stated that there is much discussion of these issues within Radical Faerie circles, including at Hickory Knoll. While I take Rifkin's challenge to my analysis seriously, I have not witnessed such discussions taking place, and other scholars of the Faeries, such as Scott Morgensen and Elizabeth Povinelli, write of the lack of attention to cultural appropriation among the Radical Faeries, as do some gayborhood residents with close ties to the Faeries.

<sup>8</sup> While Tennessee is a Southern state, it was not, especially in the eastern half of the state, part of the large-scale slavery-based plantation economy. As I discuss in chapter 3, the geography of the area was not suitable for large plantations, and hence slavery was less common (though by no means absent) than in other parts of the South. This means that there was not a large forced migration of Black people to parts of Tennessee, which has affected the population composition to this day. Thus, apart from the Southwestern corner of the state, Tennessee has very few Black-majority counties, unlike the rest of the South.

the face of rapid social change” (8). The same could be argued about US rurality, including representations of queer and LGBT rurality. While cities are construed as locations where new things happen, and thus include a conceptual space for those labeled as outsiders or newcomers, the rural represents continuity, a lack of progress, “the way things have always been.” One of the roles of the rural in the maintenance of the US nation-state is to provide a back-home feeling, where white US-born mothers bake apple pies, where things do not change, where “we” know what to expect.

Considering the ingrained image of the rural as a hegemonically white space, and the impact this has on the gayborhood, discussing the repression and outbursts of racist sentiments in this space is important. Stating that something is important does not, however, tell us what is important for us to do, how to properly respond. How do we focus our efforts, where do we direct our response for it to be more effective (if effectiveness is indeed a desirable goal)? Is speaking out always the best option?

### ***Culture of silence***

I want to read the “joke” and the responses to it within the context of the gayborhood. How was the “joke” made possible? What structures are in place? In this section, I think through the culture of silence in the region, in the hollows, noticing how this complicates narratives of speaking out as good.

### **Effects of stories**

A few years ago, a gayborhood resident decided to make a map of gay-friendly businesses in the area. Some of the business owners surveyed said yes, we're friendly, others said no, we're not, while some posed a question in return: “what do you mean, gay-friendly?” Asking a question opens up the space for a response and an explanation. “Gay-friendly”



is only relevant for a business that knows that some of its customers are “gay.” Sometimes, not talking is better. At the same time, that map could be a useful tool, and it could not have been created without pushing the boundaries, without being open about the fact that there are gay people living in the area.

Another gayborhood resident, let's call him Alfred, used to work as a nurse at a local hospital. One day, a co-worker complimented him on his new scrubs. Alfred said “Thanks! My boyfriend got them for me.” A few days later he got fired. His manager told Alfred that he did not fit into the cultural values of the hospital.

As we leave the hollow, Clutch stops the car and changes out of their miniskirt, into a pair of shorts. Not that they will look straight, not that people won't know what hollow they're coming from, but the shorts present a modicum of respectability. It's safer that way.

The question is, safer for whom? Does silence always protect? In my research and writing about the gayborhood, my first impulse is to protect the privacy and dignity of the gayborhood members, people whom I know and care about. I know that they, like most people whom ethnographically-oriented academics write about, have slim possibilities of challenging anything I would publish about them, and I need to be mindful of that. I am also aware that they are economically and culturally marginalized, living in an area with few job possibilities and implicit and explicit hostility toward people who are openly queer. I am constantly concerned with how to tell a story that is respectful of them, considerate of their position and their feelings. Karen Tongson writes, at the end of *Relocations*, her book about queer suburbia, that “[w]hen I first began to route the twists and turns of *Relocations*, I imagined I would tell all. Seduced by the fantasy of

comprehensiveness, I thought this book would reveal the vibrant lives unseen, unheard, unread,” but as her research and writing process continued, she “realized some part of me refused to reveal everything, lest I come to find, like [the artists she writes about], my precious nowheres occupied and taken over” (213). Academia impinges, demands stories, leaves little regard for the importance and beauty of nowheres. For these reasons, among others, I have also decided not to tell all.

But what about all the other people hidden in the shadows of the official narrative of this space? Those I don’t hear about because they do not fit into the image the gayborhood has of itself? Does my choosing to not tell everything further marginalized their stories? For example: the population of the county where Bucky’s is located is 96 percent white. According to U.S. Census data, this number has been fairly constant since antebellum days. But, then again, the stories told by real live people hint at a more complicated situation. One of the gayborhood old-timers tells me that the county used to have a much larger Black population than it does now, but that this population was driven out: “from what I hear there were a bunch of Ku Kluxers, and they did a series of, um, vigilante stuff at a series of black funerals and weddings, where they rode in and shot it up and terrorized people and broke them off. And the purpose was, you know, to 'drive the n\*\*\*\*rs out of the county,' and so the black folks left, they didn't wanna be here with that kind of crap.”<sup>9</sup> This interviewee is the only one who tells me this story, and I cannot find written records confirming it. Yet, she is one of the most knowledgeable people about local history I have encountered, and I cannot dismiss this narrative. Is it true? If so, why is it not told? Who is protected by not telling this history? Who was protected by people

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Merrill, Tennessee, August 2011. I discuss the history of the Ku Klux Klan in the region in greater detail in chapter 2.

not protesting? Does silence always protect the strongest? What are my silences and what are they contributing to? Can I tell the part of the story I firmly believe needs telling – about how structures of nationalism, racism, and neoliberalism have aided the development of a rural queer community – without risking someone’s privacy, without hurting anyone? Where does my responsibility lie?

### **Strategic silences**

Telling stories not only risks offending people; it can also cause further damage. Sometimes a strategic silence has to be maintained. Breaking that silence has consequences. Each year, the gayborhood hosts several events – pagan gatherings, a music festival, work parties – that draw hundreds of people. Many of these visitors come here wanting to be as queer as can be for a few days, a desire that is accepted, even encouraged. However, the gayborhood residents have to remind the visitors to tone “it” down once they leave queer land and step into the general community; in fact, some residents prefer that visitors not leave the land at all. Going into town in drag can be read as a provocation, the consequences of which the residents will have to spend months repairing. Precarious bonds have to be readjusted, trust rebuilt. Acceptance into the life of rural middle Tennessee has taken years, decades, of gifts of food, cow milking, babysitting, conversations, beer. A brief lapse into disrespectful behavior will not quite ruin all that, but the cracks will be deep.

I doubt that many, if any, of the county residents surrounding the gayborhood are ever going to read this dissertation or anything else I write; still, I wonder if writing can have some of the same effects, can provoke a reaction, put a crack in a carefully constructed safe(r) space.

To clarify: the issue at hand is not that people in the area think that homosexuality is a sin – though many do – but rather that undesirable or sinful behavior should be kept private. As E. Patrick Johnson describes Southern etiquette, the problem is not so much the transgression of moral codes as the “flaunt[ing]” of the transgression (4). There is a strong culture of silence in rural Tennessee, a live-and-let-live attitude. I’ll ignore your still-house if you ignore my cannabis plants. “It’s not a problem being queer here,” one person at Bucky’s tells me. “There’s something queer going on in each of these hollows.” You just don’t talk about it. This is a landscape on the margins of the economy, a region where jobs are so scarce you probably will not find one unless your grandfather knew someone’s grandfather, where grocery stores go out of business if they do not accept food stamps. Sometimes you just butcher your own deer, sell your milk right from the farm. I won’t tell on you, if you don’t tell on me.

## Shouts and whispers

“I went from shouting and never being heard, to whispering and feeling like I made a difference.” This is how Bill<sup>10</sup> describes his move from gay rights activist in urban Florida to country-folk in rural Tennessee. Away from marches and meetings, he feels like his mere presence here is teaching people something about accepting gay people. It is not simple, and it certainly does not fit into any established narrative of gay rights or liberation:

There are a lot of people that would have been raised bigots – that *have* been raised bigots – that firmly believe in their church and the teachings that say that I and people like me are bound for hell, do not pass go, do not collect 200 dollars, that’s just the way it is. But they accepted me, and they’re accepting of us....And overall, our community is becoming really integrated....And you can be like the

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<sup>10</sup> Bill” is a pseudonym. Some of the other names in this article are not. Letting interviewees chose their own names is one attempt at not imposing silence.

[neighbors], who firmly know in their heart of hearts that I am bound for hell, but still love me and accept me.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, talking to Bill and others in the gayborhood, this mode of existing is a viable and positive way of creating queer life and community. Whispering is often more appropriate than shouting.

How do academics, used to a tell-it-all style of communication equivalent to the loud marches Bill used to participate in back in Florida, approach the study of a community such as the gayborhood, where a culture of whispering and non-speaking often prevails? As Kamala Visweswaran, writing about her anthropological fieldwork in southern India, asks in relation to her “informant’s” refusal to speak: “does not my puncturing of a carefully maintained silence replicate the same moves of a colonial anthropology” (60), the desire to conquer and excavate? In recent years, some excellent scholarship on this topic has come out, notably by Martin Manalansan, who argues that “silence stands in sharp contrast to the kinds of discursive norms of coming out. It has a kind of quiet dignity and carries multiple meanings” (30). Manalansan, in his ethnographic study of Filipino gay men in New York City, points out that not telling is not the same as hiding: “Many informants...felt that they didn’t have to come out [to their families] because they thought that their families knew without being told” (28). While never being spoken, an implicit understanding can be developed, where gestures such as a mother cooking for a son’s partner shows a respect for the relationship (28). As Manalansan paraphrases one of his research subjects’ analysis: “ambivalence may permeate this kind of silence, [but] it is also indicative of a kind of dignified acquiescence and, more importantly, of abiding love” (30). Carlos Decena, in his study of gay men

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Bill, Tennessee, August 2010.

from and in the Dominican Republic, uses the term “tacit subjects” to explain how his informants relate to their families and communities: a way of “inhabit[ing] a space that is both 'in' and 'out' of the closet” (19). Decena argues that there are “forms of connection that cannot be fully articulated but can be shared, intuited, and known” (3). This is similar to what I am arguing, but also distinct. In my analysis, it is not so much that certain things cannot be spoken, but more that *not* speaking them has value within the community context. My study of silence in the gayborhood deepens the understanding of the multiple contexts in which silence plays a role very different from a simplistic “in or out of the closet” view of queerness.

When Bill tells me about the gayborhood, he keeps coming back to the story of the time he went into town to buy chicken gizzards:

Nobody knew who I was [once I left Florida and moved to Tennessee], there was no more hate mail, no more threats, no more support, no more any of this, that or the other. I was just another guy living on the creek. And I was here for almost two years, and I went to the grocery store, and this was the [town] Food Center, which no longer exists, but, it was a lady named [Hattie], who currently works at the Food Lion, looked at me and I'm buying my stuff, and she rings up this package of gizzards, and she looks up at me, she says “So, where's he at this time?” “What?” “Where's he at this time?” No idea what she's talking about. She looked at me and said “Every time you send [James] on vacation, you buy chicken gizzards. Where's he at this time?” “California. For two weeks.” She looked at me and she winked, and she said “When you're gone, he buys broccoli.”<sup>12</sup>

As with any story, there are many ways to read this one. Queer relationships are secret, people take years to accept you, and even then you cannot really come out, but there is still a way of being queer. None of those interpretations are very interesting to me, nor do they convince Bill himself any longer. Rather, knowledge is transmitted and shown in certain ways, focusing on what is relevant and okay to speak about. It is a knowledge that

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Bill, Tennessee, August 2010.

is sparse yet deep, and rooted in an economy where the same person rings up groceries for two decades. Under these circumstances, telling a story can be allowed to take years. There is time, more of it than words or money.

## Dischordance

But I do not want this to be a simplified narrative about a culture of silence in the gayborhood and surrounding rural Tennessee. It is much more complex than that. Take MD's nursing school graduation, for example:

One of my favorite [Bucky's] stories is my graduation from nursing school, because my entire [Bucky's] family came. And even though I said "Y'all should really clean up!," they didn't. So they all came wearing, like, you know, Spree came in his purple skirt. I mean, they came just, like, as [Bucky's], to this church in [a nearby town], with these very uptight girls, who were really, like, I mean, it was their day, and so they were really, kind of like, especially intense about it. And this gaggle of people rolled up, and I literally watched these women's jaws just...It was so insane. It was nuts. And that was kind of that...yeah, that was kind of what I was up against, I guess [laughs].<sup>13</sup>

We could read this story as going against the culture of silence, but I do not see it as out of line. There is a constant balancing of appropriate and inappropriate moments to speak, to be flamboyant. And there are no easy answers. MD was simultaneously shocked and delighted that her Bucky's family showed up. Maybe it was okay because it was graduation, her last day of school. Yet these moments constantly take place. Despite what I wrote earlier about proper behavior in town, we go to the county fair in what some people would consider drag. There are not that many stares. Maybe the fair is a space to break the boundaries a little. Or maybe the boundaries are not as tight as they are considered to be.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with MD, Tennessee, June 2011.

I should mention that MD eventually moved away from Bucky's and the gayborhood. There were several reasons, but one was the tension she was experiencing between her job as a nurse in town and her life as a “commune housewife.”<sup>14</sup>

### ***Reacting***

So there are times for silence and times for whispers and times for shouts. We need to figure out which response is appropriate in each situation. In the moment when the “joke” happens, I am stunned into silence. I am used to having my immigration status scrutinized at airports and embassies and job interviews, but not in a place where I feel safe, by someone I consider my friend. And I can let my shock be, because, as is the case at airports and embassies, my status is such that I am let through, that I am allowed to proceed to dinner without further questions. Chi Mei, on the other hand, is stopped, speaks back, but is not heard.

My keeping my quiet would only protect the “joker” and the culture of racism in the gayborhood. Further, it would put the full burden on Chi Mei. We spend a good part of our seventeen-hour car ride to New York the next day devising a response. Together with a sympathetic bystander to the “joke,” we write a letter to the “joker”'s housemate and close friend. It takes us months. We are scared about how it will be received, worried about how it will affect our relationships with people we, despite this, care deeply about. Within hours of emailing the letter, we get a thoughtful response, and draw a sigh of relief. But then, nothing. Our attempt at speaking is swallowed up by the enormous silence around nationality and race at Bucky's. Speaking up was right, but now seems horribly ineffective.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with MD, Tennessee, June 2011.



We are left with the question of what to do now, the next step. And this returns me, through this circuitous path, to the question I asked in the beginning: what can we as academics responsibly write about? Because my response is still to write. It is what I have been trained to do, a tool whose efficacy I still have some faith in. Is my writing about the gayborhood in my dissertation, analyzing these moments and putting them into perspective, doing anything? Can it put some tiny cracks in the system of ignorance and appropriation that allows for these “jokes”? And, if it does, does that make the writing worthwhile? Does that justify the invasion of privacy? Bucky's residents are constantly nagging me, during mundane activities of wood-splitting and Scrabble-playing, “are you taking notes on this?” Reminding me of the fine line between my making a living and their making a life.

*The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.*

— Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” 36

Once the sun has set, or in the middle of the day when it is too hot to work, people gather in the kitchen or on the porch swing. Over a home-cooked meal or beer, whiskey, and cigarettes, topics big and small are contemplated for hours. If you had to choose, would you rather have the legs or the arms of an eight-year old for the rest of your life? Do you think we need to make more compost tea? How many potatoes did we actually plant? Can someone show me how to make a vinegar tincture? Anyone interested in doing a liquor store run tomorrow? Any ideas for how to raccoon-proof the chicken coop? Oh, and we need to do something about the ghost in the back barn, she's starting to scare people. “The

quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives” is low-key, and, at the end of the day, full of words. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by all this talking. At those times, I like the early mornings better, when us gardeners groggily crawl out of our tents for a few hours of quiet weeding and watering. Perhaps I am reluctant to write these things because I appreciate that silence. But then, on good evenings, the long, slow conversations do bring light and world-making.

Lorde continues: “As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny and to flourish with it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us” (36). It was fear that caused us to take such a long time writing that letter. Fear of losing people we care about. And, for me, fear of losing a research site, fear of not finishing this dissertation in a timely manner. But it is also something else. Wanting to choose the right light to scrutinize by. What is illuminated? What needs to be illuminated? And what needs to stay in the dark, needs to rest, needs some time out of the spotlight?

As I am finishing up the first draft of this chapter, I receive an email from Chi Mei. She wants to submit the parts of the letter she wrote to a 'zine about queer no-borders activism. Is that okay with us, if no names are mentioned? We all say yes, even though we are reluctant, once again, this time to put the words out to a broader audience. I am happy that we are not dropping the issue altogether, and I am also reminded that I do not control this story, nor the story of the gayborhood as a whole. Pieces will be told, whether I write about them or not. But which pieces should be told? How? To whom? I send a draft of

this chapter to Chi Mei, and we have a quiet phone conversation about it, not knowing how to voice our frustrations. We decide that writing is useful, but not enough.

## Introduction

*I return south again because here it is quiet, I see each bud come and know what winter does. I cut hundreds of boards of rough cut poplar at the same angle. There is no one I love here. It's possible that I'm overanalyzing, like you suggest. That we're happy when we're together and that being happy is something like a berry bush or the wine we made from the berries. Berries and later wine. After several hours of thoughtful countryside perception, I call you on the phone to tell you that I feel like a swan in love with a plastic swan.*

— T. Fleischmann, 47

This dissertation has taken quite a while to write; I made my first visit to Bucky's in 2009, for non-academic purposes, but soon realized this land project raised questions – and excitement – that warranted sustained analysis. Much has happened at Bucky's and in the broader queer land community since then. Yet much has also stayed the same. Land tenure and access to a stable home are still precarious. White supremacist structures still organize many aspects of life, and while challenges are being posited, they are meeting with great resistance. Belonging to the community and to the land is still fluid and expansive. Daily and yearly rhythms are still shaped in the interaction between the land and the global economy. These are the tensions and conundrums I analyze in this dissertation, starting from the following questions: What are the exclusionary risks and creative potentials of queer land? What happens when groups attempt to create an alternative societal structure within the shell of the old, as queer and women's land arguably does? How are land projects, even when seemingly separatist, in conversation with other movements and the world around them? Relatedly, how are these projects implicated in power structures such as neoliberalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism? Considering the criticisms of exclusionary practices and racism leveled at queer land projects, can they develop into being more hospitable, more available for a

broader range of queer people, and, if so, how? Does queer land hold potential as a liberatory practice, or does it further entrench private ownership of the earth?

By writing a dissertation starting from these questions, my hope has not been to answer them all nor to provide solutions to the issues facing queer land. Rather, I am interested in what the process of asking these questions, and listening to the responses from conversations between land projects, academic (primarily queer) theory, and the land itself, *does*. I am interested in how thinking about these questions, and listening in unexpected places, poses ways of understanding queer rurality as imbricated in the global market, and queer theory as connected to the ground, to material temporality, and the more-than-human world. Anna Tsing writes, in *Mushroom at the End of the World*, about “capitalist edge-effects” (cf 55), the things that happen at the outskirts of capitalism, but are completely imbricated in capitalism, and wouldn't happen without it. I think of the work of queer land as being this kind of edge effect, one where capitalist waste and the more-than-human intersect and create worlds.

The movements and projects discussed here are messy, and that is precisely why they appeal to me as objects of study. Kathleen Stewart writes, in reference to James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, that “Agee proposed an ethnographic account to be read not for its truth value and congruence with fact but for its tense, halting evocation of difference and desire at the very heart of a double constructed 'real'” (1996, 23). This dissertation has the same sense of being a story about places that for most readers will be filled with “difference.” These places are also intensely filled with “desire,” in many senses of the word. I read these desires as wishes and daily struggles for a “different” world, and I read the land projects as showcases that a “different” world is possible. There

is an alternative. Or, rather, there are many, many alternatives. I write this not in the hope that everyone who reads it will move to a queer land project, but in the hope that this text will be part of a discourse about how another world is possible, a world where many worlds fit.<sup>15</sup>

## ***Interventions***

*To engender a pause (for reflection, for vibrant becoming) in the quickening compressions of the knowledge economy, the academic industrial complex.*

– Melissa Autumn White, 339

There are silences within the queer land community that hinder addressing central issues of race, coloniality, and neoliberalism, issues that are constantly present on the land, in the land. These matters are not altogether unspoken, but they often get forgotten or hidden, and they deserve further attention. This dissertation takes a multi-disciplinary approach of insider/outsider scholarship that allows for engaging with these forgotten or hidden questions in new ways. I make four main interventions: a reading of labor of belonging; a theory of materiality and excess; an argument for land as an actor; and the development of a rural queer methodology.

## **Land tenure and the labor of belonging**

The community of queer land projects such as Bucky's, which includes both residents and visitors, is created through a labor of belonging. This labor both recreates Lockean notions of ownership and exceeds them. On the one hand, contributing labor to a land project does create a sense of what might be referred to as “ownership,” in that those involved in the labor of the community start referring to Bucky's as “we” and feel at liberty to use resources and hold events on the land. This ownership, however, does not

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<sup>15</sup> I borrow the phrase “a world where many worlds fit” from the Zapatistas.

stand on its own, but is one-and-the-same with a sense of belonging: Bucky's is “mine” only to the extent that “I” am Bucky's'. Laboring on the land creates a relationship *with* that land, rather than turning it into a commodity. This relationship, however, takes place within a local and global structure of capitalist resource exploitation, ongoing settler colonialism, white supremacy, and queer marginalizations and inclusions. The labor that creates a belonging to the land community thus constantly risks reinforcing these dynamics, and often end up doing so.

### **Materiality, brokenness, and excess**

Tied to the labor of belonging is the creation of, and involvement with, excess. Much labor at Bucky's does not produce “adequate” use or exchange value, yet it creates *something*. My study of Bucky's asks that we rethink notions of excess and waste, and in the process the relationship between scarcity and abundance. I do this by engaging with anarchist economics and with theories of materiality, as well as ethnographic research which includes close attention to the more-than-human.

Rural locations are not more material than urban or suburban ones; however, the interactions of humans with the material world (including their own bodies) is frequently more obvious in rural places, and hence these places can serve as excellent starting points for a materially centered theory. At Bucky's, people have more of the ground on their bodies – on elbows, under nails, in their hair – than in cities; they smell more, get “dirty” more, (inadvertently) eat more bugs.

But perhaps I should say “we,” not “them”: the earth ends up on and in all of us. Our bodies are not confined. The chiggers live under all our skins. Sometimes fieldnote-writing has to take a break because the chiggers are begging to be itched, or because a

beesting has to be nurtured. This changes the temporality of research and writing. Taking materiality seriously has thus impacted my approach to research, and I will return to this in the fourth intervention, on methodology.

### **Land as actor**

Related to the above discussion of materiality, another key intervention of this dissertation is considering land as an actor. Throughout the dissertation, and especially in chapter 5, I return to the concept of the land as an active participant of Bucky's. The land plays a role in creating the rhythm of the space: when the sun is visible, where and how things grow and hence what space is available for humans. It affects movement: the weather and topography collaborate to make leaving or entering the hollow easier or harder. It provides food, limits communication with the outside world, and plays an active role in healing practices. Thus, land is an actor in socio-political processes, rather than just a field upon which these processes take place.

### **Methodological intervention**

One of the main things the gayborhood has taught me is that things rarely turn out as planned, and that is fine, even great. Failure opens up space for the whimsical and unexpected. When, one summer, visitors camp on top of the site where Bucky's buries its dogs, this becomes an incentive for putting up a decorative fence, with quirky wood working, adding to the land's altars and impromptu sacred spaces. When one New Year's party in the gayborhood is announced with a theme many residents find offensive, boycotting it becomes the occasion for a smaller, and very fun, house party. Likewise, in this writing, I want to figure out how to hold the pieces, seemingly broken, and see what can be built.



With the undisciplined messiness of queer land as my model, in this dissertation I am more interested in developing a method than in making an argument. I use a series of motifs related to queer land to explore grounded modes of queer research, centering time/space, focusing on earthiness, on the generative capacity of food, on the embodiment of fear and pleasure. It is an experiment, an intervention, showing a way of doing. Form interacts with content, and the two are not separate, but rather inform one another. In order to experiment with this form/content relationship, I employ fermentation as a framework, which I explain in detail later.

### ***Theoretical framework***

In thinking through how to theorize rural queer life in a way that produces valuable insights yet does not attempt to make be-all-end-all claims, I have turned to anarchist theory and praxis. Anarchism is an exploratory, anti-/inter-disciplinary field, which encourages multiplicity, trial-and-error, and playfulness. Part of the beauty of anarchism is that does not require all the answers, but rather lets practioners figure things out as they go. What happens if we try a theory? How can we keep playing with it? There is no end point; the process becomes the goal. Asking questions and learning new ways of being and thinking are more important than providing answers. Present-day anarchism draws much of its inspiration and theoretical and practical tools from the Zapatistas, a revolutionary social movement in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Among the Zapatistas' theoretical tools is the concept of *caminando preguntando*, “walking while asking questions.” The process, and a constant re-evaluation of our work, is more important than where we end up. It is this approach that I take to theory-making.

## Queering anarchism

Queer and anarchist activisms have often overlapped and interacted; scholar-activist Benjamin Shepard gives as examples “anti-authoritarian organizing involving rejection of social controls, vice squads, and criminalization of protest and dissent” (512). One example is the annual Dyke March in New York City; held the day before Pride, the Dyke March is purposefully unpermitted (i.e. no marching permit is applied for), with the reasoning that queer bodies are allowed on the street, and do not need to ask permission from the police. In recent years, researchers, too, have started to put “queer” and “anarchist” together when writing theory (cf. Heckert; Rouhani; Shepard; Windpassinger; Daring et. al.). Shepard points to four instances of overlap between queer theory and anarchist principles (summarized by Farang Rouhani): “a rejection of the paternalistic state; support for a politics of freedom and autonomy; a critique of normative assumptions about the world, and a mutual respect for pleasure” (Rouhani, 376). These are all values embraced at Bucky's. A queer anarchist framework is especially useful to my project because of its ability to, in Gwendolyn Windpassinger's analysis, de-isolate sexuality: “Much like Marxist approaches to queer theory, queer anarchism can prevent sexuality from taking an isolated, primordial role neglecting capitalist and gender oppression, with which it is entwined” (501).

Jamie Heckert, one of the most prolific theorists of queer anarchism, has integrated anarchist epistemology<sup>16</sup> and methodology with queer studies, and explains it thus:

Neither anarchist nor queer, as I see them, are concerned with these linear

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<sup>16</sup> “Anarchist epistemology” is not to be confused with “epistemological anarchism,” a concept developed by Paul Feyerabend. Feyerabend's theory, as he himself admitted, is not directly connected to the ideology of anarchism, nor to the classical anarchists' ideas about science and knowledge production.

stories and their (continually postponed) happy endings. Nor do they attempt that subtle ruse of power, to claim that history is ended, that democracy is achieved or that life involves accepting official stories about economics, politics, intimacy. Instead, both may refer to the erotic potential of everyday life, to the ongoing joyful awareness of being alive, even when it hurts; an awareness that life itself is exuberant and always escapes, overflows, undermines or disregards all attempts to impose categories, to discipline (2010, 43).

This methodology works well with the purpose I laid out above, drawing on Stewart and Agee, that “halting evocation of difference and desire.” I am especially interested here in the non-linear stories, the lack of beginnings and endings, and the assertion that “life itself is exuberant.” One of the questions that will come up in this dissertation (in chapter 4, to be specific) is the relationship between queer land projects and prefigurative politics. Farhang Rouhani describes anarchism as prefigurative in the usual sense: “an understanding of a democratic politics that presupposes equality, as opposed to demanding it” (376). What is interesting in this context is the conclusion he draws from this: “It [prefigurative politics] then leads to movements and spaces that are ordered less around identity-based demands and more around an active, radical presupposition of equality that envisions a collective subject of resistance” (376). While I would not use the term “resistance” to describe Bucky’s, I do find Rouhani’s shift from identity-based demands to a collective subject an interesting way of approaching Bucky’s, and a perspective that combines anarchism and queer theory. Both these schools of thought reject static categories, yet leave room for acknowledging the coming together of people in collective groups or subjectivities, though these are temporary and locationally specific.

My addition to queer anarchist work is a close attention to the rural, and to the material reality that becomes so apparent in the hollows. Anarchism, like queer theory and activism, has been largely urban, at least the anarchist groups whose writing and

theorizing get distributed widely. There is not a sense within these writings that anarchism has to be urban, the way there is the sense in much queer theory that queerness has to be, yet rural concerns are moved to the side. Materiality plays out in different ways, and I argue that the connection to materiality is stronger in some rural locations, like queer land. Queer land thus provides a good case study for re-materializing anarchist and queer thinking.

### **Irreverence and messiness**

A central aspect of the threads of anarchist theory that I am drawing on is a rejection of dogmatism and purity. The world is a messy, complicated place, so why should our approach to it be any different? Sometimes, a squeeze of ketchup is exactly what that fancy dish you are making needs. Anarchism is irreverent, drawing from a wide variety of sources, and questioning linear traditions of thinking and doing. This irreverence is central to my approach: I use interdisciplinary methods and bibliographies, focusing more on what ideas do than where they come from. Irreverence has been latched on to by critics of anarchism, who argue that anarchism is unrealistic (these critics talk primarily or even exclusively of anarchism as a form of activism, incredulous to the idea that such a thing as anarchist theory might even exist). While unrealistic tendencies do exist among some anarchist people and work – as they do within any body of practice/theory/praxis – a review of anarchist work shows that this is by no means the rule and that, as a whole, anarchist thinkers and organizers (often being the same people) view anarchism as providing a realistic alternative in a world farther and farther out of touch with reality. Why claim that capitalism is the truth of economy, when today it is a system based on the trade of imaginary clumps of money? Why look to the state for protection, when it – with

its monopoly on legal violence – persecutes, injures, and kills those who do not fit the mold<sup>17</sup>? Anarchists ask us to view the tendency to bake a cake to share (for free) at a gathering with friends as just as real, if not more so, than going to the store to buy a Twinkie for oneself (which has, after all, in recent times, been an activity at risk of extinction).

Anarchists understand that the process of trying to create a better world here and now often necessitates interacting with things we might not approve of, even finding a way of liking those things. In research and writing, this means that no sources are by default excluded, that anything can be used if we deem it useful. Our bibliographies end up a hodgepodge of the strangest neighbors, and somehow they get along, or grate at each other in an interesting fashion (for an example of this, see the contributions to Heckert and Cleminson, and the sources listed). As queer thinker Mattilda Sycamore Bernstein states, “The messiness is where the possibility for rigorous analysis emerges” (Ruiz, 239). When we pair the unlikely – the sources that disagree, the neighbors who think those living next to them are going to hell, yet like hanging out with them – we are forced to ask questions about the situation at hand, and how the seemingly paradoxical might work out.

When anarchist thinkers and actors speak of the value of rejecting purity, this is often connected to a valuing of pleasure, of having fun. The classic example is a quote attributed to Emma Goldman (though it is disputed what her exact words were) that “if I can't dance, it's not my revolution.” If our labor does not lead to pleasure or other positive results, we need to reconsider whether our work is worth pursuing. As Goldman well knew, working for what one believes in often has unpleasant sides – in Goldman's case,

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Jaeah Lee reports that of ten major US cities surveyed, Black people were overrepresented among those fatally shot by police officers. In Oakland, CA, between 2004 and 2008, 37 out of 45 people shot by the police were Black.

prison and deportation – but this cannot be all.<sup>18</sup> Derric Shannon and Abbey Willis use the term “theoretical polyamory” to describe their multi-theoretical approach to anarchism, and state that “[o]ur intention here is to play with theory a bit through metaphor. We believe the play can be deadly serious, fun, and help us move forward” (437).

As Shannon and Willis point out, there are plenty of dogmatic anarchists, who hold fast to one particular strand of thinking (434). Queer anarchism, however, takes seriously (yes) the irreverence and lack of purity of anarchist philosophy and practice. This is closely connected to an intersectional perspective. Shannon and Willis continue:

For us,...queering anarchism means complexifying it. Many of the criticisms we have gotten from (a rather loud minority of) comrades regarding queering our political project are focused around class struggle being THE instrument to bring about radical change. Under this economistic...view, the struggle between workers and bosses and the replacement of capitalism with socialism will somehow magically bring about an end to environmental destruction and patriarchy. It will likewise end confining notions of gender or “sexual identity” and hierarchies made out of those notions. As well, libertarian socialism will somehow ensure that “disabled” people will be treated as if they are every bit a worthwhile human being as the “able-bodied” and it will end racism and white supremacy (437).

Part of the dilemma that Shannon and Willis lay out is that there is no one clear definition of anarchism. Such a definition would go against the very foundations of anarchism, with its skepticism of imposing rules from above. In this project, I define anarchism as mutual cooperation and the rejection of all types of hierarchies, which necessarily entails questioning social norms.

All this does not mean that anarchist work is not rigorous, nor that it is unstructured. Yes, there are anarchist individuals and schools of thought who shy away from rigor and structure (the critique Jo Freeman leveled at women's liberation groups could just as easily apply to many anarchist formations), but many also see rigor as

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<sup>18</sup> We can see this interplay between seriousness and fun in Goldman's decision to open an ice cream parlor in order to make some money and provide a movement meeting space.

central to their work. It does mean, however, a rethinking of what structure entails. Structure is a strategy, something that can change. It should be suitable for our purposes at the time.

Further, rigor is a concept in need of problematizing, as Walter Mignolo explains: “The problem is that 'rigorous historiography' is more often than not complicitous with modernity (since the current conceptualization and practice of historiography, as a discipline, are a modern rearticulation of a practice dating back to – again – Greek philosophy)” (14). While not a historiographic project, this dissertation is a project grounded in an (inter)discipline within a colonial academic system, and rigor is part of the idea of knowledge production that forms the basis of this academic system. Judith Halberstam, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, presents a similar view to Mignolo’s: “Indeed terms like *serious* and *rigorous* tend to be code words, in academia as well as other contexts, for disciplinary correctness; they signal a form of training and learning that confirms what is already known according to approved methods of knowing, but they do not allow for visionary insights or flights of fancy” (6).

What the rejection of purity and dogmatism *does* mean is that a queer anarchist project necessitates an interdisciplinary methodology, one that takes into account life's refusal to fit into neat boxes. We find traces of stories in people's oral narratives, in government archives, in books, movies, magazines, and through partaking in daily life. These are all sources that I draw on for this project.

### ***Literature review***

The anarchist bent of my work is indebted to a new wave of anarchist theorizing, providing fruitful sources that were not available when I first started my dissertation

research. In 2009, Routledge published an anthology about *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, showing that anarchism is a generative lens for looking at the world, and that it is gaining traction in academia (Amster et.al.). In 2010, the Institute for Anarchist Studies and AK Press began publishing a series of books making explicitly “Anarchist Interventions” on various topics. Of these, Maia Ramnath's book on *Decolonizing Anarchism*, which uses decolonial activism in India as a case study to theorize anarchist tendencies outside of a narrow “classical” anarchist tradition, has been especially useful to my project. AK Press has also published a book on *Queering Anarchism* (Daring et. al., 2012), starting a conversation among scholar-activists about the intersection of anarchism and queerness.

Finally – though this body of literature has continued to grow<sup>19</sup>, and will most surely continue to do so, as scholarly interest in anarchism is ongoing – James C. Scott's new *Two Cheers for Anarchism* provides new ideas on how to invite anarchist thinking into academic projects. Scott does not talk of anarchism as a methodology, but rather as a “squint,” a way of looking that helps us perceive the world in different ways. I do think, however, that this squint can be part of a larger methodological practice. Scott argues that through an anarchist squint, “certain insights will appear that are obscured from almost any angle” (xii). It allows us to foreground ways in which state order and capitalism are not all-pervasive: we jaywalk, share a meal with friends without monetary transactions.

Much of the new literature in anarchist studies, with notable exceptions such as Ramnath's and Scott's monographs, is in the form of anthologies and special issues of

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<sup>19</sup> Notable books published recently include *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchisms*, eds. Barry Maxwell and Raymond Craib. Oakland, CA, 2015: PM Press; and *The Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics*, eds. Deric Shannon, Anthnoy J. Nocella II, and John Asimakopoulos. Oakland, CA, 2012: AK Press.



journals, with chapters and articles exploring previously un-theorized topics or perspectives, providing starting points for future thinking, research, and action. Longer research projects that can dig deeper into a topic, theory, or case study provides a more sustained analysis, and this dissertation contributes to this more long-term work.

My project is firmly (albeit at times uncomfortably) situated within the inter-/anti-disciplinary field of Women's and Gender Studies. It thus draws largely on feminist scholarship, but also acknowledges the importance of texts from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives.

As inspirational models, I draw on “experimental,” multidisciplinary ethnographic texts. In Michael Taussig's *What Color Is the Sacred?*, I see a viable model for deep interdisciplinarity, a text that focuses on a conceptual question – what can the question “what color is the sacred?” do, where does it lead us? – and draws on sources across and beyond academic disciplines to explore this question: literature, philosophy, participant observation, childhood memories, history, religion, chemistry, anthropology. Taussig poses that

To ask, What color is the sacred? is to ask about...connections and whether we have lost the language [for making connections]: the way the primeval forests and swamps went under to become coal and petroleum, the way that coal gas came to illuminate nineteenth-century cities and excrete a waste product from which first colors and then just about everything else could be made in one mighty imitation of nature. We cannot see that as sacred or enchanting because we have displaced that language of alchemy by that of the chemists (6).

Taussig engages with academic work, but does not avoid poetry and magic. He pays attention to language, mixes “facts” with thoughts and questions. Texts such as *What Color is the Sacred?* encouraged me to let the magic spoken of on queer lands infuse my

writing. But it is a book which, despite its global scope, is primarily populated with prominent white men, who all get to stay within their respective disciplines. The book starts with a quote by Nietzsche, and his ilk of European white male scholars get to take front and center stage.

Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* has influenced how I frame the relationship between fieldwork site and theoretical perspective. *Politics of Piety* is a study of women's involvement in the Islamic piety movement in Egypt. Mahmood asks how our analytical capacities might change if we put aside our assumptions of how a group should react to, or interact with, a given politico-social landscape. While expressing her own discomfort with many of the practices and views of the piety movement, Mahmood insists on understanding the movement on the participants' own terms, rather than according to the standards of secular liberal academia. This allows her to question “normative liberal assumptions about human nature,” such as freedom as a universal desire (5), and thus her book presents a complex and deeper worldview. Mahmood's approach continued to resonate with me throughout the dissertation process, as I worked to write about rural queer life not as it is understood by liberal metronormative studies, but as it is lived and experienced by living, embodied, self-identified queer people in the rural US South.

Another important influence in how to write ethnography is Kathleen Stewart's *Space on the Side of the Road*, an ethnography of a small community in West Virginia's coal-mining region. Stewart writes about “the real and imagined hinterlands of 'America'” (3), the rural areas that are considered marginal but are actually central to the economic and cultural development of this nation-state. Understanding this space requires dislodging “master narratives of center and margin, self and other, and...an order of things

'in here' and a space of culture 'out there'" (6). It is a process of "unforgetting" (6). This approach to scholarship became central to how I came to study and write about the Gayborhood.

Discussing Stewart's book in a methodology seminar, questions arose as to why it appealed to us. It might be that Stewart's text speaks to us because of its showcasing of difference, because it gives us the sense of gaining entrance into a world so remote from the groves of academe: the poverty-stricken towns and villages of coal country. In this way, it provides an exoticizing window into a space that often refuses being studied, and we gain the taboo-filled entrance into a world that is not ours. On the other hand, perhaps *A Space on the Side of the Road* speaks to us because Stewart in many passages refuses academic jargon (though in other places she embraces it wholeheartedly), and lets the way people speak and formulate their world take center stage. For once, Appalachia gets to be present in academia, a space of theory-making, not just abjection. Stewart does not simply present what her "subjects" have to say, however; on the contrary, her text is written in a language that is distinctly her own. Her words paint pictures: they both show the reader the landscape and people she are writing about, and bring us into her own thought process and reactions. Further, Stewart speaks to the complex inter-relating that can come with ethnographic research: "narrator and audience find themselves in the space of a doubled, haunting epistemology that comes of speaking from within the object spoken of....[T]hey find themselves for subject and object of story, both inside and outside storied events, simultaneously seduced and watchful" (34). This is how my writing about Bucky's developed, from a place of both seduction and watchfulness. Rather than deny this seduction, I have, like Stewart, placed it within my writing. It is there anyway, and

the study is more honest when it is acknowledged.

And, most influential for this dissertation, Arun Saldanha's *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*. In *Psychedelic White*, Saldanha combines dense theory with rich ethnographic material to develop the concept of viscosity in order to explain the workings of whiteness in the trance-dance scene in Goa, India. We read, discuss, admire the book. And then we learn, at the end of the semester, that Saldanha has just been denied tenure. He does eventually gain tenure, at the same institution that originally denied it, but the message is clear: this is not the kind of work you should be doing.

Like Stewart and Taussig, Saldanha includes large portions of his thought processes, mainly through fieldnote excerpts, in his book. The text is a testament to a process, not only an end point. Saldanha's mind is in the book, as is his body (cf. 44). All research, he notes “is embodied practice” (45), and this breaks down neat divisions between researcher and researched: “It is difficult to distinguish what was intuited through my own experience, and what was learned through observing others interact” (45). This form of embodied ethnographic work has been key in my research process.

Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* has been immensely influential in my conceptualization of the connection between sexuality and land tenure. Federici argues that as common lands were enclosed in medieval Europe, women's bodies and labor were increasingly exploited as the sites for reproducing and sustaining the community, as well as making a profit. In Federici's writing, I started seeing connections between gendered and sexualized embodiment, capitalist and communal concepts and usages of land, and spiritual and religious

groupings and worldviews. I saw the trends she found in fourteenth-century Germany reflected in nineteenth-century Utah and present-day Tennessee. A study of queer engagements with land now struck me as politically relevant, a way of expanding our analytical capacities as we rethink land as property.

Another important cluster of texts have been the sparse but thoughtful literature in rural queer studies. As I describe in the next chapter, scholars have tended to view queerness as inherently urban. This urban bias has, however, been increasingly challenged in recent years, thanks to scholars such as Mary Gray, Scott Morgensen, and Scott Herring.

Mary Gray's *Out in the Country* is an ethnography of queer youth in rural Kentucky, with a focus on media and visibility. Gray points out the myriad ways in which the participants in her study queer non-urban space, meeting at WalMart and in churches. The lack of explicitly LGBT venues does not mean the absence of queer life and community. In addition to the physical locales described by Gray, the study emphasizes the use of the internet in socializing and identity construction among the teenagers in her study. The center, then, is to some extent still elsewhere: in cyberspace. Rural queer life is possible, yes, but still derived from urban culture, this time transmitted through telecommunications.

Scott Herring (re)claims the rural in *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanity*, showcasing queer life and culture in the countryside as complex and often desirable. Drawing on literature, photography, and newsletters, Herring argues that the rural has long been a site (or, rather, multiple sites) of queer cultural production. *Another Country* is one of few texts to resolutely refuse to center the urban, yet it is still there, the

counterpoint of his argument. It is in the title – “anti-urbanity” – and in the opening sentence of the book: “I hate New York” (1). Even for those scholars embracing queer rurality, the grip of the urban seems hard to shake.

Scott Morgensen has conducted ethnographic research among Radical Faerie communities, and places this research within his larger project on queerness and settler colonialism. Morgensen shows how communities such as the gayborhood are implicated in settler-colonial structures, and his work has thus been especially useful for this dissertation.

Another key site for understanding the connections between queer rurality and settler colonialism has been Mark Rifkin's work, in particular *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty*. Rifkin shows how regulation of sexual and family relations has been a central mechanism for creating the United States as a settler nation-state.

Texts written by people in the gayborhood provided a different perspective on rural queer life. These books – T. Fleischmann's *Syzygy, Beauty* and Sandor Ellix Katz's writings on fermentation and food justice – are only peripherally about the gayborhood, and provide only fragments of accounts of the community, but what they do provide is a *sense*, a feeling for how thinking and writing can be approached when they are grounded in this particular location.

Sandor Ellix Katz has, through his writings, arguably become the most famous gayborhood resident. His *Wild Fermentation* and *The Art of Fermentation*, two cookbooks, have been catalysts for a renewed interest in fermented foods in the US. The

books contextualize the recipes and formulas, and are full of anecdotes from Katz's life and the lives of the people in his community, including some Bucky's residents. The recipes themselves also tell a story about this place; they are locational, filled with the ingredients available here, the cook aided by the microbes of this particular place. Food, and its role as a material and economic practice, has been key in my theorizing of the gayborhood, and Katz's writings have been useful for conceptualizing the multiple roles of human-food interactions.

T. Fleischmann's quasi-biographical book *Syzygy, Beauty* is labeled “an essay,” and it does feel that way, as an attempt to capture, to explain, to sense. A series of vignettes describe a love story, a handful of art works, mathematical formulas, and Fleischmann's construction of a house at Bucky's. The vignettes are fragmented, pieces that tell seemingly raw stories yet leave so much out. They remind me of communication at Bucky's, the topic of the prelude to this dissertation, the way things are both said and unsaid.

## ***Methodology***

As an inter-disciplinary study, this dissertation draws on several methods, most importantly ethnographic fieldwork and archival research.

## ***(Auto)ethnography***

My key research method is ethnographic fieldwork. I have traveled to Bucky's at least once a year (and often more) for the past six years, staying between one week and two months each time. During my stays at Bucky's, I have also visited several other homes in the gayborhood. In addition, I have made brief visits to other queer and women's land projects across the United States, and thus have a sense of the extent to which Bucky's is

part of a larger system, but also the exceptional nature of the gayborhood in regard to size and longevity.

In conceptualizing my participant observation practices in the gayborhood, I am influenced by social and cultural geographer Gavin Brown's concept of "observant participation" as a more engaged version of participant observation (2686). My work does not quite fall in Brown's category, as I do not live full-time in a land-based community and my relationship to Bucky's is at times peripheral. At the same time, during my research time I have been involved in the communities beyond "pure" research. My first visit to Bucky's, before it was a fieldwork site for my dissertation, was for a gardening internship. I also keep visiting Bucky's regularly, even though I am officially done with my fieldwork, because it is a place I enjoy spending time at, and because I have friends there.

Though this project uses ethnography, I have not spent the requisite year "in the field"; instead, my research has taken place during a series of visits over the course of six years. Yet it has also taken place in-between these visits: it has taken place in the interactions I have had with other city-dwelling participants in queer land projects; it has taken place as I have helped organize performances for the Eggplant Faerie Players; and it has taken place as I have discussed and participated in the politics of these spaces from afar, writing emails and talking on the phone. This method, while growing out of the financial constraints of doing interdisciplinary academic work under late capitalism, has turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It has allowed for a long-term engagement, and for an integration of queer land into the yearly rhythm of my life. It has also allowed for time to reflect between visits, and returning to the gayborhood with new questions and



perspectives.

Of course, this method also has its downsides. The traveling back and forth, the readjusting, is tiring. Needing to return back to New York and New Jersey to teach every semester also meant that I often had to leave before somebody I wanted to talk to arrived, before the trip to the demolition derby, before harvesting the watermelons. It meant that my time in the field was constantly burdened by writing syllabi, studying for exams, and writing funding applications. On the other hand, this meant that my “subjects” could give me feedback on what to teach my students, enriching the work I do while in the city.

Can a research design where the researcher is constantly coming and going be deemed ethnographic, or considered to truly employ participant observation? Anthropologist Tom Boellstorff, writing about his research in queer communities in Indonesia, describes his participant observation as involving “activities such as playing volleyball, doing drag in a show, helping write a grant for an activist group, contributing an article to a zine, standing around in a park at night, going to a movie in a shopping mall, visiting relatives in the countryside, and listening to someone's story of falling in love” (2007, 11). With minor tweaking (rollerskating instead of going to a movie, grant for a performance troupe instead of an activist group, karaoke instead of drag), this list is surprisingly similar to my interactions with my field, interactions that take place both in person and over a distance. My work is ethnographic in the sense laid out by Tony E. Adams (drawing on Clifford Geertz): “An ethnographer is a person who studies, represents, and is defined by her or his relationship to culture. A person becomes an ethnographer – does ethnography – by writing ‘thick descriptions’ of cultural happenings” (154). This work does not, however, follow Adams’ next feature of ethnography: “to

make ‘strange’ aspects of a group familiar for ‘insiders’...and ‘outsiders’” (154). Rather than make queer land familiar, I hold the tensions, strangeness, and messiness of land projects, and aim to write an ethnography that values these qualities, rather than making descriptions clean and palatable.

The ethnographic work I engage in is in some aspects autoethnographical. I follow the model presented by Adams et.al.: “Rather than silence or disguise the personal reasons that lead us to choose our research projects, autoethnographers make use of personal experience and subjectivity in designing their research” (26). Adams et.al. also point to the importance of reflexivity to autoethnographic work (29). As a researcher with increasingly close ties to the community I am studying, I believe that my account of Bucky’s and queer land more generally cannot be neatly separated from my scholarly understanding of this community.

## **Archival research**

Archival research has been crucial to this project: it has provided historical context for the queer land movement, and also given me access to cultural objects for analysis. All of the women's and queer land projects I have visited have an archival collection. However small and unorganized, these collections have been valuable sources in my research. Some material on women's and lesbian land is available at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City, and a small amount of material on the Radical Faeries is at the ONE Archives in Los Angeles; I have done research at both these archives.

There is, to my knowledge, no official archival collection on queer land outside of the materials found at land projects themselves. The key archives for my research are the collections held by the land projects. These archives are piles of papers in plastic bins,

drawers, and occasionally a filing cabinet. The sources I have used include brochures, newsletters, meeting notes, and invitations to events.

### ***Confidentiality and anonymity***

One of my main concerns in designing my research methods has been how to balance academic rules of research with the needs and wishes of the communities where I have been conducting fieldwork. I have followed the letter of the Institutional Review Board protocol. But stories and images travel, and I doubt that I can fully conceal the identity of this place, one of the most well-known clusters of rural queer communities in anglophone North America. Within mainstream academia, perhaps I can hide Bucky's identity, but when I speak about my project with queer academics, more often than not they ask me "So you're studying [Bucky's real name]?"

And I am not convinced that this inconcealability is a bad thing. It keeps me on my toes. As Mitchell Duneier writes in the methodological appendix to his ethnography *Sidewalk*, "it seems to me that to disclose the place and names of the people I have written about holds me up to a higher standard of evidence" (347-8). He acknowledges that anonymity is useful at times, yet concludes that "in my own work, when I have asked myself whom I am protecting by refusing to disclose the names, the answer has always been me" (348). Most of the time, I do not know who I am protecting, or from what. Sometimes, I have a nagging feeling that what I write can hurt someone. And then I have to check in with myself and the gayborhood about that. This story is not private, it is not mine alone. This is my version of the story, and I have to take responsibility for it, but it is still the story of a community, as confusing as the composition of that community may be. There are people, and they have names. Some of them wanted their names in this

particular telling of the story. They are here. Some of them will read this, and have already, and will tell me good job Stina, but there are a few things you should think about.

The academic quest for anonymity and confidentiality assumes that knowledge production can hurt the people involved. If it can, should that not give us pause? If we believe our work might hurt people, do we not need to rethink it? And what about all the cases where the stories we tell are not hurtful, where our “research subjects” welcome them, want them told? When they want themselves in the picture, and want their role acknowledged? Then why hide their identities?

## **IRB regulations**

The protocol that we have to follow in order to get IRB approval dictates that we grant our “subjects” confidentiality or anonymity. This is supposed to make them (feel) safe. When I first mentioned this to a couple of my subjects, right after I had gained my first IRB approval, they looked at me with their Jeez-you-crazy-academics look and told me in no uncertain terms that they did not want me to give them pseudonyms or otherwise hide their identities. A few months later, I received a voice mail from a person I had interviewed, telling me that I must certainly use his real name, and that he would prefer if I capitalized all letters in it, though he understood that such capitalization might not be approved by my academic superiors, and that he would accept lower-case letters. Not everyone has wanted quite such a prominent exposure. Others have told me that I can use their name, or that they would prefer initials only, or that it is up to me.

These conversations around naming raise questions about academic standards of subject protection. Nancy Scheper-Hughes puts it nicely:

I have come to see that the time-honored practice of bestowing anonymity on

“our” communities and informants fools few and protects no one – save, perhaps, the anthropologist's own skin. And I fear that the practice makes rogues of us all – too free with our pens, with the government of our tongues, and with our loose translations and interpretations of village life (128).

Being honest about who my “subjects” are thus serves as an accountability mechanism. Arlene Stein reflects on her research among proponents and rejecters of LGBT rights in rural Oregon: “I had the power to portray them as I wished, and they had little recourse” (563). By being allowed to identify themselves, “subjects” become actors, participants in the story. They might not have full access to scholarly outlets for response, but they can respond in other ways and places.

The issue of silencing (which I introduced in the prelude of the dissertation) first came up in relation to what seemed like a tangential part of my dissertation research: HIV/AIDS. Originally, I had not planned on discussing HIV/AIDS in the dissertation, because it did not seem central enough to what I was doing to be bothered with the intricate Institutional Review Board clearance it would require. Before I filed my IRB application, I asked one of the IRB officers what it would mean to talk to my “research subjects” about their HIV status. It would probably require a full-board review, she responded, on the grounds that it would be traumatizing. Most human subject projects at Rutgers University go through an expedited review, a process that takes up to two months. A full board review can take even longer, and also requires a higher level of justification for why the benefits of the research outweigh the risks. Since I considered HIV/AIDS to be peripheral to my research project, I decided not to jump through these extra hoops.

But as my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that HIV/AIDS is such a crucial part of the lives of many of the gayborhood community members that ignoring it would

seriously impede my ability to understand how the gayborhood functions. The virus affects why people move here, the rhythm of daily life, and people's plans for the future. Since the IRB had told me that HIV/AIDS was a verboten topic of conversation, I had left any questions about it out of my interview protocol. But there is a vast schism between a protocol and what actually happens in an open-ended interview, and “subjects” have a way of talking about what they find relevant, not what the “researcher” has deemed important. And, so, without me ever bringing it up, the “subjects” revealed their status to me. I nodded and avoided asking any follow-up questions, but that didn't seem to help: I still received information about infection dates, medical regimens, life expectancies, bathhouse sex, and ACT UP meetings.

The IRB's stance on HIV/AIDS research has important consequences for my project: since I have not been allowed to talk openly to people in the gayborhood about HIV/AIDS, my data is much more limited than it could have been. A better sense of infection patterns in the community, and a more thorough understanding of people's interactions with the health care system, would be of great help. All research is incomplete, but this research in particular is about finding information in the cracks, sensing patterns, and thinking about future questions. IRB rules that do not take into consideration the research context, but rather protects the university from legal trouble, makes finding information even more difficult, without in return actually providing any protection for the “research subjects.”

In a 2007 special issue on participatory research of *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, Matt Bradley points out that “in some cases IRBs serve to reinforce hierarchical power structures and modes of knowledge production that run

counter to the goals of participatory/action research” (340). He levels a harsh, but relevant, criticism against IRBs: “Ironically, in their attempts to ‘protect’ the ‘subjects’ of research, the IRB perpetuates the marginalization and oppression of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged they claim to protect, all the while ensuring the survival of the commodification of knowledge for an academic political economy dominated by a cultural elite” (347). In this model of research, “research subjects” are not allowed to be co-producers of knowledge, to own their stories, nor to decide for themselves what they want to share with researchers. Bradley was even told by the IRB “that I would have to stop an informant if I believed he was about to tell me about an illegal activity he had been involved in” (343). Research “subjects” are assumed not to know how to protect themselves, and to not have the right to decide how to present themselves. In addition to a deeply troubling approach to subject formation, this particular IRB rule also raises the question of the accuracy of the research produced. If the researcher, rather than the “researched,” decides not only on the question but also on the allowed answers, does the resulting material present anything but the researcher’s preconceived notions?

## **Naming**

Certain research protocols risk erasing the participants, through restrictions of the approved topics of discussion, through pseudonyms, and through promises of anonymity and/or confidentiality. In this process, people are reduced to mere tools for the production and dissemination of knowledge about larger systems, systems that can be disentangled from the people whom they are made of. When asking some of my “research subjects” whether they wanted pseudonyms, they sternly said NO! None of that. They have their

own names, often chosen by themselves, and that's how they want to be known.<sup>20</sup> Can you put our names in an extra-large font, T and Spree asked. You could include a personal ads section in the back of your book, MaxZine suggested; we're a little short on dates around here. For the most part, the people I work with want to be seen and heard in the stories told about them. What they *are* concerned about is *how* those stories are told. There is a fair amount of skepticism of academics who come in, “observe” the community for a while, and then write something about it, without knowing much at all. The solution to this is not to further hide subjects, but rather give space for their voices. To solve the tension between IRB regulations and “my research subjects” wishes, I decided to ask “research subjects” to choose their own pseudonyms. Most people ended up choosing some variant of their actual names.

Similarly, I have used the preferred pronouns of all people for whom I know these, and in other cases used the pronouns that are used by their community. In some cases, pronouns change over time, or are mixed up within the same sentence. While this is unconventional writing, I have chosen to represent people through the language use of the community, rather than standardizing pronoun usage.

By maintaining a regimen of pseudonyms and distorted details, we can claim to be the sole authors of a text. Any misrepresentations, any uncomfortable disclosures about people's lives can be brushed to the side, dismissed as not really understanding what the text is doing. And then we make money off of the work that is supposedly ours alone. One thousand dollars more a year per published article, that is how the pay-scale for new

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<sup>20</sup> Respecting people's own naming practices strikes me as especially important in a queer studies project, considering the prevalence of misnaming as a form of epistemological violence against queer people.



professors work, I was told my first semester of graduate school. Write, and you will be rich. (while academia is not seen by its denizens as a place of riches, compared to the incomes in the gayborhood, where all five-digit yearly wages are seen as substantial, the salaries of professors and even graduate students are luxuriously high.)

### ***Why write?***

While I do have a political purpose with this work, it is not intended to provide direct solutions. I borrow Tom Boellstorff's words to explain this stance:

I do not recommend policies or provide solutions in this book. Solutions are important, but the rush to solutions can be part of the problem. Solutions are helpful, but in an important way they are boring: they close doors and silence debates. While I care about finding answers and often work as an activist, for this book I am more interested in asking new questions, questions that could point toward new visions of social justice (2005, 4).

Academia's potential lies in providing space for thinking, without always having an end result in mind. This is, of course, a simplistic, idealized view of the academy; the university has since its beginnings had implicit results in mind. It is an institutional tool for maintaining power hierarchies, for creating knowledge for the elite. Today, in an era where the buzzwords of the university world are “excellence,” “assessment,” and “goals,” when Rutgers University is receiving record grants from the Department of Homeland Security, while cutting teaching assistant positions in the humanities, academia is highly involved in a system of purposes, purposes quite at odds with what I am trying to do here (and what many, many scholars want to accomplish with their work). That said, I think it serves us well to resist the commodification of knowledge by acting as if though academia is a space for result-free thinking. At several points in this dissertation, the tension between academics and land folk (not that the two are mutually exclusive) will

come up. We see it in the work of the Eggplant Faerie Players (EPF), a vaudeville troupe based in the gayborhood, whose work I discuss in chapter one. I hear it in the constant questions about which of our daily goings-on at Bucky's are going to end up in the dissertation (recorded interviews? private conversations? tense planning meetings? innovative Scrabble words?). In writing this, I am telling one story, and my "research subjects" will never let me forget this. But it is just one story among many, and the frequent comments about why I am at Bucky's read to me as a constant reminder of this. There are other stories: the unwritten/sometimes-unspoken ones I discussed in the prelude, the plays of the Eggplant Faerie Players, sections in the books of the gayborhood's published authors, among them Sandor Ellix Katz and T. Fleischmann, both of whom I draw on in this dissertation.<sup>21</sup>

All these stories fit one set of narrative conventions or another: the need for vivid details and a fast storyline that will catch and keep an audience during oral storytelling, the explanatory musings of a cookbook introduction, the juggling-intermissions of a vaudeville performance. And then this story, which must follow the conventions of a social sciences/humanities interdisciplinary dissertation. Prove me as a storyteller of a certain kind.

And it is a storytelling I love, drawing it out of the warm soil of the hollow. There

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21 Michael Taussig says, in an interview in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*: "it struck me that most of what anthropologists hear from their so-called 'informants' are stories, but the anthropologists don't recognize them as stories. And they're very quick to translate them and reduce them into information, through talking to people as 'informants.' Of course, Benjamin (let alone your common sense) might tell you there's a great deal of difference between the wholeness and strength and glamour – and humor – in a story, and that has nothing much to do with information per se. Information is, you know, the modern reification of all that. So I thought if anthropologists, in general are reducing stories into stories into information, my job – or our job – should be the reverse: recognizing that this is storytelling, what's being told to me, and to take responsibility for writing my own story." This applies to feminist and queer studies scholars as much as to anthropologists. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?type&id=1287&fulltext=1&media#article-text-cutpoint>. Accessed February 13, 2013.

are few things that give me as much pleasure as waking up in a moldy old farm house, hours before the sun will make its way over the ridges surrounding the hollow, knowing that those hours are mine and this text's alone. Maybe I will have to chase off a mouse or two, maybe a mosquito will fly by, but those are the only distractions. In that early-morning surreality, I get to try out/on ways of telling this story, half of which will be deleted by the time the chickens start cackling for their breakfast. But then the text does all need to be cleaned up and fit into boxes of chapters and IRB regulations and good solid theory-making, and it seems like a horribly misfitting – maybe even harmful – way of telling the story of this place. This story has to maintain a veneer of anonymity. It deals with sensitive topics. “We” university-folk know what constitutes a sensitive topic. Unfortunately, those undisciplined gayborhood residents do not, and tell their coming-out stories and reveal their HIV status left and right. They do not have the good sense to be ashamed of being seropositive or transgender or on disability or what-have-you. It must, then, be my role as the good scholar to impose the appropriate shame, to hide their stories behind pseudonyms and not-quite-true details.

A tension is created between the conventions, the stories, the people. The rules for what to write, the desire to write, and the lived lives of people rub up against each other. Therefore, it is imperative to keep thinking about methods, and to not separate them from the purposes of this project. It is through this work of refusing separation – ironically, perhaps, for a project on separatism – that my theoretical and methodological framework has grown. First of all, this project is resolutely anti-disciplinary. Queer and women's lands have grown out of a rejection of ways that relationships between bodies and land, bodies and other bodies, individual and community, are disciplined in society at large. I

want to respect and honor this rejection, and also see what happens if we let it bleed into academic writing. Can new knowledges be formed this way?

***The lay of the land: introducing Bucky's and the queer land movement***

First, the time to get here. Whether they arrive by bus, plane, car, truck, bike, train, or foot, humans always arrive at Bucky's late. The way the road goes from highway to country road to dirt path, slowing down the journey. The road winds downhill, past cow pastures and houses and trucks with tomatoes ripening on the hood. Drivers and cyclists have to dodge packs of dogs all too happy to nip at heels and tires. And then you remember to stop for a second, turn your gaze upwards, see the surrounding hills, their trees, the sun peeking through between them. Oaks, maples, poplars, and box elders; on walks, a part of the beauty of the landscape; down in the hollow, blocks to scarce sunlight, and a source of firewood in winter.

Once down in the hollow, the land is all around: the gravel and soil under your feet, the steep hillsides surrounding the hollow, the trees overhead. The land envelops humans; maybe that is why so many get stuck, stay for years when they were planning on weeks. The land changes our temporality, lulls us into a rest, a nap lasting for weeks or months or years. Though it is a nap full of bug bites, chiggers under your skin, little itches, the feeling that maybe we have been here too long, maybe it is time to leave, to re-engage with the world outside.

The land also changes our bodies. The way my arms feel after taking a maul to an impossibly sturdy log, a piece of wood raised from this land that refuses to break under my blow. I know that after years of chopping wood my body would be different – I see it

in the bodies of others here: arms, backs, movements, all coming together to split that log down the middle. The soil moves into that tree, which falls, and now the soil moves into our bodies, through the reverberations of the maul, up our arms, into our shoulders. When I type these words with the same fingers that split that log, the same fingers that have picked cabbage worms off the kale in the front garden, that have dug into the earth for turnips, the words are as much from the land as from me.

Bucky's was founded in late 1993 as a gay men's artist community. It was an offshoot of Hickory Knoll, a relationship that I discuss in more detail below. About seven years into Bucky's existence, what someone in the gayborhood referred to as the “lesbian invasion” – one female-bodied person moving to Bucky's – took place; a couple of years later, a trans\* gathering was held on the land. These events were the catalysts for Bucky's morphing into a mixed-gender queer project.<sup>22</sup> Today, there are just over ten residents of various genders, all of them white, and all of them US Americans. Only one of the founders still live there; other current residents have been there anywhere from a few months to twenty years. Most people who live at Bucky's stay for at least one, but usually no more than five, years.

When I am “in the field,” I live at Bucky's, and though my research stretches throughout the gayborhood, Bucky's is the location I am most familiar with, and whose residents are most familiar with my work. Harwell Hollow, the little valley where Bucky's is located, is thus the center of the version of the story told in this dissertation. One node

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<sup>22</sup> Bucky's was never officially a male-only space; however, since all the founders were read as gay men, it was in practice a male space.

in a web of stories about chosen, Southern, queer rurality, and the land that holds this culture.

Hickory Knoll and Bucky's form two of the center-pieces in a larger rural “gayborhood.” In addition to about five communal properties (the number shifts as new communities are founded and others close), there are also individuals and couples living on private plots of land. Many of them started their time in the gayborhood as residents or long-term visitors at one of the communal projects, and later decided that they wanted a more private living situation, while still being involved in the life of the community. Though some gayborhood residents-to-be came to the area already a decade earlier, the gayborhood got its official start around 1980, with the transformation of Hickory Knoll from a hippie farm<sup>23</sup> into a Radical Faerie sanctuary. While this was the first LGBTQ-specific intentional community in Tennessee, communal projects have a long history in the state: commune-type experiments started in Tennessee already in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, partly because of access to cheap land (State of Tennessee, 445). Most famous, perhaps, is the Farm, a sixties commune that is still around, and is known for its midwives and soy-based foods.

Nowadays, the gayborhood is a hodge-podge of intentional communities, privately owned homes, and rented houses. In addition to a few dozen year-round residents – up to a hundred, depending on how one defines the gayborhood's boundaries – the gayborhood hosts over a thousand visitors each year, who come here for pagan celebrations, music festivals, and gardening and construction internships, as well as informal get-togethers and rest and recreation.

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<sup>23</sup> Tennessee was a central locus in the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and '70s, with numerous communes, most famous among them the Farm, which is still in existence.

Bucky's and the gayborhood at large serve as an inspiration for the proliferation of queer land projects<sup>24</sup> in North America. The influence of this community thus stretches beyond the physical boundaries of its hills and hollows, forming a central node in a network of queer land projects and rural dreams stretching across the US.<sup>25</sup> Official statistics are lacking, but my research points to about a dozen queer lands in North America, all started after Bucky's.<sup>26</sup>

The mixed-gender queer land trend is partly a response to – though not an altogether rejection of – gender-segregated women's and lesbian lands and Radical Faerie sanctuaries.<sup>27</sup> Though this dissertation focuses on the recent turn to mixed-gender queer land projects, women's lands and Radical Faerie sanctuaries serve as important touchstones, and deserve at least a brief introduction:

Women's and lesbian lands are rural land projects whose organizers intend for the spaces to be accessible, often exclusively, to women and/or lesbians. According to Ariel Levy, a journalist who has written about the lesbian land movement, in their heyday North American rural lesbian separatist communities had several thousand members. Jae Haggard, a longtime land dyke (as many lesbian land residents refer to themselves) and publisher of *Maize: A Lesbian Country Magazine*, the main publication of the North

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<sup>24</sup> “Land project” is the term most commonly used in the mixed-gender land movement to refer to a community and the land it is situated on. Radical Faeries usually use the term “sanctuary,” while in the women's/lesbian land movement, the term “land” is used.

<sup>25</sup> There is very limited involvement by non-US citizens in the queer land movement, though a number of Canadians and Australians do visit the gayborhood, as well as some Europeans.

<sup>26</sup> I do not know of any rural queer projects in other parts of the world, but lesbian/women's land can be found in France, and urban separatist spaces can be found in Italy, and temporary lesbian separatist zones in Scandinavia. I have also heard rumors of lesbian land in Croatia, but have not been able to confirm this. A global survey of queer separatism is sorely lacking, both from my own project and from queer studies.

<sup>27</sup> Nor should queer land be viewed as a successor of gender segregated land projects: there are still an estimated 100 women's and lesbian lands in North America (Kershaw), and a thriving Radical Faerie movement. For more information about current lesbian land communities, see Association of Lesbian Intentional Communities, <http://www.alicinfo.com/>.

American lesbian land movement, describes lesbian lands as “lands where Lesbians live. Most are in the country tho [sic] some wimmin in cities identify their space as Lesbian Land. Lesbian Lands have Lesbian residents but many also have straight women residents and visitors. Some have male children. Most have male visitors” (61). There is no strict delineation between women’s and lesbian land, though lesbian lands often tend to put greater focus on only having relationships with women. Some straight-identified women do not want the land projects they are a part of to be seen as lesbian, and point out that conflating women’s and lesbian land invisibilizes their presence. Overall, though, I have found that the two terms are often used interchangeably.

There has, in past decades, been at least one women’s land project in the area near Bucky’s, but it is no longer operating, and it does not seem to have been an active participant in gayborhood life. Some gayborhood residents are, however, involved in the women’s land movement through other locations, and involvement that influences the gayborhood dialogue of what queer land is and could or should be.

Radical Faerie sanctuaries are, as the name implies, the nodes of the Radical Faerie movement. The Radical Faeries were formed in the late 1970s, as a gay men’s spiritual movement. They draw on – many would argue appropriate – various spiritual traditions, especially North American Native spiritualities. Rural living, either year-round or during regular gatherings, is central to Radical Faerie life. There are active Faerie groups in cities across the United States, but large-scale gatherings tend to take place at the rural sanctuaries, and these gatherings serve to revitalize urban groupings. Over time, the Radical Faerie movement has opened up to women and gender-nonconforming people, though many sanctuaries are still heavily male-dominated, and some gatherings



are for men only.<sup>28</sup> There is also a sense among some observers that the Faeries are appropriating women's mode of dress and behavior, while not being especially supportive of women.

Radical Faeries make up a large portion of the gayborhood, and the Faerie movement has had a substantial influence on gayborhood culture. Although many Radical Faerie spaces, including Hickory Knoll, are nowadays open to people of all genders, cis-men<sup>29</sup> are still central to the projects. As a cis-woman, I judged it too difficult to build the kind of trust with a sanctuary community that I would need in order to be able to do high-quality research,<sup>30</sup> and thus my project focuses on Bucky's, the locus of mixed-gender activity in the gayborhood, with only occasional discussion of Hickory Knoll. Fortunately, there are other people, notably Scott Lauria Morgensen, Elizabeth Povinelli, and Peter Hennen, who have done extensive and thoughtful research in Faerie communities, and I draw on this previous research in my theorization of queer land.

Mixed-gender queer lands maintain many of the characteristics of their elders in the lesbian, women's and Faerie land communities: valuing creating safe(r) and supportive space for those who have encountered gender or sexual oppression, the belief in separatism as a strategy (while maintaining an internal debate on this topic), and a valuing of the arts and creative expression. There is also a shared concern for, and connection with, the more-than-human environment. As with earlier projects, the residents of current queer lands are predominantly white US citizens, and many projects

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<sup>28</sup> There is less discussion about what "man" means in the Faerie movement than the constant and controversial discussion around what "woman" means in the women's land movement.

<sup>29</sup> The prefix "cis-" denotes people who identify with the same gender they were assigned at birth.

<sup>30</sup> Several cis-women and gender-queer folks who have visited or lived at Hickory Knoll express feeling invisible, as though they are being looked right through, an observation with which I concur.

many are located in Tennessee or California<sup>31</sup>. The North American map of queer lands is not as random as it might seem: these are areas with weather favorable to farming and forgiving of houses without heating and proper insulation. Queer land projects also tend to cluster together; where there is one well-established community, there are likely other ventures surrounding it. For a queer land project, Bucky's is exceptional in its longevity and size, measured in both population and acreage. Other than that, it is fairly typical: a functioning chaos, a space rich in land and creativity, poor in money. Half-way outside of the capitalist economy, yet deeply dependent on it.

### ***The “we”***

As I kept writing about Bucky's as an object of study, something shifted. Little by little, I fell into this community, until “home” is how I thought of that place, more often than “my fieldwork site.” My text became littered with “here” instead of “there.” I started thinking of the Bucky's community as “we,” not “them,” and this showed in my writing. I found myself saying at dinner one night that “If I don't get a job next year, I was thinking I'll just move here.” These shifts in subjectivity, while worthy of caution, are not something I want to delete from the text of the dissertation, for two reasons. First, whether or not they are spelled out, they are still there: this is still the perspective from which I write, whether I hide that or not. Secondly, this “we” speaks to one of the main cruxes I speak to in this dissertation: the way a home for a collective is created through tense relationships with dominant structures, in the case of Bucky's particularly around capitalism, settler-colonialism, race, and sexuality. I am interested in the way that some subjects are interpellated by the community, and I do not think that writing this out of the form of the

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<sup>31</sup> Clusters of lesbian/women's and Radical Faerie spaces can also be found in Oregon, Vermont, New York State, and New Mexico, but the new wave of queer land projects has not (yet?) reached these locations.

text supports discussing it in the content.

### ***Sensing, understanding***

At the beginning of *Psychedelic White*, Arun Saldanha asks: “Where do we start thinking? Which are the encounters that enable new concepts to be sensed?” (1). Though it was not quite where I started thinking, the encounter that enabled me to sense new concepts was with Bucky’s. This magical hollow – “magical” being an adjective frequently used by visitors and residents alike to describe the land – serves as a resting place from the stress of big-city living, and as a sanctuary for those living with HIV/AIDS, addiction, or trauma. It is also an incubator for cultural production and a practice space for guitar playing, cheese making and scrabble record-setting. And, most intriguing to me, it is a laboratory<sup>32</sup> for collective ownership, common access to land, and open-border separatism.

It fails constantly, of course. It turns out that ownership limits community participation, and that those borders are not so open, after all. The gayborhood is glaringly white, and sex/gender hierarchies have not been completely eradicated. Somebody’s disability insurance expires and the community does not have the energy or resources to support them. And silence, everywhere the silence, disguised as constant talking. Yet, as the warm July air digs into the jars of tea and milk and beans crowding the kitchen counters, not all is spoiled, and successes grow: yogurt, kombucha, a fund for taking care of elders, a barn raising. This is where I think, sense something. How does this space, this grouping of people, happen? What is said and what is unspoken? How am I, as a

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<sup>32</sup> As Alison Cool pointed out to me, “laboratory” is not a quite accurate term for projects that fall outside of the framework of scientific precision and cleanliness. I am also not convinced that “workshop” is a better alternative, with its focus on work.

participant observer / observant participant drawn into this hollow? What work does queer land do, how does it influence life beyond its geographical boundaries? And then other questions that do not have words, that are about the texture of this land, the way the air feels, even the magic, perhaps?

But why should I find answers to these questions? And how should I present them, and to whom? And why the need to make an argument? Queer land is a space where understanding is sensory. When I ask people to tell me, on tape, why they are here, I get neat linear stories, ones focusing on grand events. But then I see someone sitting by the creek for hours, or feeding the chickens cabbage worms, or dancing on the lawn, or giving someone a hug. And those, too, are reasons for being here. The ways our bodies land.

There are moments when feeling, magic, fun, are used to preclude critical thinking, to not address the ways queer land projects are part of a larger, often harmful structure, a structure that divides the earth into parcels and gives access to some and not others. I write in order to put pressure on some of these moments, to ask those of us in the queer land community if we can't do better, can't stretch our embodied politics a bit further. Because I think we can.

### ***Spectacles and nonsense-making***

*When I look up at the sky from the hollow, it is so much farther away that it has ever been before and also richer with stars. This is called divine, meaning it makes sense in a way we can't understand, that it floats.*

— T. Fleischmann, 107

One of the pitfalls of academic work is that it schematizes everything, presents something resembling a logic. Queer land, as understood by residents and visitors, is not like that. It

does not make sense; indeed, it explicitly nurtures a non-sense, spectacular, quality. Objects are put in unexpected places: a mirror shard hung in a tree discombobulates our sense of indoor versus outdoor activities; a neon pink plastic figurine becomes the center piece of an altar, blurring sacred and profane. On an evening in the middle of summer, when the gardens are full of vegetables, dinner consists of tater tots, bagel bites, and Oreos, and it is neither delicious, economical, nor nutritious. People change names left and right, complicating keeping track of individuals and who did what when.

Common sense is, according to Ed Cohen, an invention of the Enlightenment.<sup>33</sup> Secular academia is an Enlightenment project, and so our job as academics is to make sense of things. But I think if I make sense of queer land I kill some of its magic. These are spaces for forming lives that do not have to try to fit into neat boxes. They are about spilling over, about going crazy, about healing from being bound up in a repressive world. Yet writing a nonsensical story is not enough. I will do that, but there has to be more. One of the things that worry me about queer land projects is the lack of entry points. There are few communities, and access to them is mostly word-of-mouth. This prohibits entrance for those who lack the appropriate contacts or knowledge. If this dissertation perpetuates that close-to-closed-circuit system of queer land access, it is worthless, even harmful. We need to make clear where the invisible gates are, why they were built, and how we can start dismantling them.

Jack Halberstam writes in the introduction to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* that

Fanon, according to Moten, wants not the end of colonialism, but the end of the standpoint from which colonialism makes sense. In order to bring colonialism to

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<sup>33</sup> Feminist Genealogies, Professor Ed Cohen, Rutgers University, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, fall 2008.

an end then, one does not speak truth to power, one has to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other, the other who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism. Indeed, blackness, for Moten and Harney by way of Fanon, is the willingness to be in the space that has been abandoned by colonialism, by rule, by order (8).

The non-sensical can, according to this model, be a part of evading and dismantling power structures. In this dissertation, I attempt to honor both the messiness and the need for clarity and accessibility. Not everything will be laid out neatly, and the story does not unravel in a linear progression. The story I am trying to tell is difficult; some of these questions have been asked by women's, lesbian, Radical Faerie, and queer land residents and visitors for decades, and yet answers have not been solidified. I believe that a writing that holds space for complications – embraces them, even – is helpful in thinking about the issues presented here. At the same time, this complicated narrative should be welcoming, something to fall into, a story to read, think over, be amused and/or angered by. Though I do not attempt to provide solutions here, I do hope that this document will be useful in formulating future solutions to some of the conundrums facing queer and women's land projects.

## ***Outline***

This dissertation is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. Part one, “Making Place, Queering Land,” addresses the creation of the gayborhood, and locate it within a wider history of land ownership in the United States. Chapter 1, “Dreams and Nightmares,” considers the rhetorical production of queer rurality. I contrast scholarly and media representations of the countryside as dangerous to queer people with stories and performances from the gayborhood that imagine rural areas as spaces of queer possibility. In chapter 2, “Hiding and Forgetting,” I argue that a history of settler colonialism has

enabled the purchase of cheap land in Tennessee, and hence made possible the establishment of white-dominated intentional communities there, and that we need to understand rural queer communities as emanating from the political economy of the land. Chapter 3, “The Specter of Polygamy,” is a comparative study of contemporary intentional queer communities and 19-century Mormons. In both cases, non-normative relationships have been used as a reason for withholding access to land; as a response, these communities have claimed normativity as white settlers in order to access land.

Part two, “Non-Capitalist Materialities,” addresses the world-making work of the gayborhood. I engage with queer theory and settler colonial studies, as well as ethnographic fieldwork, to analyze how gayborhood residents open up space for queer possibilities in postindustrial Appalachia. Chapter 4, “The Kitchen,” reads food distribution in the gayborhood next to the Black Panther Party’s breakfast for children program and the Occupy Wall Street kitchen in order to address the question that led me to research intentional communities: what (if any) political work is performed through the mundane acts of subsistence? Chapter 5, “The materiality of time,” develops a theory of rural queer temporality, focusing on interactions with the material world. I argue that existing theorizations of queer time center urban life, and are not applicable to rural locales. Chapter 6 reads the gayborhood as simultaneously commons and enclosures. I posit that the purchasing of land has been a crucial tool for creating communal, non-privatized, spaces.

## **Part I: Making Place, Queering Land**

Where do we find the roots of rural queerness, and of the gayborhood in particular? What are the material conditions that make this space available and how, in turn, does the gayborhood affect material and economic conditions? Looking carefully at rural queer communities implores us to ask what it means to be queer, and where queer lives originate and are located. The first three chapters of this dissertation address the creation of the gayborhood, and locate it within a wider history of land ownership in the United States. I lay the ground for my understanding of the gayborhood in political economy as much as in identity politics.

Chapter 1, “Dreams and Nightmares,” considers the rhetorical production of queer rurality, through a study of stories told about the gayborhood, and media representations of rural queer lives. I contrast scholarly and media representations of the countryside as dangerous to queer people with stories and performances from the gayborhood that imagine rural areas as spaces of queer possibility.

In chapter 2, “Hiding, Forgetting, Naturalizing,” I look in another direction for the history of the gayborhood: the economic history of the region in which the gayborhood is located. I argue that a history of settler colonialism has enabled the purchase of cheap land in middle Tennessee, and hence made possible the establishment of white-dominated intentional communities there. We need to understand rural queer communities as emanating from the political economy of the land, rather than being ungrounded imports from urban locations.



Chapter 3, “The Specter of Polygamy,” is a comparative study of contemporary intentional queer communities and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. In both cases, non-normative relationship and family practices have been used as a reason for withholding land tenure; as a response, these communities have, explicitly or implicitly, claimed normativity as white settlers in order to access land. This chapter shows the role of sexuality in the construction of the United States as an expansionary settler-colonial society. Proper sexuality – related to norms about gender, race, and land ownership – has been central to the formation of US American subjecthood and to the material and geographical construction of the US nation-state.

## Chapter 1: Dreams and Nightmares

One summer week, Bucky's self-appointed bread bakers are out of town, and as the rest of us grow tired of making sandwiches out of dumpstered<sup>34</sup> tortillas, we ponder baking possibilities. We settle for sourdough, and initiate a starter: a small portion of dough that will be given time to spontaneously ferment, in order to have a rising effect similar to commercial yeast. The recipe we choose is simple: flour and water. It will work here, without extra help from sweeteners or store-bought yeast, because the air is teeming with yeast spores. It is a well-used kitchen, with tiny leftovers from years of cooking and baking floating invisibly in the air. These invisible microorganisms will adhere to our dough, making a home, creating pockets of air that will fluff up our bread. A sourdough starter, when properly fed and housed, can be kept indefinitely, and families and bakeries sometimes keep the same sourdough alive for decades. Bucky's is much too sloppy and messy for such diligent maintenance, and so sourdoughs are started when needed, drawing on what happens to be floating around at the moment.

Like that sourdough bread, communities have starters, flash points, moments when processes are initiated, and yet they also build on what already exists. How does something come to be? How does it form and grow? How does it restart itself, over and over again? Nothing starts out of empty space; everything builds on traces of what was there before. Still, there are starters, the events that set something off. The loaf we baked has a long history – the growing and milling of flour, digging of a well for water, transportation of ingredients, to name a few components – but it is not going to rise

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<sup>34</sup> “Dumpstering” is the practice of finding still edible food (or other useable items) in dumpsters or other trash outside of stores or sometimes restaurants. Because of stringent sell-by dates and the high consumer standards for flawless appearance of items, much food that is still perfectly edible is discarded from stores.

without that sourdough. Or store-bought yeast, if you are so inclined. Just putting plain water and flour in the oven would yield a different result, a flatbread without airpockets.

So what are our starters? How did a queer land-based community in Tennessee come to be? In this chapter, I use Bucky's and the surrounding gayborhood as a case study for teasing out some of the starters of queer land, particularly in the US South. I draw together three sets of narratives: oral creation myths of Bucky's, as told by residents and other community members; academic theories of the rural as hostile to queers; and cultural productions from and about the gayborhood. All three sets repel and draw individuals and groups to the gayborhood, and I argue that they all, in separate ways, constantly recreate the boundaries of this community.

Stories draw people to the gayborhood, and repel them. One night, while visiting Bucky's, I am terrified. There is a party at Hickory Knoll, a late-summer Leo birthday party. A group of us decide to go, and pile into the truck. It smells like gasoline. It makes funny sounds. And we're off, out of the hollow, across the first bridge, across the second bridge, up the road. The road goes up a hill. Why did we not consider the fact that this truck does not go up hills? We get partway, and stall. Turn the truck a bit, angle it so it will keep going. It does keep going, backwards. Someone looks out the back window and says we're about to go down a ravine. Whenever the driver lets go of the break, we skid further down. Can we get out? Maybe. We scramble our way over broken car seats and out the side door, leaving the driver to fend for themselves. It turns out there is no ravine. We're safe. Now we just need to get the truck out of the ditch (not ravine). As we are discussing strategies, two men on All-Terrain Vehicles drive by. They look like men in the

backwoods of Tennessee are expected to look: rough white men, big guys in worn-out t-shirts. “Do you need help?” No, we say. “You sure?” We’re sure, so sure. We stand in front of the truck, hoping we are blocking the view of a very gay, bearded, tiara-ed, person in the driver’s seat. Two more men on ATVs drive up. Hearts are pounding as we tell them we’re fine, that we’re not that stuck, that we’ll manage so well on our own. They look at us suspiciously and slowly drive off.

At the time of our truck breakdown, I have spent a couple of years trying to convince people in academia and other places that the countryside is not inherently dangerous to queers, that just as many people get queer-bashed and harassed in cities. And here I am, freaking out. The fear is not surprising: even though there is nothing inherently threatening about the situation – strangers offering help to a stranded truckload of people – the incident fits into an established narrative of events that should be dangerous for queer people. The rural is assumed to be universally unfriendly to gays, with the urban marked as open-minded and free from homophobia. It is attitudes like these that make it possible for one of my urban, straight, “gay-friendly,” acquaintances to exclaim that “something like that would never happen in New York” in relation to Tyler Clementi’s suicide and have the whole table – gay, straight and queer alike – nod in agreement. Never mind that Clementi jumped off the George Washington Bridge, which leads right into Manhattan.

My goal here is not to prove that homophobia does not exist in rural areas. It does, and, yes, it takes some forms that are rarely seen in cities.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, other types

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<sup>35</sup> According to studies cited in Puckett et.al., found that “residents in rural areas have more negative attitudes toward bisexuals, and rural residents have been found to be more uncomfortable with LGB people. Also, they are more likely to believe that LGB people should not have the same rights as heterosexuals, such as being allowed to marry or serve in the military.” Puckett et.al., “Out in the Country: Rural Sexual Minority Mothers,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 15(2), p. 177. It is worth noting

of gay bashing are more common in urban spaces.<sup>36</sup> In one survey from Philadelphia, a city with a reputation for having a vibrant queer culture, lesbians reported “levels of victimization...twice as high as those recorded for women in the general urban population” (Valentine 1996, 148).<sup>37</sup> Neither am I trying to prove that rural locations are somehow better for queer people than cities are. My research has, however, convinced me that the countryside (or, rather, a multitude of countrysides) is not universally hostile to queers, and there is plenty of queer life in the country. This conviction underlies my research. And, yet, I am scared sometimes. I do not know how much of that fear is valid, but sometimes it is there.

The fear of violence is connected to a sense of non-belonging, of not being the proper subjects of this place, of being that which should be eradicated. Violence, or even the threat of it, is a way of policing who gets to feel validated and included, and who is always an outsider, never safe. This does not mean that insider status guarantees safe space; as feminist anti-violence activism and scholarship have shown, for women, home is often the most dangerous place to be. Yet this violence is hidden, depending on the false image of home as safe.

Queer land rethinks the notion of belonging, re-situating home in rural locales. We hear it in the constant invocations of the phrase “Welcome home/homo,” the iteration that the rural is not just Other, but a home for Others, in this case queers. In this chapter, I

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that the examples of “same rights” given here are marriage and military service. These rights and their desirability have been thoroughly critiqued in queer studies.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, recent statistics show that “bias-related crimes” are on the rise in New York City. Mark Santora and Joseph Goldstein, “In the Shadow of Stonewall Inn, a Gay Man Is Killed,” *New York Times* online edition, May 18, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/10/marco-mcmillian-funeral\\_n\\_2846581.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/10/marco-mcmillian-funeral_n_2846581.html). Accessed July 23, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Valentine’s article does not specify whether there were varying levels of victimization within the lesbian population.

analyze narratives from and about the gayborhood, and rural queer spaces more generally, to understand how ideas around the rural as either violently foreign or as a magically safe home constitute the boundaries of Bucky's and the gayborhood, attracting certain people to the community, while rejecting others.

### ***Scholarly literature and metrocentricity***

My dissertation builds on a small but growing body of literature on rural queer life. This new tendency is a much needed addition to a field that has since its inception depended on metrocentric assumptions. Larry Knopp and Michael Brown point out that “work dealing with queer issues has tended implicitly (and probably unconsciously) to employ surprisingly conservative and static notions of space and spatiality...includ[ing] the idea that innovations are rare and emerge from a relatively small number of mostly ‘metropolitan’ locations” (411). When rural queer life is acknowledged in scholarship, Knopp and Brown further argue, it is treated as derivative from an originary urban queerness. Or, as Anne-Marie Fortier writes, “queer subjects are constructed as urban subjects, thus making the rural queer an outsider, one whose choice of residence – which is sometimes also the choice to ‘stay put’ – seems somewhat out of place within queer studies” (411). A quote from David Bell and Jon Binnie's book *The Sexual Citizen* summarizes the urban-centric view of queer life: “Arguably the most relevant stage for thinking about the social nature of sexuality is the city. The city is the prime site both for the materialization of sexual identity, community and politics, and for conflicts and struggles around sexual identity, community and politics” (83). Bell and Binnie go on to reference several LGBT studies scholars who make the claim that sexual identities develop in cities, because cities provide a critical mass of people, and because they are

democratic (84-5). The rural is implicitly situated as the undemocratic, an irrational space where tolerant community is lacking and where those who do not fit the mold are shunned. As John Howard writes about rural Southern queer people, they “don't fit. Industrialization and urbanization don't figure prominently enough in their lives. Many never move to the city and 'come out' in the traditional sense” (1997, 5).

In his study of male queer life in Mississippi, *Men Like That*, Howard points out that “[t]he history of gay people has often mirrored the history of the city” (1999, 12). At least since researchers at the University of Chicago performed a series of studies on gayness in the mid-twentieth century (Rubin), “gay” has been seen by scholars as a quintessentially urban category. Because of the location of this particular university, the studies focused primarily on urban areas. One of the arguments presented by this school of thought is that the city provides space for eccentricity, whereas the countryside and small towns only have room for the “normal” (Rubin, 24). Numerous scholars writing on gay populations, including such widely read academics as Samuel Delaney, George Chauncey, and Laurent Berlant and Michael Warner, perpetuate the stereotype of the countryside as hostile to all non-straight persons, presenting the city as the “natural” habitat for gay men and lesbians.<sup>38</sup>

This is not how members of the gayborhood in Tennessee understand their existence, suggesting that even though much of the scholarship on urban queer life is of excellent quality, there is something left out of the canon. Queer life and queer activities happen outside of cities, too. According to Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce

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<sup>38</sup> The idea that gayness is connected to the urban is so common in gay scholarship that I have started to wonder if perhaps the term “gay” refers to “urban homosexuals” and if rural “same”-sex practices should be defined in another way. This is one of the reasons why I use the term “queer”; it serves as a placeholder while I figure out how to talk about non-heteronormative communities in settings outside of the city.

Erickson, in the introduction to their anthology *Queer Ecologies*, “if Alfred Kinsey’s research was correct, there was in the nineteenth century *more* same-sex sexual activity among men in the remote wilderness than there was in the cities” (15). John Howard’s *Men Like That* provides a plethora of examples of male queer interactions in twentieth-century rural and small-town Mississippi; indeed, Howard starts his book by proclaiming that “[i]n the second half of the twentieth century, male-male desire in Mississippi was well enmeshed in the patterns of everyday life” (1999, xi). Rather than reading these interactions as derivative, Howard asks “[w]hat unique features of the Mississippi landscape shaped and structured homosexual interaction” (1999, 4). We could ask the same about rural middle Tennessee. A quote from a former Bucky’s resident points at the queerness of the gayborhood: “this fucking crazy place where everything is just one step past the edge of decorum, and you can just go all the way there. And you’re living that, like, every day you go home, and that’s what’s in your kitchen every day. It’s like, people roll up, and it’s just so queer, you know, queerer than that queerest bar in, like, you know, most American cities.”<sup>39</sup> The formulation of this quote is noteworthy: the city once again becomes the point of comparison, that through which the speaker has to define Bucky’s. Yet at the same time, Bucky’s is presented as a space that can be more queer than is possible in cities. The rural becomes a queer location in and of itself.

On the occasions that queer theorists do write about the rural, it is more often than not with a great deal of discomfort (cf. Halberstam, 22). The rural is approached with fear and the rural queer is presented as the Other, an Other that is constantly at risk of demise.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with MD, Tennessee, June 2011.



Those who are too young to leave for the city are viewed as tragic. Those who are old enough and still do not move to an urban area are considered stupid, and even blamed for their own brutal or sad endings. This is part of a narrative of the rural death of queers, constantly retold in accounts of the deaths of for example Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard, and in fictional accounts like *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee and Proulx). As Judith Halberstam writes in regards to Brandon Teena, “his story...symbolizes an urban fantasy of homophobic violence as essentially midwestern” (25). Halberstam does not define Midwestern, but in the context of the surrounding text, it functions as a synonym for rural. This is the Midwest of Falls City, Nebraska, not Chicago or Minneapolis. Regional labels such as “Midwestern” or “Southern” often stand in for rural in descriptions of violence and bias against queer people. The urban becomes equated with the US Northeast and West Coast. I would argue, then, that the “urban fantasy of homophobic violence” that Halberstam describes is as much Southern as Midwestern.

The urban bias is not all-pervasive in queer studies. There are notable exceptions, and also examples of critical engagements with urbanity. There are people studying rural queer populations, and this trend is growing. Scholars are recognizing urban bias, questioning it, and finding ways to subvert or amend it (cf. Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 1380-1; Herring; Sandilands). And not all queer studies scholars define the rural as inherently violent or lacking. Especially notable for their more nuanced portrayal of rural, and to a large extent Southern, queer life are the works of Mary Gray, E. Patrick Johnson, and Scott Herring. Mary Gray's *Out in the Country* is an ethnographic study of the lives of LGBT teens in the Appalachian South. Gray argues that the teenagers she is studying

are engaging in queer life-making in a variety of settings, ranging from WalMart to community organizations and, central to her study, internet sites. Scott Herring's *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* takes to task the metrocentricity of queer culture and writing. Beginning with a polemic introduction titled “I Hate New York,” Herring points to the ways in which non-urban queer lives have been invisibilized or ridiculed, and goes on to present a series on non-metronormative queer cultural productions. His aim is to “treat these disparate objects like a coalition that reveals how queer life beyond the city is as vibrant, diverse, and plentiful as any urban-based sexual culture” (6). E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea* is a collection of oral histories with gay black men in the South. Many of the men featured live in rural areas. Johnson complicates the notion that queerness only exists in certain places, or that queer people can only be happy in cities outside of the South. Instead, he paints a picture of complex, full lives, containing both joy and difficulties. These authors have opened up space for thinking critically about rural queerness, and my work builds on their insights.

### ***Mainstream media representations of rural queer life and death***

It is not only academics who conceive of the rural as dangerous for queers; on the contrary, the danger narrative is ubiquitous in mainstream media representations of the existence of rural queer people, if indeed the media even acknowledge such an existence.

“Popular” media representations with a more queer bent also perpetuate the image of the rural as a space of danger and death. One example is the documentary *Southern Comfort*, which traces the last year in the life of Robert Eads, a white transgender man living in, in the words of the producers, “the back hills of Georgia” (Qball Productions). Eads is dying from ovarian cancer, having been denied treatment at several medical

facilities. The medical professionals he encountered did not want, or did not know how, to treat a man with cancer in what is considered a women's organ (Kate Davis). In the documentary, the medical maltreatment which leads to Eads' death is likened to the racism against black people in the antebellum South, implying that Eads does not live in the modern era and that had he lived in the modern urban North, he would have survived. Even the physical process of his death is portrayed as Southern, through his increasingly slow, blurred, heavily accented speech. Through the narratives of persons – primarily white men – such as Teena, Shepard, and Eads, conventional gay/queer scholarship and popular culture portray the Southern and Midwestern countrysides as places of queer death, environments where queer bodies are supposed to die, not live, survive, thrive.

A more recent documentary, *Small Town Gay Bar* (Ingram), presents a somewhat more positive image of rural LGBT life. The movie centers around two gay bars in Mississippi. While certainly facing difficulties, the bars are presented as community meeting places and as spaces of belonging and happiness. Still, synopses of the movie hone in on the negative. Executive producer Kevin Smith<sup>40</sup> describes the documentary as “tak[ing] a look at how difficult it is to be gay somewhere as rural as Mississippi” (WellSpring). The story told in the movie is quite different, beginning with a quote from the mayor of the town where one of the bars is located that everyone is welcome here. The movie continues, showing stories that are not drastically different from those of any bar: people dance, have friends, the owner is struggling to make ends meet.

Perhaps this story was not dramatic enough for the filmmakers, because halfway through, the movie takes a drastic turn. After a sister of a gay man who attends one of the

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<sup>40</sup> Famous for the feature film *Chasing Amy*, another movie with a queer-related plot.

bars expresses that she sometimes worries about her brother, we are taken to Bay Minette, a town five hours away in Alabama, where Scotty Weaver was killed. There is no evidence in the movie that Weaver had ever visited either of the two bars featured, nor that he was in any way connected to them. His only relation to the main storyline is that he was a gay person living in the rural Deep South. The story of Weaver's killing is followed by pictures of Westboro Baptist Church<sup>41</sup> protesting at Weaver's funeral and in other places. We are also treated to an interview with Westboro founder Fred Phelps. Again, there is no evidence presented that Westboro has ever protested at either of the gay bars in the movie, though Phelps, who was born in Mississippi, admits that he has heard of one of them. The relation between the virulent homophobia of Westboro Baptist Church and small-town Mississippi is presented as so obvious as to needing no explanation, even though Westboro is based in Topeka, Kansas, a Midwestern city.

Most narratives of rural, Southern, queer death focuses on a specific demographic: white men. Teena, Shepard, and Eads were all white, male-identified and -presenting, and US citizens. So are most of the people portrayed in *Small Town Gay Bar*, and the few people of color featured are barely allowed to speak. In the cases of Robert Eads and Brandon Teena, their deaths are presented as the dire results of failing to live up to a rural (white) masculinity; their murder or illness happens when their gender transgression is found out. Shepard, Teena, and Eads are usually presented as being mostly “normal,” apart from being queer. In mainstream media accounts, they are all presented as striving for a hetero- or homo-normative existence, and not getting to have that is what makes

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<sup>41</sup> Westboro Baptist Church is primarily known for its anti-gay stance, and picket lines at funerals of LGBTQ people, including Matthew Shepard, and others of which it does not approve.

their deaths sad. These accounts reinforce ideas about the rural as white, homogeneous, and striving for normalcy.

One recent exception to the white bias in portrayals of rural queer death is the murder of Marco McMillian, a black gay mayoral candidate, in Mississippi on February 26, 2013. The discussion around McMillian's death has been somewhat more nuanced than the cases discussed above, acknowledging that a Southern culture of propriety and silence led to homosexuality not being central in how people talked about his life (Ross). The media discussion of McMillian's case was brief, however, vanishing almost completely less than a month after his death. The lack of publicity around McMillian, as compared to Shepard or Teena, is remarkable, especially considering that McMillian was a public figure. The media silence surrounding McMillian can be read as one way that McMillian is placed in the “stupid” (as opposed to “tragic”) stereotype of Southern, small-town/rural queer: “what was he thinking?,” the media implicitly asks over and over again: a black gay man, deciding to have a career as a public servant in Mississippi? Without saying so explicitly, the media reporting partly blames McMillian for his own death: he should have known better.

An example of the narrative of the urban as the space of gay life and the rural as the space of gay death (and I use “gay” rather than “queer” here purposefully) is the famous “It Gets Better” project. Initiated by sex columnist Dan Savage in response to a series of gay teen suicides, among them that of Tyler Clementi, “It Gets Better” invites people to upload videos directed at troubled LGBT teens, encouraging them to hold out, because things will, as the title states, get better. The project has been critiqued and criticized from various angles, not least for its progress narrative, and the assumption that

one should just get through bullying, rather than a message of the need for a different society. Here, I want to point to another aspect of the project: the repeated message to get out of the countryside. Actress Jane Lynch and her wife Lara Embry have recorded a video, for example, where Embry states that “it changed for me when I got out of Alabama.” Dan Savage's husband, Terry Miller, states in the inaugural “It Gets Better Video” that “My school was pretty miserable. I lived in Spokane, Washington, which is a mid-size town with a small-town mentality.” What is interesting about Miller's narrative is that the anti-gay sentiments he encountered in a non-rural location are interpreted as being “small-town mentality.” Homophobia is in this case rural by default, and its presence marks a space as rural.

Narratives of queer life that present the rural as monolithically oppressive and unfriendly are not only un-nuanced to the point of being incorrect; they also risk being self-fulfilling prophecies. Stories and their circulation shift balances. Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson:

“[a]lthough it is certainly historically the case that migration of gay men and lesbians to particular urban areas has contributed to queer visibility, and thus to community vitality, the concomitant erasure of rural gay and lesbian possibilities has *contributed* to their ongoing flight from rural and suburban communities, to the ghettoization of queer culture as inherently and only urban” (17).

Studying stories told about the gayborhood and by gayborhood residents provides alternatives to the narratives of queer death presented in scholarship and mainstream media. It is at the intersection of the common negative portrayals and these less well known stories that newcomers' first impressions of the gayborhood are made. In talking to people about why they decided to come to the gayborhood, either as a visitor or resident,

or why they dreamed of going there even if they had not (yet) gone, the most common reason I was given was encountering alternate stories, such as those I present below. Despite the often horrifying images of rural queer (non)life presented in scholarship and media, many queer people do dream of a rural existence. What are the alternative narratives that feed that dream? Here, I present the creation myth of Bucky's, as well as two recent projects that paint positive images of queer rurality: the Eggplant Faerie Players and the *America ReCycled* documentary series.

### **Creation myths**

*What makes people cohere, I was told, was a sense of common cultural origin, a creation myth.*

– Elana Dykewomon, p. 32

Gayborhood residents repeatedly narrate their arrival stories as mistakes of sorts, or unlikely coincidences. Haphazard might be the best way to describe these arrivals. Sandor Katz, who lived at the Radical Faerie sanctuary Hickory Knoll for many years, and now lives in his own house nearby, recalls in an interview that he “considered the idea of living in Tennessee absurd” (Bilger, 4). The residents of the gayborhood were often town and city folks, who went to the country for some time off, and stayed. They usually did not know much about country living, and had to pick up skills as they went along.

The reluctance to settle down in what has become the gayborhood is not surprising. As I discussed above, “Tennessee,” “the South,” and “rural” are all terms loaded with connotations of homophobia and closed-mindedness. While not altogether correct perceptions, gayborhood residents have indeed faced discrimination and silencing. Further, there is an entrenched poverty in the area, and job prospects for in-migrants have

been scarce for the past few decades. Despite these reasons for initial hesitation, those who did decide to settle down in the gayborhood also found something else. Many incoming gayborhood residents quickly came to realize that their preconceived notions of a harsh cultural climate for queers were not wholly accurate: they found their new neighbors cautious yet friendly, willing to help out yet never intrusive. Gayborhood residents made small-talk at the bank (before it shut down to make room for a pawnshop), and milked the neighbors' cows in exchange for extra parking space for visitors. They found out that if you accidentally left something behind at the post office, the cashier would call you up the next day, knowing very well where those odd-looking people lived and wanting to make sure they got their belongings back.

The physical features of the region have also provided gayborhood residents with reasons to stay. Many speak of the beauty of the place. This region of Tennessee, on the border between the Appalachian Mountains and the Cumberland Plateau, has many hills and valleys (what are referred to locally as hollows or hollers), as well as open fields. Streams and rivers pass through the landscape, on many occasions creating cascading waterfalls as they descend down the hillsides. Although the climate is varied, offering summers of both droughts and thunderstorms, moderate fall days, and winters with occasional snow flurries, it is all-around warm enough to have made it possible for incoming queers to take up residence in cheap ramshackle houses, where a small wood stove would make even the winters bearable. And, of importance to many gayborhood residents, the climate and topography are favorable to gardening and small-scale animal husbandry.



But these positive impressions often did not occur until residents had already moved here, or at least visited. Why, then, did they come here in the first place, and how? Let us look at a few examples:

Bill came to the community through magic. This is how he narrates the story: In 1993, Bill, a gay-rights activist in a medium-sized city in Florida, went to a bath house, where he spent hours together with a new acquaintance. Even though they liked each other, a long-term involvement was out of the question, because this new acquaintance was about to move to rural Tennessee, a move that was not part of Bill's plan for himself. He had "no desire to move to Tennessee,...no desire to live with a bunch of queer hippies in the woods." He thought this guy was crazy, "just weirder than shit." Bill soon found himself infatuated, but the affair still had to be broken off. The two set a break-up date for September 23, two months into the future. And sure enough, come September, Bill's lover moved to Tennessee to help found Bucky's, the newest collective household in the gayborhood. While in Tennessee, he cast a spell at Hickory Knoll, a space that is for many people connected to magic, spirituality, and rituals. For Bill, who had "never believed in magic,...something changed":

He [Bill's lover] came back a month after he had left Florida with the intention of asking me to move to Tennessee with him. And I didn't give him a chance to ask. I saw him, he walked in to where I was working – I was working at a little gay bar... – and I knew he was coming and I had arranged for the owner's lover to jump behind the bar and cover me for a few minutes while I talked to him, and less than two minutes after I started talking to him I asked his permission for me to move to Tennessee to be closer to him. And he gets this silly little grin on his face, 'cause that was kind of his intention of coming the whole time, and he's like "yeah, that might work out."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with "Bill," Tennessee, August 2010. "Bill" is a pseudonym.

Bill and his partner have lived in the gayborhood ever since, and have become key members of the community.

Spree came here because his other options were not working out. Spree often describes himself as the longest-term visitor Bucky's has ever had – twenty years after coming to visit, he is still living in the gayborhood. Tennessee was not where he was *supposed* to end up. He had been living in New York, Los Angeles, Michigan. He also tried moving to Europe, but his Danish gay marriage did not work out. By then, it was the early 1990s, and Spree, who is HIV-positive, was concerned about finding health insurance, thinking he would sooner or later need sustained treatment. The Tennessee state legislature had, in January of 1994, passed a health care reform that would provide health insurance to “uninsurable” people, such as those living with HIV/AIDS, and Spree was hopeful about the possibilities of finding care there. So Spree came to Tennessee and, sure enough, soon he needed, and received, extensive medical care.

MaxZine came to Bucky's to grieve the loss of friends and lovers to AIDS. He planned to visit Bucky's for a few months in order to recuperate, and then move back to an urban location, but ended up staying, finding solace and purpose in the growing of vegetables and flowers. Nineteen years later, he is the head gardener, and oversees Bucky's garden intern program. He also works at a local plant nursery, and no matter how hard he tries to quit that job, he can't. The earth here is keeping him stuck.

Other residents and visitors repeat versions of these narratives: feeling the magic of the place, needing space, needing to breathe, needing insurance, wanting to have their hands in the dirt, feel the soil, or wanting space and time to complete projects like writing 'zines, developing construction or gardening skills, practicing handstands and solitude,

projects that did not fit with a busy urban lifestyle and crowded urban space. The activities listed are not by definition rural, and often do take place in urban areas. Indeed, cities can provide resources for these activities that rural areas cannot; in New York City, for example, you could within the span of a few months attend a 'zine fair, a handstand workshop and a course on container gardening. And yet, visitors and residents alike repeatedly point to the value of rural queer space in pursuing their projects. (I will explore this queer desire for the rural and for the wild – which, although they are by no means the same, are often conflated – later in this chapter, in the section on “Forest of the Future”).

Still, this collection of individual arrival stories is not enough. If we gather every one, we will know how each person arrived in the gayborhood. But the gayborhood is not just a collection of individuals; it is a community, too. It is to the communal arrival story – what I label as a creation myth – that I now want to turn.

Bucky's has a creation myth.<sup>43</sup> It describes how Bucky's first residents-to-be attended the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. On the way back to their respective homes, they stopped at Hickory Knoll for the yearly Beltane<sup>44</sup> celebration. They fell in love with the place and wanted to stay, but there were no open spots for residents at Hickory Knoll. A nearby property was available for rent, and after a few months, Bucky's was established there. This is how Bill narrates the creation myth:

**Bill:** The owner of this property at the time was [Don Smith], and he had had

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<sup>43</sup> Ronald Wright, quoted Jeff Conant's book about Zapatista “public relations,” defines myth thus: “Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that reinforce a culture's deepest values and aspirations.” *A Poetics of Resistance*, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Beltane is one of the major holidays in Celtic-inspired neo-paganism, and coincides with May Day. Pagan celebrations such as Beltane are central to life at Radical Faerie sanctuaries like Hickory Knoll.

some run-ins with the law, that involved...run-ins with the law...and part of his deal was that he paid off a whole shitload of people with a whole lot of money and got to leave the state with the very distinct request that maybe he shouldn't come back. An old-timey law enforcement which worked for them. But [Bucky's] got a good deal on the land.

...

[Bucky's] came about as an amazing conjunction of events. The gay pride march on Washington in 1993. It's...I believe April 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup>. I was there. In 1990, I was employed at a gay bar in Florida and I was told all of my responsibilities, and then I was asked what I wanted, expected in exchange and I said "Last week April '93, I'm off, okay? I want the week off." And the owner's like, "what?!" Said "I'm putting in for vacation time, three years from now. I'm outta here, I'm gonna be in DC."

...

It [the March on Washington] was just amazing, so many people. It depends on who you count: you know, 300,000 from the Parks Department, over a million from the people that, you know, were involved, and I'm sure that somewhere in-between those two numbers was an accurate count, but...it was, it was so, so fucking empowering.

...

It was the gay, the pride march in DC was my first introduction to the Faeries, although I didn't meet a single one of them. I did watch a couple of hundred naked men dancing in a conga-line style around what I believe is called Dupont fountain, Dupont Circle, in DC. And I took a lot of pictures, a whole lot of pictures [chuckles], and didn't have any idea that that party was started by a collective of people who dubbed themselves Radical Faeries. I'd never heard of the Radical Faeries, I didn't know anything about them at all at this point.

...

I was talking about the foundation of [Bucky's] and how it was created by the gay pride march in '93. And it really was. What happened was, the Beltane festival, which is centered around May Day, May first, the maypole, the Pagan festival, the Christian festival, whatever you call it, occurred four days after the gay pride march in Washington, and a very large number of people, comparatively so, to previous gatherings, stopped at [Hickory Knoll], on their way back to the Midwest or the West Coast or wherever. And their gatherings, which had to date been less than a hundred people, suddenly blossomed to over 300 people, unexpectedly. ... They went from under, right around a hundred people, to all of a sudden this...you know, stopover, on the way west, that so many radical people, who had heard about the [sanctuary] before and just, they all decided to go experience it. Well, the [sanctuary] was just, you know, inundated, flooded, slammed....I was not at this gathering, this is what I've been told from, my partner,...he was one of the people there.... [The sanctuary] wasn't prepared to take on that many people. And the people that arrived had an energy level like I cannot explain. It was the same high that I was riding on. I had just been to gay pride, I had just, for the first time since I discovered a single hair on my dick, felt normal, felt empowered. And I

was taking that power back to [Florida], and I was sharing it with my friends and my community and here was a large number of people on the same power trip, on that same high, and we were just riding that wave to shore, gathering at [Hickory Knoll]. And a dozen or so people – my partner..., his best friend...they were some of the people looking for a place to live. And they're coming off this incredible, empowering high, and they got to this neighborhood and they said...and they found the community, the support, this acceptance where you could be a little bit weird and handed a hammer and asked to join in. And a whole bunch of them said, "We found it, we wanna live here." And then all the residents of [Hickory Knoll] said "We kind of full up, mother-fuckers, step back. There ain't no dozen of you moving in." We, you know, they're having a, they had an incredibly, there's a large process to go, an entire year for a person to go from visitor to resident...this program that people, you know, they were required to experience time with every member of the community. They were required to create a project which improved and empowered and strengthened the overall community and the land itself, and they were expected to, I mean, there was, there was a whole lot to becoming a resident, there was no way they were gonna take on a dozen hippie freaks with no back-to-the-land experience, or very little, I should say, between them. But they were smart enough to say "Why don't you just look around the neighborhood?" And they did, and they found [this land]. And then they *founded* [Bucky's]. And they created it.<sup>45</sup>

This is the story that I am told over and over again as I ask residents and other community members about Bucky's' beginnings. It is so ingrained that at times it does not even need telling. This is how one interview starts:

**SPREE:** There was that gathering where a lot of people wanted to live at [Hickory Knoll] and then they told them "Well, you can't live in here." And so, it just so happened that there was this group of people that were at that gathering and they were having, like, circles and stuff, and...Now, did you make it to Merrill's last night?

**Stina:** No.

**SPREE:** You didn't. Okay.

**Stina:** I've met Merrill, but I haven't been to her house.

**SPREE:** Okay. And have you met Peter?

**Stina:** No.

**SPREE:** Okay. Well, Peter is her...gay partner [laughs]. And he knew about this place, and he came to the group and told them "Oh, these people that I know," like, you know, "they got busted for growing pot and bla bla bla," the whole story and all that kind of stuff. And so, what happened was that they got the keys to the place, obviously you know that is euphemistically, on New...on Thanksgiving Day of 1993.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Interview with "Bill," Tennessee, August 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Spree, Tennessee, August 2010.

I have not even asked a question yet. This is where it begins. And, although Spree loves telling stories, she does not bother with the details of this one, because I must know it already. I do. You can't really miss it around here. The details diverge – was it the fall? the spring? – but the overarching narrative is the same: Radical Faeries enchanted by rural life, now looking for a home near Hickory Knoll. This story is not untrue, but it is also not complete. Yes, the 1993 Beltane gathering was unusually large, and this sudden growth was spurred by the March on Washington. Still, this does not explain why Hickory Knoll was a Radical Faerie space, why it was possible for newcomers to find land to live on, nor who came after (and who did not). Of all the possible ways to explain the beginnings of Bucky's, why is this narrative the one that is used? What purposes does it serve?

### **The March on Washington**

The March on Washington provides a coherent moment of origin for Bucky's. It is a convenient starting point, one that makes for good narrative. While I do think that this is part of the appeal of this creation myth, the explanation that it is a convenient starting point is not satisfactory. Easy stories are not the preferred currency at Bucky's. Bucky's is a project that relishes in messiness, in not making sense; why, then, make sense of the beginnings? And considering the significant portions of time devoted to sitting around talking, why would there be a need to construct stories that can be told quickly?

The March on Washington helps locate Bucky's within a wider queer history, one of pride, visibility, acceptance, and communion. This, again, might be convenient, but is not fully satisfactory. Many who moved to the gayborhood in the early and mid-1990s had a history of gay rights and AIDS activism, and thus locating one's new community

within this history does provide a historical order. But why this need for order in the telling of origins, since it is resisted in other aspects of life?

There is also another side to the version of queer/LGBT history written through events such as large marches: the acceptance as capitalist subjects, as full participants in an economized society. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, known for his anti-assimilationist work, with books such as *Nobody Passes* and, most recently, *Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots?*, writes that the 1993 march was “the biggest ever of its kind, a million white gays in white T-shirts applying for Community Clout credit cards” (14). The march was more diverse and complex than Bernstein Sycamore gives it credit for. An article published in *The Nation* three weeks after the march points out that “[t]he approving media and exultant gay leaders who reported the docility and normality of the March on Washington on April 25 must have missed the thousands of ‘Lesbian Avengers’ roaring past the White House and the Treasury Building and in to the Washington Monument grounds in the early hours of the night before” (Kopkind, 652). Kopkind analyzes the predominance of “jeans and white T-shirts” (653) as a media image, rather than an accurate portrayal of the march participants: “The gatekeepers of national public opinion had decided before the weekend began that the march would officially bring the lesbian and gay movement into the American mainstream” (653). But even if not all participants looked normative, this appearance of a dominance of “docility and normality” is what came to be the narrative of the March, and it was a narrative reinforced in the official organizing of the event.

The organizing of the march, and the activities that surrounded it, point to the mainstreaming function of the march. Pictures from the event, published in the book *One*

*Million Strong*, shows an organizing office with posters of Bill Clinton, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King on the walls (Cox, Means, and Pope, 11). President Clinton, while often seen as left-wing due to being a Democratic president wedged between Republican presidents, passed both Don't Ask Don't Tell and the Defense of Marriage Act.<sup>47</sup> Considering that some of the issues addressed by the marchers were the rights to marry and to serve in the military, looking to a national leader who opposed these rights seems ironic. The March activities included a "cross-country Tour of Duty bus tour that celebrated the military service of gay men and lesbians" (Cox, Means, and Pope, 32), as well as other activities lobbying or demonstrating for equal treatment and inclusion of gays and lesbians in the US military (Cox, Means, and Pope, 40-45). There were also multiple weddings (Cox, Means, and Pope, 46-53).

These images and activities of the March are quite at odds with gayborhood life. Perhaps the gayborhood-residents-to-be came to Washington as part of the white t-shirts and money crowd. By now, however, the white shirts and the credit card offers have fallen by the wayside, replaced by mildewy house dresses and notices from debt collectors. There is not much money here, and keeping anything clean, let alone bright white, is just impossible. The community at Bucky's does not partake to any significant extent in the most commonly mentioned aspects of neoliberal gay life – marriage, military, conspicuous consumption – but its creation myth helps cement a normative gayness as its starting point. It is seen in the family picture of some of the “founding fathers” of Bucky's hanging on the living room wall in the back house: five white-reading, male-assigned individuals. Others, the people not represented in this picture, are

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<sup>47</sup> DADT and DOMA were not yet in effect at the time of the March: Don't Ask Don't Tell was made official US Military policy in 1994, and the Defense of Marriage Act was passed in 1996.



added on to the community, through struggle by those who have been implicitly or explicitly excluded.<sup>48</sup>

This creation myth helps form Bucky's community's (as well as the gayborhood as a whole) sense of self. In the prelude, I discussed in detail the silence around race and citizenship at Bucky's, a silence that the creation myth contributes to. In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar discusses the discourse of Lawrence v. Texas (the Supreme Court case that legalized sodomy in all US states) as "our Brown [v. Board of Education]" (118): this discourse is a way of removing anti-racist responsibility from the LGBT community, and to inscribe queerness as white and non-whiteness as straight. We see this at Bucky's, in events such as the "joke." An even more explicit example of the removal of anti-racist (and other) responsibility took place at the 2011 installation of the annual music festival at Bucky's. While pontificating with one of that year's garden interns about the lack of political awareness and activity during the festival, and expressing how strange this seemed to me, considering how many participants were active in political struggles elsewhere, the intern told me of a comment someone had made to him earlier that day: this week is a break, a few days of not having to think about politics. One can certainly empathize with this need for a break for those involved in draining and often painful struggles; indeed, I believe that the retreat function is one of the most valuable aspects of Bucky's. What is problematic is the equating of a break from work with not having to think about the ways in which one's actions hurt others and perpetuate oppressive structures.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Today, struggles of inclusion are primarily around (dis)ability and race. Organizing to make the gayborhood more accessible for people who are differently abled or not white has primarily happened after I completed my fieldwork, and I will discuss them briefly in the postlude to the dissertation.

<sup>49</sup> In the time since I conducted my fieldwork, some changes have been made. In 2013, the music festival included a workshop by an anti-oppression organizing collective, and that fall, a bi-weekly reading

Several gayborhood residents were involved in queer activism before moving to Tennessee, working with groups ranging from ACT-UP to local organizations. The stories told about these activities are markedly different than the narrative about the march on Washington: they are about confrontation, about questioning the mainstream gay establishment. Residents reminisce about disrupting Pride marches, or of standing up to the police while being detained in a parking garage. Visitors and residents alike tell of their involvement with provocative groupings like Bash Back and the Lesbian Avengers. These stories are about fighting, about questioning the rationale of LGBT activities. They have room for complexity. Why is this one creation myth story told differently from the stories about gayborhood residents' previous activities? Is this purely coincidental? Or does it link us back to the silence surrounding the “joke” in the prelude: the struggle is elsewhere, not here? Working against institutionalization of LGBT culture, against xenophobic measures, against violence and oppression, this all takes place outside of the gayborhood, not in it. Purposefully or not, the gayborhood comes to be understood as a space away from the structures of the world.

### ***Dreams: Cultural productions***

Though tucked away from the world in a hollow with no cellphone reception, a continuous stream of visitors find their way to Bucky's, joining the dozen or so residents for meals, gardening, and a no-rules volleyball game or two. The gayborhood keeps growing and, as with other queer, lesbian, and Radical Faerie land projects, most residents have moved here from other locations. Only a small number of current Bucky's and

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group on white privilege was started. The discussion group is well attended by residents and visitors at Bucky's, and also draws some participants from the wider gayborhood community. In 2014, part of the land at Bucky's was designated as an autonomous zone for queer and trans\* people of color. While welcomed by many, this process has led to rumors and annoyance in the wider gayborhood, highlighting the ideological schisms within the community. I will discuss this further in the postlude.

gayborhood residents have lived there since the time of the March on Washington. The growing gayborhood and the significant number of visitors suggest that a queer, rural – and, in in this particular case, Southern – life has appeal to a large number of people, beyond the geographical borders of the gayborhood. At the same time, cities maintain their image as *the* space of gay/queer existence. How, then, is a (romanticized?) imaginary created around rural queer communities, and how, if at all, does this imaginary, as David Bell has argued, fit into a metronormative queer ideology (549)?

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote about the stories of arrival told by gayborhood residents. As haphazard as the journeys here seem, people rarely arrive in the gayborhood purely by chance. They want to come here, having heard of this mythical land of frolicking queers before they ever meet the physical locale. The meeting that spurred the first wave of hippie – soon turned gay – migration here was a letter in *Mother Earth News*, a back-to-the-land magazine, encouraging people to move here.<sup>50</sup> Today, many people meet the gayborhood in stories told by friends who have visited.<sup>51</sup>

The *Mother Earth News* letter and the visitors' tales challenge the much more widely-known nightmarish narratives of queer rurality, the production of which has been documented, for example, in Judith Halberstam's analysis of "the Brandon Teena case." Stories about queer death in rural areas, most notably the murders of Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepard,<sup>52</sup> circulate as warnings about the dangers of failing to escape rural or small-town life. An older version of this narrative appeared in the movie *Deliverance*,

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Merrill, Tennessee, August 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Hayley Hunt and Mel, Brooklyn, NY, March 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *The Laramie Project*, *Boys Don't Cry*. There is also an earlier genre of movies (such as *Deliverance*) where the danger of rural areas lie in their queerness, rather than their heteronormativity, a topic explored in Scott Herring's current research.

when four affluent male urbanites decide to take an adventure in the rural wilderness.<sup>53</sup> These are the stories that run through our heads on dark streets outside of Bucky's, or when we hear an unknown car in the driveway. At the same time, though arguably with a much smaller circulation, an imaginary of the rural as the ideal place for queer life is being produced by Radical Faeries, land dykes, and others.

As analyzed by Scott Herring in his recent book *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*, publications such as *RFD*<sup>54</sup> and *Country Women* have been central to this production of a rural queer imaginary. These and other cultural productions are crucial ways that people approach the gayborhood, either to stay away from it, get drawn to it, or interact with it from afar. So how and where does the cultural imagery being produced around and about queer land, and by its residents, circulate? Who sees it? How do audiences interact with queer land? I address these questions through two case studies: the Eggplant Faerie Players, a gayborhood-based theater group that tours widely; and *America ReCycled*, a web-based documentary series which includes an episode about Bucky's.

## The Eggplant Faerie Players

The Eggplant Faerie Players (EPF, for short) are a performance duo based in the gayborhood. One of the performers lives at Bucky's, the other is a former Bucky's resident who still lives in the gayborhood. The EPF used to have several other performers, who have now retired from the troupe, or passed away. They are frequently joined by

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<sup>53</sup> For an analysis of the queer politics of "hixploitation" movies such as *Deliverance*, and their relation to conservative politics, see Scott Herring's "'Hixploitation' Cinema, Regional Drive-Ins, and the Cultural Emergence of a New Queer Right," *GLQ* 20:1-2, 2014, p 95-113.

<sup>54</sup> *RFD* is the main Radical Faerie magazine. The acronym originally did not stand for anything – it was a reference to the Rural Free Delivery stamps many copies of the magazine received – but in the past 37 years the magazine has received many names, perhaps most famously "Radical Faerie Digest."

guest performers, usually past or current gayborhood residents, or people with an active involvement with Bucky's. The Eggplant Faerie Players have toured widely; nowadays, they primarily perform on the East Coast, in the Midwest, and in and around the gayborhood. My reading of their work is based on their latest performance, "Welcome to Homo Hollow," which has gone through several iterations in the past few years. The Eggplant Faerie Players are of especial interest to me in their function as an entryway into the gayborhood. After a performance they did at Indiana University, for example, several audience members asked about the possibility of visiting "Homo Hollow." The audience members expressed never having known that places like this existed, and a fascination with life there.

While for many audience members, the Eggplant Faerie Players present a first encounter with rural queer cultural production, the EPF is part of a longer tradition. As Scott Herring argues in *Another Country*, "queer artists – across decades, media, and idioms – have creatively used rural stylistics to fashion critiques against lesbian and gay metropolitan norms. Though dismissals of the rural are routine in urbanized lesbian, gay, and queer studies, rurality can be and has been redeployed to promote a critical form of queer anti-urbanism" (6). Through humor, the Eggplant Faerie Players pose a critique of metronormativity, while at the same time poking fun at their own rural existence.

"Welcome to Homo Hollow," the show I discuss here, was originally created as an evening entertainment at the academic conference "Queering the Countryside" at Indiana University in 2010. In designing the show, MaxZine Weinstein and Tom "Tom Foolery" Rayburn, the core duo of the EPF, immediately thought a show responding to academic narratives of Bucky's, the gayborhood, and queer rurality in general, would be both funny

and poignant. The show is thus set up to provide a counter-narrative of life in the countryside, utilizing media from inside the gayborhood: juggling, costumes, inappropriate jokes, and music. The central characters in the show are Rayburn and Weinstein, but they are also joined by guest performers, all of which are connected to the gayborhood in one way or another.

The audience of the Eggplant Faerie Players' performances shift with the venues. Colleges and universities are important locations on the EPF's tours, since these institutions can afford to pay a decent amount of money, and the amount they pay is not dependent on the number of spectators who show up. Considering this choice of venue, a large part of the audience of the EPF are young and (in the process of becoming) highly educated. At a recent performance of "Welcome to Homo Hollow" at Barnard College in New York City, the audience, a total of twenty to thirty people, was between eighteen and sixty years old, and seemingly all white.

### **Slide show**

I want to focus in more detail on one part of "Welcome to Homo Hollow": a slide show that translates the performance into "academish." The slide show is named "Conjuring the Queer Side," a play on the title of the conference where it was first performed ("Queering the Countryside"). Perhaps this is just a reversal of syllables, with little thought, but the phrase is telling: rather than academics "queering" the countryside, which assumes that it was not quite queer until "we" named it as such, conjuring implies bringing out what is already there; instead of queering a place, the Eggplant Faerie Players are bringing forth an already queer aspect of country life. It is more in line with E. Patrick Johnson's statement that "the South is always already queer" (5) than with Michael Warner and

Lauren Berlant's reading of rural and small-town queerness as derivative of big-city culture.<sup>55</sup>

The first slide introduces the topic of the slide show: “Homo Hollow: The People, Place, and Pedagogy – Post-binary thinking through analytical methodologies in a non-urban landscape.” This statement, like most of the wording in the slide show, is presented as nonsense, a string of big words. While it is indeed a string of big words, it is also, arguably, an accurate description of “Homo Hollow,” the show and the place. Bucky’s is post-binary, in that it is rejecting the gender binary both of hetero- and homo-normative society, and of lesbian land and Radical Faerie Sanctuaries. It is also post-binary in the sense of not being altogether removed from the binary; traces of it are still left, and it influences, for example, the division of labor on the land. Further, “analytical methodologies” is an accurate description of the slide show and “Welcome to Homo Hollow” as a whole, even though it presents itself as something else; the process of creating the show involves careful analysis. Finally, a “non-urban landscape” is indeed where Bucky’s is located. The question raised by this slide is, why use these words? Who do they speak to? Why say “non-urban landscape” instead of “the country”?

Another slide presents “Homo Hollow and the Butch Arts: Flower Arranging – Continuous Reiteration of quotidian actions reinforces the ritualization of rural aesthetics.” Again, the language is over-the-top academic, yet there is also an analysis in place here. Indeed, the reiteration of certain actions reinforces a certain aesthetic at Bucky’s. Among these are flower arranging, making sure that the path from the parking

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<sup>55</sup> I realize that I read the references to “rural” and “the South” interchangeably here. The two are of course not the same, yet they are so frequently conflated in media and scholarly works, that I would argue that they do much of the same work.

lot to the houses – the path most visitors walk when first arriving at Bucky's – is surrounded by colorful plants for as much of the year as possible.

We then get to “Homo Hollow: Place of beauty – Hydration over rocks, Defecation site.” These labels are placed under pictures of a waterfall and a shitter, respectively. These are indeed both objects of beauty, the waterfall conventionally so, and the outhouse because it has been ornately painted. The pairing has an ironic quality, though, taking a jab at many a newcomer's tendency to view everything at Bucky's as fantastically beautiful. The term “defecation site” points to the academic tendency to hide the vulgar: “For you this is a beautiful place to do something with a fancy Latin name, but for us it's where we shit,” the slide seems to say. The image of the shitter is interesting in light of the documentary I will discuss below, *America ReCycled*, which was shot after the slide show was compiled, but also presents a romanticized view of the outhouses at Bucky's, and I will return to this topic.

Taken as a whole, the slide show from “Welcome to Homo Hollow” pokes fun at an academic way of conceptualizing the world, in the process distancing Bucky's and the performers from the realm of intellectuals. At the same time, the use of language in the slide show indicates that the performers do understand much of this academic discourse, even if they are not comfortable with it. In this way, the show reinforces stereotypes about the rural as backward and simple (in both senses of the word), but reclaims this image, subtly asking the audience if backwardness might be such a bad thing, after all.

## **America ReCycled**

The Eggplant Faerie Players provide an entry point for some people into the gayborhood, created from within the community. Many other people first hear about Bucky's and the



gayborhood through outside sources. Here, I focus on one such source, a documentary about the community. The documentary is one half-hour installment of a longer series about intentional communities, all of which the filmmakers visited on a bike trip through the US, hence the project's name.

The episode on Bucky's is beautifully shot, setting a scene that reflects the magical quality many people feel that this space has. It is not surprising, then, that many viewers gain a positive image of Bucky's and the gayborhood; indeed, in informal conversations I have had with viewers of the documentary outside the gayborhood, everyone has expressed positive views, and often a desire to visit Bucky's. For example, my students in an undergraduate LGBTQ studies course, who up until that point had expressed very negative views of rural life, in line with the kind of mainstream media and academic representations I discussed earlier in this chapter, decided after watching the documentary that we should make a fieldtrip to Bucky's (a venture that was, for better or worse, beyond the scope of the course).

While outside viewers are enamored with *America ReCycled*, residents at Bucky's for the most part dislike the project. They mostly agree that it is a beautiful work of art, but disagree with how their community is portrayed, and especially with how the filmmakers treated them. Responses range from acknowledging that the movie has problematic aspects, but to accept it for what it is: a beautiful piece of semi-fiction; to a refusal to have anything to do with the project. A couple of residents asked, after seeing a first draft, that all images of them be cut out, and one, whose music was originally used for the soundtrack, that her work no longer be featured in the documentary.

The one point about the documentary on which almost everyone at Bucky's can agree is that it is breathtakingly beautiful. Set in middle of winter, the landscape is sparse yet the scenery made rich through the people and buildings portrayed. The colors are striking, and the juxtaposition of moving and still images provide a haunting, simultaneously warm and chilly atmosphere. One person told me that although s/he knew there are problems with the documentary, s/he watched it simply as an object of beauty, something to get lost in. A couple of other residents told me that they also got lost in this spectacle when watching it, and needed to return to it a second time in order to purposefully watch it with a critical eye. I first watched the documentary at Bucky's, curled up on the kitchen couch with several other visitors and residents. Like so many viewers, I was swept up with the beauty of the cinematography, the stunning images of the landscape.

The documentary about Bucky's was shot over a couple of months in the middle of winter 2010-11. There is no overhead narrator; the only people speaking in the movie are residents and visitors at Bucky's, and the boss of one of the residents. The people who appear in the film are not given names or otherwise introduced – they are simply shown, talking or doing. Interspersed in the film are stills, most of them portraits of people at Bucky's. Overall, the people interviewed give a positive, loving image of the community. They express the possibilities here, the breaking of gender norms and the constant joy of life.

While on the surface *America ReCycled* provides a counter-narrative to the image of the rural as hostile to queers, a closer reading shows a more complicated picture. Bucky's is indeed portrayed as a warm and friendly place, where people sing, juggle,

dance, and eat birthday cake together. It is pictured as safe and communal. The surrounding area is, however, portrayed very differently. We are introduced to Bucky's surroundings through a quote from one resident, who points out that “we're living in the frickin' rural South, honey. Home of God. Welcome to Tennessee.” We see pictures of three illuminated crosses outside a nearby church, and a lawn sign advising passers-by to “prepare to meet thy God.” This is not in any way an inaccurate image; yes, this is the rural South, and God, especially in his Southern Baptist incarnation, is everywhere. What is notable is how the filmmakers depict the area. In transitioning from Bucky's to the “outside,” the soundtrack changes from upbeat techno to a haunting, slow ballad. The warm, reddish color scheme that we were treated to in the images of Bucky's is gone; now, the world is monochromatically gray. The rain is drizzling, a cow is staring quizzically at the camera. A broken plastic bag on a barbed-wire fence shows that the wind is blowing, and suddenly a roll of thunder breaks through the gloomy music. Where did they find this barbed-wire fence, I wonder? The road to Bucky's is fence-free, surrounded by open fields and lawns, from which dogs dart out to greet or attack the rare pedestrian. Did the filmmakers go looking for a fence, or did they run across it somewhere, deciding it was a more accurate representation of the region than the much more common open lawns? And why the thunder now? Certainly, it thunders down in Bucky's hollow, too. Usually, storms are welcomed: a spectacle of rain and lightning to view, and a day without having to water the gardens by hose!

After watching *America ReCycled*, I offhandedly mentioned to a long-term resident that the winter it was filmed must have been unusually cold, considering the amount of snow in the film. “Not really,” he said, “it's just that they chose to shoot on

snowy days.” This is not an inherently bad decision; the documentary is, in part, an artistic production, and the choices that the filmmakers made did indeed produce a wonderful piece of art. At the same time, those artistic choices reinforce the idea of the hostile rural South, making Bucky's an exceptional safe space. To some extent, this is an accurate portrayal: Bucky's is a safe haven in an often dangerous or unfriendly world. The borders are not, however, as clear-cut as the documentary makes them out to be. Leaving Bucky's does not mean driving through a line of barbed-wire fence on a gray evening; more often, it means driving into town on a hot, sunny day, to go to the laundromat, and, while waiting for the washing cycle to finish, have some tortas de pollo and flirt with the queer waitress. And, no, interactions with the surrounding world are not always easy, especially for trans\* and gender-nonconforming people in the gayborhood. There are sneers and disgust. But there is also joy and mundane pleasures, which the documentary overlooks.

### ***Conclusion: Forest of the Future***

In this chapter, I have looked at some of the stories that circulate about rural queer life and death, and how these stories influence who arrives in the gayborhood. We see that the gayborhood is simultaneously resisting a mainstream narrative of queer belonging, and being interpellated by that very narrative. This happens through a series of stories, which can be characterized as either dreams or nightmares.

What all these narratives have in common is a portrayal of queer rurality as the Other, as that which does not fit the norm, the mainstream, the audience as it is perceived by the storytellers. Whether these othering descriptions present queer rurality as a dreamlike Garden of Eden or as a nightmarish hell, they serve to remove rural queer life

from modern temporality, inserting it as stuck in the past, or as transcending time.

Can representations of queer land such as those presented in this chapter be read as a search for Paradise? Is the creation myth a desire for a new beginning, a wish for untouched space, a garden of Eden? Do later representations, such as *America ReCycled*, carry on this desire? Recent literature about back-to-the-land movements point to the utopian aspect of such projects, and reference the longing to go back to a mythical beginning. With titles such as *Eden within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage* (Kopp), and *West of Eden: Communes and Utopia in Northern California* (Boal et. al.), the Edenic aspect of communal land projects is being brought to the forefront. Positing land projects as paradisaical gardens dehistoricizes them, placing them in a mythical past devoid of previous inhabitants of the land, as well as in a glorious future.

The image of land projects as Eden also performs the common move of equating the rural with the wild. The rural is not necessarily wild; in fact, agriculture is in a sense the opposite of wilderness, yet, in an urbanized culture, the discursive distinction between rural and wild is frequently blurred. As Stacy Alaimo eloquently phrases it: “Characterizing nature as a liberatory wilderness...poses several potential problems: it may widen the nature/culture divide, and it may be complicit in the American glorification of ‘free land,’ which has underwritten colonialist exploits by depicting nature as an empty space” (17). To me, it is quite clear that most, possibly all, members of Bucky's reject the notion that this was ever “free land,” or that nature and culture can be separated. Yet, I do believe that an uncritical creation myth risks reinforcing these ideas.

What work does the image of queer land projects as wild, paradisaical, and magical do? To understand this further, I want to turn to a project that took place in New

York City in the spring of 2013. As the largest city in the United States, and among the ten largest in the world, New York is in some sense the antithesis of rural, yet it is a node where quite a few activities related to queer land takes place, notably fundraisers. The project I discuss here, Forest of the Future, is not officially related to the gayborhood, but there are connections, and I believe the gayborhood has left a mark on the Forest. Among the organizers, we find one former Hickory Knoll resident and a non-resident frequent Bucky's participant. There was also a strong Radical Faerie presence at the event.

Forest of the Future was an installation art project that took place in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, for two weeks in March of 2013. According to the project website, "The Forest of the Future is a collaboratively-built art installation that imagines what a queer future might look like." In a warehouse-turned-artist-loft, a forest of sorts was constructed, with white paper trees, rhinestones, and even a tree-house structure. There was a small stage for performances, as well as space for people to socialize or take a nap.

So how is it that even this event in a decidedly urban environment – a dilapidated factory in post-industrial, gentrifying, north Brooklyn – invoked the non-urban – the forest – to manifest a sense of queerness, of possibility? According to mainstream gay history writing, the city is the location of possibility, where queer individuals can live outside the norms, unconstrained by a heteronormative nuclear family structure. The work done in the gayborhood and the Forest of the Future is the reverse: an escape from the city to a space that does something else, a space where norms can be broken and possibilities re-imagined.

On a sign by the entrance to the Forest of the Future – a poster for the event – somebody, presumably one of the organizers, had scribbled "Welcome homo," a greeting

also seen on signs at Bucky's and Radical Faerie sanctuaries. Once again, space has been claimed, and once again, it is claimed by primarily white, non-native, natural-born U.S. citizens. Queerness becomes a reason for needing safe space, a reason that avoids analyzing the mechanisms behind such space-claiming. This old factory, like the hollers/hollows of the gayborhood, is presented as an unpopulated wild where a home can be created.

This dream of a rural wild helps explain the appeal of the creation myth at Bucky's: by beginning the story of the community elsewhere, in Washington, DC, the location of Bucky's itself can implicitly be presented as empty. It was space available for starting a community, rather than a place already filled with life. Nightmarish media and scholarly representations of the rural, on the other hand, perform the opposite function: they portray the rural as so full of human prejudices, hostility, and violence that there is no space for queer existence. Once people settle down in the gayborhood, whether as residents or as frequent visitors, they find a much more complicated reality, one more like what is portrayed by the Eggplant Faerie Players: there is human history here, and a human present moment, and these include violence and displacement, but also tentative love and slow acceptance. Interacting with this messy reality takes more work than either dreams or nightmares, however, and it is this work that, at its best, structures community-building in the gayborhood.

## Chapter 2: Hiding, Forgetting, Naturalizing

*Dispossession has preceded capital accumulation everywhere.*

– Michael McIntyre and Heidi J. Nast, p. 1470

*It just seems to me that you're unknowingly doing the same thing to us that all the colonizers before you have done: you want to do stuff on our land without asking our permission.*

– John Paul Montano, in open letter to Occupy Wall Street

The genealogy and county history room at the public library in the main town of the county where Bucky's is located is impressively well-maintained and I could write a whole dissertation just using the sources here. From the official history of the county, I learn that not much of interest to the recorders of history happened here until the county seat was established in the early 19th century. I learn that at any given time in the early 1800s, there were only one or two slaves in the whole county (at least according to the official records). From the high school yearbooks, I learn that these days most people who attend high school in town are white, and that most have married parents. This is the official narrative of the county: a place where a homogeneous population lives in harmony, on land that was never occupied by anybody else.<sup>56</sup>

The most common history of all, then; the history written by the “victors,” by the numerical majority, those who knew how to write, who had time and money to produce books and other documents. My question in this chapter is how Bucky's and the gayborhood understand and engage with the history of the area, and how this history has affected the existence of the community. What is written and what is forgotten? How does the gayborhood engage with narratives about middle Tennessee? Lisa Lowe argues that

<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed discussion on white bias in Southern historical society archives, see Glazier, chapter 1.



an “economy of affirmation and forgetting...structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding” (3). In this chapter, we see how an ongoing process of forgetting the violences of modernity and liberalism – notably slavery, the Trail of Tears, and the “modernization” of agriculture through the war industry – is crucial in affirming the identity of Bucky's and the gayborhood.

In tracing the history of forgotten and hidden displacements, I am especially interested in the relationship between the told and untold narratives and the land. Kathleen Stewart writes about the coal-mining region of West Virginia, not too far from middle Tennessee: “These hills – at once occupied, encompassed, exploited, betrayed, and deserted – become a place where the effects of capitalism and modernization pile up on the landscape as the detritus of history, and where the story of 'America' grows dense and unforgettable in re-membered ruins and pieced-together fragments” (4). The sentence might just as well have been written about Bucky's hollow. The “effects of capitalism and modernization pile up,” yet they are also broken down, rethought. If purity and separation are impossible, what do we do instead? How do we engage with the waste?

To answer these questions of history and of rethinking waste, I look at a series of events from the past three centuries where capitalist development has encroached on the hollow, leaving waste and deserting the land. The events I look at are: entering the land into a monetary economy; the effects of the two World Wars on farming; the growth of car culture; and the War on Drugs. The fragments of history presented in this chapter serve as a partial response to a question I posed in chapter one: if a teleological narrative of LGBT progress is not adequate for understanding the creation of the gayborhood, what alternate history can we tell? The answer, at least parts of it, can be found right here, in

the land, and the stories it keeps, and in how the gayborhood interacts with this history, how it understands it and creates narratives. Since 1919, the land which now is Bucky's, or parcels of this land, has been bought and sold at least eight times.<sup>57</sup> I argue that it is through a process of waste-making that the land has become available for occupation by Bucky's. Over the past three hundred years, parcels of land have gone from being considered "fertile" and "valuable" to being seen as increasingly "marginal" and "useless," as new models of production and consumption have developed. In this process, populations have also shifted between locations, including the establishment of Bucky's and the gayborhood as a queer enclave. This process of waste-making is related to forgetting, hiding, and silences. The culture of silence that I engaged in the prelude encompasses not only the present moment, but also the community's history.

### ***Learning the land, claiming a home***

Bucky's is populated by migrants; none of the people living here were born nearby, nor were, with one or two exceptions, the visitors. People at Bucky's thus do not know this land from our childhood; we create a relationship with it over time, as adults. This happens through the daily labor and pleasure of existence: finding fallen trees for firewood and knowing which ones will burn well, going on morning constitutionals and treading the deer paths, slipping and falling while walking barefoot in the creek and remembering to wear shoes next time. This is a learning rooted in the present moment. For some, a curiosity arises: how did this come to be? What shaped this land, made Bucky's possible?

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<sup>57</sup> This was not the first time the land changed hands; however, the county deed records do not specify where earlier deeds are located. By 1919, the land was in the ownership of the family after which the hollow is named. Records show that members of this family were significant actors in the area, frequently buying and selling land, but I have not been able to trace the particular parcel on which Bucky's is located any further back.

Bucky's is far from the county archives, a fifteen-minute drive into what almost seems like a different world. Along the way, the air-conditioning is lost, as are the neat shelves of orderly books, the systematization of knowledge. Bucky's, too, is filled with books, a collection of whatever passers-by have left behind. Shelves are lined with queer theory, *The Hunger Games*, pharmaceutical manuals, home-brewing guidebooks. Half of the books are starting to mold: the air here will not let anything last for too long. There is a community archive, too: plastic bins filled to the brim with papers. Here, in one unsorted mix, are pamphlets, newsletters, photographs, letters. Somewhere, the deed to the land is supposed to be, but when I ask about it nobody seems to know where it is.

Sometimes, the bookshelves are re-organized. The archive is intermittently added to. Oral history and memoir projects are started and then abandoned. Documentation is simply not prioritized. And sometimes not knowing, not speaking, is preferred, as I discussed in the prelude. This goes for events big and small. A Christmas package is all the more exciting for having an anonymous sender. Not specifying who exactly is on the lease strengthens the feeling that this is communal land. Divulging everything, digging up every detail of Bucky's history, is thus not necessarily desirable. The quest for constant knowing can impose a certain violence. At the same time, so can silences and forgettings: not knowing the history of exploitation and dispossession that have allowed for migration and settlement here allows for a continual evasion of the responsibility to address structures of white supremacy and ongoing settler colonialism.

In chapter 3, I discuss the process of claiming land; here, I focus on the role of forgetting in this process. In order for the gayborhood to be claimed as a queer homeland, the fact that others lived here before has had to be largely forgotten, as a neat genealogy

cannot be drawn from those living here before to the current residents. Taiaiake Alfred, professor of Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria, and a member of the Mohawk Nation, points out, as many others have, that “When the non-native people came [to what is now North America] from Europe, they were looking for land to build their societies. Some were escaping prosecution. They were escaping whatever situation it was in Europe that drove them away from their ancestral home to come here and take what we had” (7). Among the people who arrived to the new gayborhood, hundreds of years after the first European settlers on this land, many were also looking for a home, a place to feel safe in a world that is often deeply hostile to queers. This home was built on forgetting, on viewing this as uninhabited land; in this chapter, I argue that this forgetting serves as a means to escape guilt. Un-forgetting would require taking seriously Glenn Coulthard's analysis of colonial dispossession as ongoing, and seeing Bucky's as part of the landscape of “[s]ettler-colonial formations [which] are *territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*” (125, italics in original).

The pieces of history presented here are fragments, moments that strike me as especially important to the formation of the gayborhood. My goal here, rather than present a comprehensive history of middle Tennessee, is to use these moments as starting points for thinking about how alternate histories of a queer community – different from the March on Washington creation narrative presented in chapter one – can be written. In the version of history I present here, capitalism and the nation-state are intensifying their holds on people and territory, in a process that Wilma Dunaway, in her study of antebellum Southern Appalachia, refers to as an

essential prerequisite for capitalist expansion[:] the “anchoring of settler property relations,” which is accomplished in three historical phases. The land must first be depopulated; then it is contractualized so that it is transformed from a natural resource into a marketable commodity. Finally, the land is resettled and exploited as an essential element of the production process (276-7).

At the same time, cracks are opened, where modes of living half-way outside the system can be established. Borrowing words from Mark Rifkin, “Thus, I seek to provide something of a genealogy for the ways (queer) opposition to the state can reiterate everyday modes of settler sensation and occupation as its condition of possibility, how in [19<sup>th</sup> century Pequot minister William] Apess's terms 'in the works they approve of the iniquities of their fathers'" (4).

While I read Bucky's and other queer land projects as resistant to a process of un-forgetting and re-framing of their role within an ongoing history of settler-colonial dispossession and white supremacist structures, I also see moments of opening, where community members are engaging in education and informed action. As tentative and flawed as this education and action might be, it is worth paying attention to, both so that it can be nuanced and deepened, and to acknowledge the ongoing interplay between forgetting and attempts to relearn.

### ***Topography and statehood***

*The poor state of the roads measured distance from the center of America. The distance you lived from the main road down the dirt roads of the hollers measured distance from economic viability and a legal, organized lifeworld.*

- Kathleen Stewart, 2014, 11

The gayborhood has been made possible through a series of displacements and population shifts in the region. In order to understand these shifts in population, we must understand the landscape, as the two are closely related. Gayborhood residents refer to themselves as

living in Tennessee, a geographical and political label that is widely recognized within the United States. Tennessee, however, is a construct more tied to the history of settler colonialism than to biological or topographical regionality. The state has three distinct regions: the Mississippi Delta to the West, middle Tennessee in the center, and the Appalachian Mountains to the East. Tennessee was in the early colonial days part of the state of North Carolina (Eberling, 19). When Tennessee was to become separate from North Carolina, there was plans to make it three states, reflecting the regions outlined above; up until the 1970s, the border signs greeting drivers coming into Tennessee exclaimed “Welcome to the Three States of Tennessee.”

The Mississippi Delta is considered part of the “Deep South,” and with its cotton plantations was heavily involved in the antebellum slave-labor economy. Middle Tennessee is hillier, but also with some plantations, and, with the state capital of Nashville, is the administrative center of the state. The boundary between middle and east Tennessee is the Cumberland Plateau, a thousand feet above the Tennessee River Valley. Eastern Tennessee is, like southern Appalachia as a whole, a poor region, where small homesteads have been the most common form of farming. The region also has an extensive mining industry. In 1772, white settlers, primarily Scottish and Irish, formed the Watauga Association<sup>58</sup> as a non-governmental policing organization in what is now East Tennessee, since the official state system was so far away from the region; it was this association that became the starting point for the formation of the state of Tennessee (Eberling, 20).

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<sup>58</sup> The association was named after the Watauga River, which runs through Elizabethton, the town in eastern Tennessee where the association was founded.

The gayborhood lies right where the Cumberland Plateau meets the Appalachian Mountains, on the border of middle and eastern Tennessee. The topography is a mix of the two: plateaus on top, with hollows beneath. Hollows, a quintessential feature of the Appalachian landscape, are small, narrow valleys. They tend to be fairly isolated, and neighbors, each in their own hollow, only see each other when they make an effort to do so. Bucky's is located in a hollow, at the very end of a road. This gives the community a sense of being at the end of everything, a place to escape or retreat to. While residents frequently leave the hollow, both for work and recreation, it is also possible to stay indefinitely, and not interact with anyone outside of Bucky's for weeks.

Since they are so exposed to the elements, with little vegetation to keep nutrients in the soil, the plateaus are not especially fertile, and for the first century and a half of white settlement, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were considered a wasteland, where only the poorest people lived. The hollows, on the other hand, due to the run-off from the hillsides, were – and still are – incredibly fertile. They are, however, too small for any large-scale farming. This topography is crucial to the narrative told in this chapter: the lay of the land has facilitated the economic marginalization of the region, enabling the gayborhood to be established here.

The gayborhood's position on the border of Appalachia and the Cumberland Plateau also locates it in an historico-economic borderland, veering between the small homesteads of Appalachia and the slave-based agriculture of the plantations of the Deep South. Histories written about the region reflect this, with contradictory messages about the kind of agriculture and the forms of labor taking place in the region. While not technically part of the Appalachian region, I have been told that the area is “culturally Appalachian,” with

a history of [white] homesteading, grinding poverty, and a live-and-let-live morality. As I discuss later in this chapter, this Appalachian identity is embraced by many in the gayborhood.

Topography shapes daily life in the present moment, too. Because the hillsides block the light, the sun sets an hour earlier in the hollows than up on the plateaus. Night is thus longer, and there is a longer space for rest. There is also, especially during the short days of winter, a rush to accomplish outdoor tasks – wood-chopping, gardening, bike-riding – during daylight hours.

The shape of the hollow also structures the layout of Bucky's: the hollow is long and narrow, and the community follows this pattern. At the entrance are the front gardens, followed by the kitchen building and the “front house.” There is a big lawn and a porch, which, together with the kitchen, serve as the main communal spaces. The farther back one ventures, the more private the space becomes, with common spaces being replaced by residences. The back-most building is a tiny little hut, so small you cannot stand up in it, barely big enough for two people to sleep in. This back hut has no permanent residents, but regularly serves as a temporary abode or hiding place for people seeking solitude when the hollow gets too crowded.

### ***The price of land***

Land in the region around Bucky's is cheap compared to many other regions of the US<sup>59</sup>: Bucky's paid less than half a million dollars for their 200 acres, including buildings and infrastructure. This is not an isolated case: for example, Bill and his partner bought their land in the late 1990s for \$15,000. Their property encompasses 18 acres and has several

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<sup>59</sup> For statistics, see Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's website: <https://www.lincolnst.edu/subcenters/land-values/land-prices-by-state.asp>. Accessed April 9, 2015.



buildings as well as a creek running through the front yard. In both cases, the new residents had to scramble to find the money, but a purchase was still possible.

Although the series of events that will be described in this chapter has made land in middle Tennessee relatively cheap, affording to buy or rent land is still a struggle for Bucky's and other members of the gayborhood. In order to understand the financial constraints of the gayborhood, it is useful to look at lesbian and women's land projects. There is more research available on women's and lesbian land than on queer land, and the issue facing the projects are similar enough that comparisons can be made. These are also land projects based on gender and sexuality identities, and have, due to their longer existence, been more well-researched than queer land (for an outline of the interconnected histories of women's and queer land projects, see the Introduction). Lack of funds is a prevalent reason why lesbian separatists have had to leave their land. Few people have the means to buy land upfront, and in cases where a purchase of land for a land project is possible, the funds have often been pieced together through donations, inheritances, and loans from friends and supporters.

Not only must the land itself be bought or rented, but there are also costs associated with maintaining the space, for example building roads and paying for electricity (Cheney, 11). The costs of maintaining a land project can cause ruptures within the community, as some members have more access to money than others. Some communities, such as ARF in New Mexico, dealt with class differentials by letting members decide for themselves how much money to contribute (Cheney, 14).<sup>60</sup> A

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<sup>60</sup> From an interview with ARF members in 1982. Down payments ranged from \$500 to \$13,500. The community had been around five years, and survived for another eleven, until in 1993 a trust was formed, which raised \$100,000 to buy the land (Love, in Cheney, 274). ARF is still in existence, with seven residents (Maize, p. 30).

Woman's Place, in upstate New York, raised \$25,000 yearly through "guest fees, raffles, donations, and benefits" (Turner, 19), which was used to run feminist retreats and help pay the expenses of the women who lived there.<sup>61</sup> Over time, land dyke communities seem to have given up some of their innovative methods for resource sharing and fundraising. With the shift to more conventional ownership structures, the communities have become more exclusive. Alapine, a community in Alabama that is still in existence, has "a locked gate whose security code is changed frequently" (Kershaw). Gated communities are only available to those who can afford to privatize space, which is far from everyone (Duncan, 129). This trend away from a focus on land trusts and grassroots support can to some extent be seen at queer lands, too, and Bucky's in particular. In recent years, the community has been filing for 501(c)3 status, in order to be able to apply for grants. This is the price of private ownership: the constant need for money.

Finances are not only an issue in acquiring land, but also in affording to stay in the gayborhood. The county where Bucky's is located has an average household income of just under \$37,000, putting it within the average range of Appalachian Tennessee (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Bucky's residents frequently struggle to make ends meet, patching together a living from part-time jobs, SSI checks, bartering, dumpstering, and two sizeable vegetable gardens. They build their own houses, take care of their own sewage; nothing that can be done by hand should be paid for. The primary way that Bucky's negotiates class differences is through a flexible approach to rent. Even though living in the hollow is quite cheap (monthly rent, including utilities and basic food, is \$225), finances is still a concern for residents. Because of the community's remote

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<sup>61</sup> A Woman's Place closed in 1982, eight years after its inception (Turner, 19, 22).

location, holding down a full-time job is difficult. Several residents also face employment discrimination due to deviant gender presentation and/or HIV/AIDS status. Questions of class thus intersect with gender discrimination and rural de-industrialization.

### ***Fragments: history and its present***

#### **Naturalizing the nation, naturalizing property**

*I started to think about how institutionalized relations of settlement, such as law and policy, help generate forms of affect through which they become imbued with a sensation of everyday certainty.*

– Mark Rifkin, 2014, p xv

Anyone entering Bucky's is assumed to be a natural-born citizen of the United States of America, one with settler ancestry. Declaring oneself otherwise raises eyebrows, exclamations of surprise. If we take a longer view of history, looking back several hundred years, a naturalized nation-state has been crucial in the formation of the gayborhood. It was through the process of consolidating the USA that the Native inhabitants of this land – at that time, the Cherokees, though other groups, including the Yuchis, had lived here before – were either removed, killed, or invisibilized.

When white settlers arrived in the area of the gayborhood, the land was utilized by Cherokees. At the time that the state of Tennessee was pronounced in 1796, large swaths of what is now Tennessee was still under Cherokee control (Eberling, 21), though much land had already been acquired by white settlers (Dunaway, 1996, 47). In the next few years, the white population of the state would boom, from around 32,000 in 1790, to well over 200,000 in 1810 (Cumfer, 164). Making land available to these white settlers required displacing large portions of the Cherokee population. This happened partly through physical violence, and partly through entering the land into a monetary economy.

The categories that the European settlers brought with them thus did not translate

directly to the context of Cherokee usage of this land. In his history of the region, published in 1915, Will T. Hale writes that

upon the arrival of the first whites in East Tennessee [i.e. in the second half of the 18th century], a vast portion of Middle Tennessee was unoccupied by Indians, though hunting parties camped here or passed back and forth in their tribal wars beyond the borders. It seems to have been agreed among the red men that it should be held as a common hunting ground (3).<sup>62</sup>

We see here, then, a difference between the notion of populated and utilized land: the area where the gayborhood is located did not have a population residing there when European settlers arrived, but it was still in use. I will discuss the relationship between usage and property further in the concluding chapter.

Further, the structure through which access to land and other resources was organized was significantly different among the Cherokees than the capitalist nation-state model the European colonizers were familiar with. Faulkner states that there was “no centralization of power” in Cherokee society until the arrival of European settlers: “Each town was politically independent, held together by a common culture, language, and history. Europeans, however, tended to treat the Cherokee as a ‘nation’ seeking a centralized authority with whom to deal. As the eighteenth century progressed, a centralized tribal council was formed, based on the town council model” (Faulkner, 9). Today, a language of rights and nationhood is pervasive in struggles around Native existence and well-being in North America.<sup>63</sup>

Historical sociologist Wilma Dunaway describes the commodification of land as “the most dooming articulation between Cherokee environment and the European world

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<sup>62</sup> Hale is not claiming that this area had always been uninhabited: “No one knows how long it had been uninhabited; the numerous burying grounds, mounds, and traces of forts prove that some race in the past had lived here” (3).

<sup>63</sup> For a critique of this discourse, see Coulthard.

system” (1996, 46). At the time of white settlement, the Cherokees “owned their land in common, with occupants having rights to tenure” (Cumfer, 26); breaking the land up into individual plots – a concept I discuss further in chapter three – made it available to non-Cherokees. In Dunaway's words, “[p]rior to European influences, the Cherokees did not have any conception of private ownership” over land (1996, 46). Houses and other structures on the land could be owned by individuals, as could “the product of the land” (Ray, 3), but the land as such was not an object to be owned. There was a system for transferring land tenure – matrilineally – but this was not a form of ownership, as the British interpreted it to be (Dunaway, 1996, 46). As we shall see here and in the next chapter, the introduction of a European property regime severely affected access to land.

There were two facets of the individualization of land that made it available to white settlers: the land was now purchasable, which it had not been before, and it was also cheap. The new states (in the case of the land around the gayborhood, North Carolina) sold off land to private buyers in the early eighteenth century, “at very cheap prices,” \$2 to \$7 per acre (Dunaway, 1996, 57, 72).

Because of how the land was parceled and priced, however, poor settlers could rarely afford good land, and the most fertile plots were bought up by absentee landlords (Dunaway, 1996, 72). Because these absentee owners and speculators could afford to hold on to land, even when it was not in use, prices soon got too high for local people to purchase land (Dunaway, 1996, 57, 66). Due to theft of Cherokee land, fraud, and policies that made registering land prohibitively expensive for smallholders, well over four million acres of land in Tennessee went to speculators in the years after the Revolutionary War (Ray, 6-7).

Through the process described above, land in the region was entered into a monetary economy<sup>64</sup>. When European colonizers arrived in what would later become Georgia and Tennessee, they “recognized” the Cherokees as an independent nation through a series of treaties and laws, most importantly the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell. By the time the Treaty of Hopewell was signed, white settlers were already living in the area, as the late eighteenth century saw an influx of white settlers, many of them soldiers (Hale, 48). These settlers grew “hemp, cotton, and tobacco” (Hale, 48).<sup>65</sup> With the exception of these cash crops, these early settlers were homesteaders, making almost everything, including cloth, by themselves (Hale, 50-1).

Ironically, representing the Cherokees as an autonomous nation, and thus incorporating them into the legible geography of nation-states, according to Mark Rifkin, facilitated the deterioration of Cherokee autonomy: “[t]hough the United States suggested its recognition of Cherokee autonomy by signing treatises with them,...these agreements also legitimized the appropriation by purchase of Cherokee land, often already occupied by white squatters the United States was unable or unwilling to remove” (2009, 54). Through these treaties, land became an object that could be bought and sold. Theft is reconstructed as property transfers, colonization masked as autonomy. Thus, when “the Cherokee laws were first published in 1821 in Knoxville, Tennessee” (Rifkin, 2009, 58), indigenous modes of land tenure were replaced by a European framework. White

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<sup>64</sup> I focus here specifically on the commodification of land. This was, however, part of a larger process of moving the Cherokee economy into capitalism. For a thorough description of this process, see Wilma Dunaway's excellent *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia, 1700-1860*.

<sup>65</sup> By the time of Hale's writing, in 1914, hemp and cotton were no longer grown in the county (48). Tobacco became the key crop in the area, and the decline in tobacco farming has severely impacted the finances of farmers in the area, leading many to either leave or transition to non-farming work. This is one of the fragments of history that did not make it into this chapter. Very limited tobacco farming has been attempted at Bucky's, but this experiment only lasted for one season.

European structures of land tenure now became the norm, and accessing land usually meant playing by the rules of white settler colonialists.

The language of nationhood was used in reference to the Native populations for the first few decades of European settlement, but this shifted at the very end of the 18th century, to a language of rights. At the same time, white people in power also moved from talking about Cherokee rights to land to talking about claims or privileges (Cumfer, 95-6). In 1803, “the Tennessee Senate and House of Representatives...unanimously passed a Memorial to Congress urging the extinction of all Indian 'claims' to lands in Tennessee and advocating their removal west of the Mississippi” (95). Although this didn't pass the federal congress, it did set the tone for the era, and the framework of nationhood and rights is hegemonic to this day.

### **Whiteness, Appalachian identity, and the erasure of slavery**

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned the attachment of many in the gayborhood to an Appalachian identity. Locating the gayborhood in an Appalachian, rather than plantation South, cultural context helps uphold a romantic vision of white homesteading and bootstrap survival in the face of poverty. This case has not been made to me explicitly by any of the gayborhood residents, and I am not convinced that it is a conscious notion; yet, the small farmer white poverty of Appalachia is closer to the gayborhood's self-image than a history of plantation agriculture and racialized hierarchies.

Appalachia, despite its deep imbrication in the global economy, historically and in the present moment, is frequently marked as being isolated and outside of modern time and space, including outside of the Southern slave-labor based economy. As John Inscoe puts it in his introduction to an anthology on *Appalachians and Race*, the region has been

characterized as one of “racial innocence” (2001, 2). Adhering to an identity of Appalachian isolation thus can be a way of distancing oneself from the legacy and guilt of slavery and racist dynamics ascribed to the South; at the same time, however, Appalachian identity relies on a racialization of white poverty and “backwardness,” categories often seen as related to racist ideology and practice. Taking on a regional and class identity that is tied to racism in the national imaginary as a way to distance oneself from structural racism seems oxymoronic; Kiri Miller, however, poses a theory to explain this phenomenon in her work on Sacred Harp singers, to which I will return below. First, however, it is worth mentioning the long history of posing Appalachian-ness as removed from the racist structure of an economy based on the labor of enslaved people.

The notion that Appalachia was outside of the slave economy goes back to the antebellum era; John Inscoe quotes the journal of “noted East Tennessean David Deaderick,” who in 1827 claimed that Appalachians were more moral than white people in West Tennessee, who relied on the labor of enslaved people (2010, 20). This notion of a slave-free (and more moral) history is reproduced up until this day. There is a commonly expressed idea in the gayborhood that this was never a region whose economy was based on slave labor. Further research, however, shows that the area around the gayborhood was not devoid of slavery. A history book from 1915 records the presence of a slave system in the region. The chapter “Concerning Slaves and Free Negroes” starts dramatically, by mentioning a slave insurrection in a different county: “There was only one attempt of the slaves to start an insurrection in this State, as far as the writer can tell; that was in Stewart County” (Hale, 98). On the following page, returning to DeKalb County, the subject of his volume, Hale states that “slaves were numerous in the county” (99). However,



because of the topography, large-scale plantations did not exist, and that shaped the magnitude of slavery. While some people owned large numbers of slaves, Hale claims that “Scores of citizens owned from two to a dozen” (99). There were, however, according to Hale, not many free Black people in the area at the time of slavery (100). Slavery was not as central to the life and economy of the Appalachia-Cumberland border as it was to other parts of the US South, yet it was not altogether absent. In 1860, “[m]ore than one-third of [Southern Appalachia's] farm owners and cash renters held slaves” (Dunaway, 1996, 109). Southern Appalachia was also complicit in the maintenance of a slave-labor economy in the plantation South, by serving as an important market region for intra-US slave trade (Dunaway, 2001).

Census data from 1850 shows that rates of enslavement in the county where Bucky's is located are at the low end of those of counties in Middle Tennessee, and much lower than the cotton-growing region of the Mississippi Delta in the western end of the state, but not as low as Appalachia proper (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). The data further shows that slavery was widespread in Appalachia, too; though the numbers are low compared to the “Plantation South,” all counties in Appalachian Tennessee witnessed the birth of at least one enslaved person the year of the census. Yet, an Appalachian identity keeps being invoked as a way of distancing the gayborhood from an economy or culture of Black enslavement. The assumption among gayborhood residents that slavery did not happen in their region is not unique; historian of the 19th century U.S. South John Inscoe describes how the assumption “that Southern Appalachia was basically free of slaves” and therefore neutral regarding questions of race, labor, and the Confederacy, was widespread already at the time of the Civil War (2010, 2).

This history of enslavement in the region is only known by some people in the gayborhood, and Appalachian identity still plays out in the community: by claiming that this has “always” been a white region, racism is often brushed aside as an issue that takes place elsewhere, and thus does not need to be addressed here. This is where Kiri Miller's work provides a useful entry point for theorizing. Miller's *Traveling Home* is an ethnographic study of the diasporic community of “Sacred Harp singers”; that is, people who meet to sing songs from the *Sacred Harp* hymnal, published in multiple editions from 1844 to 1991. While the style of singing has roots in both New England and the US South, it is only in the South that there has been an active ongoing singing tradition since the mid-19th-century; contemporary singings in other parts of the United States (and increasingly the world) predominantly go back no further than the 1970s, with many being much more recent. Additionally, Sacred Harp music these days is usually sung in non-religious settings, and is rarely sung in congregational settings other than Primitive Baptist churches. For these reasons – length of “unbroken” tradition and church-based singing communities – the South is seen by many singers as the origin point of “authentic” singing. Sand Mountain often gets presented as the quintessential site of traditional Sacred Harp singing. Its location in northern Alabama puts it squarely in both Appalachia and the Deep South, and “diaspora singers” often hold the common stereotypes about these two regions: backward, racist, poor, and traditional, the last of these characteristics being romanticized and even fetishized. Most singings utilizing the most widespread edition of *The Sacred Harp* – be they at Sand Mountain, other Southern locations, or in other parts of the country – tend to be overwhelmingly white. Writes Miller: “New singers sometimes cover over their discomfort with the racial homogeneity

of most conventions by imagining traditional [i.e. rural Southern] singers as something like an ethnic group; nondiversity becomes authentic purity, something to be respected by outsiders” (Miller, 43). The very same identity that gets equated with racism – rural white Southerner – here becomes interpellated as an ethnic group, one who because of its isolation and distance from modernity is to be respected and not questioned. The racialization of rural Southern – and, in the case of Sand Mountain, Appalachian – whiteness becomes the means through which white guilt can be dispensed with.

What is missing in the interpretation of “traditional” Southern singing communities as a geographically isolated, pre-modern ethnic group is Sacred Harp singing's origin in a global, colonialist, modernity. The tradition of singing schools from which present-day Sacred Harp singing stems began in England, and was brought to New England where it was further developed among Protestant groups (cf. Willard). Some lyrics and melodies stem from Europe; many others were written in New England.<sup>66</sup> The books used in the singing, the texts on which the whole tradition of Sacred Harp music is based, were developed through industrial modernity. As Miller writes, “Sacred Harp singing is itself a mass media phenomenon, the legacy of a progressive music education movement and a competitive nineteenth-century publishing industry. Shape notes, also called 'patent notes,' served as both pedagogical tool and marketing gimmick” (85).

In discussing the gayborhood, I am not convinced that we can go quite as far as Miller does in her study, and propose that community members create an understanding of Appalachian rural whiteness as an ethnic group, but I do think her theory presents a starting point for considering the seeming contradictions in how the gayborhood views its

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<sup>66</sup> Sacred Harp songs are frequently named for the place where they were composed; interspersed with Southern locations such as Alabama, Georgia, and Pisgah, can be found ample New England towns, such as Florida and New Britain.

surroundings. The same stereotypes and realities that make the rural Appalachian South seem homophobic and racist are also employed in order to understand and interact with neighbors, and to dismiss the need for engaging with structural racism and settler colonialism within the gayborhood.

Viewing the surrounding population as “backward” (not necessarily in a bad sense; as I will return to in chapter 5, judgments of temporality are distinctly different in the gayborhood than in metrocentric queer circumstances) hides or ignores the influence of colonialism, racist and classist labor exploitation, modernity, and industrialism in the development of Appalachia. Just as Miller's participants gloss over the centrality of modern print culture in their tradition, those claiming an Appalachian identity within and outside the gayborhood often do not fully acknowledge that the region's mining culture and economy is absolutely central to the development of industrial modern society. Further, this has, through projects such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (which I discuss later in this chapter), been a focal point in the development of large-scale industrial practices. While there are certainly ways in which Appalachian communities are isolated, for example through limited infrastructure or underfunded educational systems, this isolation is arguably part and parcel of the region's role in the global economy – as a place of exploitation of “natural” resources and human labor – not a symptom of the region being outside said economy.

Further, this view of an old, isolated, and hence pristine (but messy and at times violent) white population invisibilizes the fact that the current population is not white so much as segregated. In Miller's case, the singing community she studies is indeed mostly white; this, however, has as much to do with the scope of her study as with the actual

demographics of Sacred Harp singers, something she only mentions briefly (12-3). Miller's book is a study of singings using the 1991 Denson revision of *The Sacred Harp*, a collection of songs originally published in 1844 by B.F. White. There are also active circles of primarily African-American Sacred Harp singers, but these often use other books, such as *The Colored Sacred Harp*, originally published in 1934, by Judge Jackson from Alabama, containing almost exclusively songs by African-American composers. In the early twentieth-century many African-American shape note singing communities adopted the Cooper revision of *The Sacred Harp*, as did many white communities (Miller, 12), but this book was looked down upon in many predominantly white singing communities because of its gospel influences, and is not nearly as common as the Denson book. In the gayborhood, we see how imaginaries of white Appalachian identity has invisibilized the history of enslaved Black populations in the region; today, this same imaginary obscures fact that there is a significant, and growing, Latino population in the immediate vicinity of the gayborhood. The exact size of this population is difficult to gauge, as many are undocumented, and thus census data is of limited use. Jamie Winders' research states that between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population of Tennessee grew by 278 percent, and the foreign-born Hispanic population of the state grew by 899 percent (17-19). This growth in population largely took place in cities, such as Nashville, but it also took place in rural areas, such as around Bucky's, even though this immigration is not well documented. My study of county school records shows little evidence of non-white students, suggesting that educational opportunities are extremely limited for new immigrants, and that whole families often live outside of official civic structures. Still, the economies and social structures of the undocumented and citizen communities in the area

do overlap, and gayborhood residents regularly interact with the growing Latino population around them. Despite this, the regional population is repeatedly described as white and native-born.

We see in these examples a romanticism that lets people – gayborhood members and neighbors alike – off the hook, not having to address the structure of white supremacy in the area. On the other hand, this romantic view of the people in the area allows for a generosity that is beneficial in building relationships in spite of mutually held stereotypes and the tensions that come with them. Miller writes of the seeming impossibility of “a Southern conservative Christian and a liberal queer agnostic intellectual...singing hymns together”<sup>67</sup> in a manner that is not “disingenuous, or at least naïve” and argues that we should allow for the possibility of genuine connection and goodwill (38). Miller's theory provides an opening for considering the relationship between people in the gayborhood and the surrounding community. She argues that while the identities inhabited by Sacred Harp singers might seem disparate and incompatible – Southern Baptist, radical leftist, queer, rural – they often result in a sense of marginalization, and this shared experience of “rejection by or rejection of the 'mainstream'” creates a shared bond (170). This, I believe, speaks to how gayborhood residents engage with Appalachian identity: this is a region of shared marginalization. This allows for great patience in interacting with neighbors: they might be homophobic, they might vote Republican and own many guns, but there is a shared understanding of life in the region, and the challenges but also beauty of this life.

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<sup>67</sup> Note in Miller's description of the two ends of the spectrum of singers that “Southern” and “queer” are posited against one another. The Southerner's sexuality is unmarked, assumed to be straight, while the queer's regional affiliation is not mentioned, because the implicit “non-Southern” is too obvious to require stating.

Space is opened up for the slow connections of community building that I return to in several chapters.

While the conceptions of self and surroundings enabled by white Appalachian identity hold much power in the gayborhood, over the past couple of years, these notions have been increasingly challenged by both residents and visitors. In the last section of this chapter, I look at how this challenge happens, and whether or not it is effective.

### **Growth of the Ku Klux Klan**

The notion of a county history free from slavery is likely tied to the current demographics, with an officially 96 percent white population. This demographic record, however, has been formed through a history of violent expulsion of Black people, and invisibilizing the Latino population. While not directly related to land prices, the presence of the Ku Klux Klan has affected who this region is safe for, and hence who lives in the area. The Ku Klux Klan was founded in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866, by six Confederate veterans (cf. Cunningham, 17; Eberling, 22; Parsons, 811), a mere one hundred miles to the southwest of Bucky's. This original Klan, often referred to as "the Reconstruction Klan" (cf. Lewis and Serbu, 142; Parsons), quickly spread across Tennessee and surrounding states (Newton, 7), but was short-lived, disappearing already in 1871 (Lewis and Serbu, 142). The KKK movement was revived in 1915, and has, though fluctuating, been active ever since.

The Ku Klux Klan has had a strong presence in Bucky's county, and this has affected the composition of the population. One of the people I interviewed, Merrill Mushroom (whom I will return to later in this section), tells a story of the presence of the KKK:

[The] County is much whiter than it used to be, they ran all the black folks off a while ago. It used to be much blacker and then, now, what I hear – I don't know for sure, for sure how much is story and how much is real – but from what I hear there were a bunch of Ku Kluxers, and they did a series of, um, vigilante stuff at, at, at a series of black funerals and weddings, where they rode in and shot it up and terrorized people and broke them off. And the purpose was, you know, to “drive the niggers out of the county,” and so the black folks left, they didn't wanna be here with that kind of crap. There's too much others, there are too many other places around to live. Wilson County, where Lebanon is, has a really big and very old black population. But I think the population of the county is like two percent black. And it's more than that now Mexican farmworkers.<sup>68</sup>

The Klan is not just part of regional history, but also of present life, as seen in events such as KKK “homecoming marches” in Pulaski (Lewis and Serbu), and the 2006 (unsuccessful) campaign to rename Forrest Hall – named after Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest – at Middle Tennessee State University (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 41; Daily News Journal). Here, again, we can see the culture of silence so prevalent in the gayborhood and in the region: while Klan influences are still present, they – and the violent whitening of the county – are rarely discussed. There are, however, exceptions to the culture of silence. Merrill Mushroom, who told the above anecdote, continually addresses racism in the region through informal conversations. The Eggplant Faerie Players, whose performance work I discussed in chapter one, take up racism in their shows. I will now turn to the work that these narratives do.

Merril Mushroom has lived in the neighborhood since before the gayborhood existed; one could argue that she is one of the founding members of the community. She is a frequent visitor to Bucky's, and many residents see her as a role model and elder, as well as friend.<sup>69</sup> An active participant in the lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s,

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Merrill Mushroom, Tennessee, August 2011.

<sup>69</sup> The respect and admiration that Merrill has in the wider queer and land dyke community is evidenced by a recent online fundraiser, following a fire that destroyed her home: within days, the fundraiser had collected more than ten times the amount asked for.



Merril is one of the driving forces behind lesbian activist efforts in the US South.<sup>70</sup> She describes herself as having been a “queer hippie” in the 1960s, when she was living in New York City. Eventually, she found that “hippie got sour and commercialized and nasty” and wanted to leave the city and try a back-to-the-land life. Merrill and her husband, Peter, another active gayborhood resident, considered several locations for their move, but the South was not on their list. As Merrill explains: “We totally were not considering the Southeast as a possible place to live because we'd adopted our first kid and he was black, and we came out of the South in the sixties both of us, [Peter] and I, and the racial situation was not safe nor good nor healthy, so we didn't even think about the Southeast as a possible place to live.” Yet the family ended up in the South, for a complex set of reasons: lack of financial resources to make a cross-country move to Oregon; word from Julia Penelope, another prominent lesbian feminist, that the culture of the South was changing; and a bond to the region, with a love of the landscape and a willingness to give this place another try. Their first stop was Knoxville, where there was an active Lesbian Feminist Alliance, from which they hoped they could build a community for themselves. Indeed, they did build a community, and together with their two first children, and three adults they met in Knoxville, they moved to rural Tennessee.<sup>71</sup> Merrill's willingness and ability to address racism in the region of the gayborhood thus comes partly from her frankness about all matters and her political involvement, but also from the ways racism has played a visible part in her family's existence. For many other white gayborhood residents, racism can be put aside as

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<sup>70</sup> For more information about the broader context of lesbian feminism in the U.S. South, see *Sinister Wisdom* 93 (2014), a special issue on “Southern Lesbian-Feminist Herstory 1968-94,” which Merrill Mushroom co-edited with Rose Norman.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Merrill Mushroom, Tennessee, August 2011.

something that affects others, without an acknowledgment of its role in their own lives. This is not an option for Merrill, who is part of an interracial family, and had daily contact with a wide cross-section of the county's population in her decades-long career as a teacher.

The Eggplant Faerie Players, the vaudeville troupe whose work I discussed in greater detail in chapter one, have addressed racism in the region surrounding the gayborhood in more public venues than Merrill. Their theatrical work has a political component, and they bring up uncomfortable aspects of life in the gayborhood, such as the history of the Ku Klux Klan in the region. I have attended several performances where the Eggplant Faerie Players point out the presence of the Klan in the history of Tennessee, but never seen a strong audience reaction to this statement. The juggling with dildos is much more likely to elicit a response. We cannot necessarily blame the Eggplant Faerie Players for this – sex is touted as an exciting topic by the culture at large, whereas racism and genocide are not. Yet the two topics are engaged in different ways: sex is a constant throughout the show, and at times the topic involves the audience, for example when a volunteer is asked to hold a phallic object – either a dildo or a carrot – in their mouth during a juggling act. The presence of the Ku Klux Klan, on the other hand, is brief and does not explicitly call on the audience's participation.

Fully acknowledging the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in the area, and the effects this presence has had – and continues to have – would allow for a more complex understanding of the location of the gayborhood. While we must locate the gayborhood within a history of whiteness in the area, the gayborhood in no way embodies the kind of whiteness that the Klan endorses (not to mention the KKK's anti-queer stance). Residents

come from Jewish and Catholic traditions (as well as Protestant ones) and many practice non-Christian spiritualities, thereby living outside of the boundaries of the morality advocated by the KKK (cf. Blee and McDowell). Life in the gayborhood is contingent upon negotiating this complex location, and neither denying the white supremacy in the community nor viewing it as all-encompassing allows space for addressing the structures of oppression at play. In the last part of this chapter, we will return to this question, and consider how various land projects have addressed structures of privilege and oppression.

### **Bombs and pesticides**

The period around the two World Wars – and especially World War II – was of utmost significance in setting up the conditions that would eventually enable the creation of Bucky's and the gayborhood. The changes in industry, agriculture, and transportation that the war brought about led to changes in middle Tennessee that would eventually make land in the hollows cheap enough for back-to-the-landers. A drop in total farm acreage in the county – from 193,331 in 1900 to 161,217 in 1950 (Historical Census Browser) – combined with an increase in farm size, meant a drop in the number of farms. This shift away from farming allowed newcomers to buy land, which would in the long term pave the way for the gayborhood.

As in most locations in the United States, the farmers who were displaced were those without enough financial resources to afford mechanization; overwhelmingly, these were farmers with small acreage, and a disproportionate number were Black (Grim, 169-70). In a 1926 article on the current state of events in Tennessee, Ernest J. Eberling writes: “Negros are leaving the farms in Tennessee to live in urban areas or are leaving the State” and that this led to an overall decline in the rural Black population in the state, while at

the same time the amount of land farmed by white people was increasing (27-8). At this point in time, farms in Tennessee were growing increasingly dependent on machinery (Eberling, 28). The trend in the area around Bucky's was mirrored across the South, where farms either closed or consolidated. The number of Black farmers in the US South dropped from 882,000 in 1920 to 55,992 in 1978 (Grim, 170-1). Manning Marable summarizes the complex set of reasons for this decline:

Most economists explain Black migrations after 1915 and again subsequently in 1940s as a result of the pull of wartime production in the factories of the North. However, the collapse of the cotton market and the epidemic of Black-owned bank failures in the autumn of 1914, combined with the curse of the boll weevil and the omnipresent fear of white lynch mobs, were also powerful factors pushing Blacks out of Dixie. The number of Black people who left the South rose from 454,000 from 1910-1920, 749,000 from 1920-1930, to 1,599,000 from 1940-1950. Most of these rural farmers and sharecroppers settled in the crowded yet bustling ghettos like Cleveland's Hough district and Chicago's Southside (34).

In addition to the factors mentioned by Marable, two shifts were critical in precipitating the drop in number of farms: widespread use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and a growing mass car culture. Both World Wars differed from earlier wars in their intensive and extensive use of chemical warfare. After the wars, these chemicals would be put to non-military uses. Industrial production of nitrogen first took place in World War I weapons manufacturing, and the process was then employed for commercial agricultural use (cf. Jundt, 30). Factories that had been producing nitrogen for bombs needed a new purpose, and that same nitrogen, in the form of ammonia, could be used as fertilizer. While production of nitrate fertilizers had started on a small scale decades earlier, it was not until the war industry needed ammonia that a large-scale system for producing this chemical was instituted (Conkin, 111). While this process started during World War I, primarily by the companies BASF and DuPont (Tokar), it was World War II that brought

about a large quantitative increase, and affected middle Tennessee more. As Thomas Lyson points out, “[b]etween 1945 and 1980, the use of synthetic fertilizers [in the US] increased by 715 percent” (20). Organophosphate compounds had been developed by the German military during World War II to be used as a chemical weapon due to their neurotoxicity. As soon as the war was over, they were being marketed as pesticides (Nash, 204-5).

Much of the work of “modernizing” agriculture during this period was driven by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and thus focused on the South (Conkin, 111). The TVA, a government-run corporation, was established during the Great Depression to build infrastructure such as roads and dams, and improve farming practices, in the Tennessee River Valley, an area that stretches across seven Southern states. This work included developing fertilizers, through the National Fertilizer Development Center, located at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. This project started selling ammonium nitrate to farmers in 1943, having first developed it for the World War II munitions industry (Culvahouse, 15; Jundt, 50).

The extensive use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides changed the agricultural landscape of Bucky’s county. The plateaus, where the soil had hitherto been too poor for any substantial agricultural production, now became prime land, but only for those who could afford the new technology. Thanks to chemical fertilizers and greenhouses, the county became “the nursery capital of the United States,” as signs around the county still proclaim.<sup>72</sup> This commercialization and modernization of agriculture in the area have

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<sup>72</sup> While not directly related to my discussion here, the gendered and racialized consequences of this increase in pesticide use are worth noting. Considering that several common pesticides were originally developed as chemical weapons, it should come as no surprise that they are toxic to the people who handle them. These toxins are often especially invasive for people who are pregnant, and poor people and people of color are overrepresented among agricultural workers in close contact with pesticides.

been key factors in the development of Bucky's. First, with the transition from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, the hollows moved further away from being used primarily for farming, and hence parcels of land were sold for residential purposes. Second, the greenhouses have provided seasonal income to some gayborhood residents, being one example of how the position of the gayborhood at the supposed margin of the capitalist economy is implicated in some community members participating in labor central to this economy.

## **Speed**

Simultaneously with the introduction of artificial chemical products in agriculture, another technological shift was taking place: the ascent of cars as the main mode of transportation in the United States. When the first automobiles were manufactured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were much too expensive for most people to afford. Starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, with the production of the first Ford Model T in 1908, cars became increasingly affordable, and between 1900 and 1910, the number of registered cars in the US grew from 8,000 to 469,000 (Gartman, 172; Kay, 142). By 1920, the number of cars in the country had grown to nine million (Kay, 143).

Between the two World Wars, and continuing at a rapid pace after World War II, the US was becoming a car culture. This included the rural South. Robin Kelley writes: “The movement off the land was accompanied by improved roads and the availability of affordable automobiles, which increased rural mobility. The number of automobiles owned and operated by Alabama farmers increased from 16,592 in 1920 to 73,634 in 1930” (37). The wide availability of cars created a system of speed and more far-ranging

travel than was commonplace before.

While experiencing a sharp downturn during the Great Depression, the automobile industry came back with a vengeance after World War II, and “passenger car registrations doubled between 1945 and 1955 from 25.8 million to 52.1 million” (McCarthy, 101). The rise in individualized motor transportation was one of the main factors for population shifts, most notably from towns and cities to suburbs. In the years following World War II, the number of people living in suburbs in the US tripled, largely thanks to the growing interstate system (Kay, 21).

Hollows such as the one where Bucky's is located were far from ideal for this early car culture. Mid-twentieth century cars, because of their construction, and in particular the manifold located underneath the car, were very sensitive to water. The road from Bucky's hollow to the main road crossed the creek twenty three times. That meant twenty-three potential sites for a breakdown, in the course of less than seven miles. It meant a slow journey, not the speed that cars were supposed to bring. If one could afford the status symbol of a car of one's own, the hollows were not the place to live, and plateaus were further constructed as a place of higher status.

Queer and lesbian land projects are in the vast majority of cases situated in “remote” locations, far from the nearest town or city. Furthermore, these nearest towns are rarely well (if at all) connected to other places via bus or train. In the case of Bucky's, the nearest Greyhound station is close to an hour's drive away. Local public transit is absent altogether. Bucky's and other queer and lesbian land projects are thus heavily car dependent. Had cars not been made affordable to a wide population, open land projects

like these, where people come and go, would not have been possible. Ironically, then, it was because people with cars could once upon a time not live in the hollows that the land became cheap, but as cars and roads have become better, it has become possible for people with less money and less well-maintained vehicles to live here.

While Bucky's is dependent on motorized vehicles for its existence, its uses of these vehicles follow a pattern somewhat different from mainstream auto culture. The hollow is too remote to make the frequent short trips that characterize US American car usage.<sup>73</sup> And the ground and the weather sometimes get in the way of transportation. A heavy storm, or even just a rain shower lasting through the night, will flood the driveway, making leaving the hollow impossible unless one planned ahead and moved the car up the road the day before, and is willing to walk through mud or water to get to it. Further complicating the role of Bucky's – and other low-income rural communities – in US car culture is the lack of funds for purchasing and maintaining vehicles. Most cars, trucks, and vans at Bucky's are quite run down, and often sit idle in the driveway waiting to be fixed.

## **The War on Drugs**

As farming was consolidated and moved from the hollows to the plateaus, and the hollows were left behind in the move toward a car culture, these little valleys became even further marginalized. Over the next few decades, farming would continue, but in a less official fashion, partly through an increase in the growing of illegal plants, notably cannabis.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the land where Bucky's now is has

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<sup>73</sup> Six round-trips per household per day, when Jane Holtz Kay wrote *Asphalt Nation* in 1997. p. 20.



changed hands quite frequently over the course of the last century, as has many other properties in the area, as commercial farming has become unviable. Today, some of the land in the hollows is still being farmed; other plots house commuters to nearby towns, are used as vacation homes, or lie unused. Another common, though not fully documented, usage is cannabis production.

Despite having been illegal for close to a century, marijuana is one of the largest crops in the state, in terms of revenue.<sup>74</sup> Up until the 1980s, the police didn't care much – the region has a strong “live and let live” morale. But with the increased intensity of the War on Drugs in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>75</sup> police in Tennessee started focusing more efforts on enforcing drug laws.<sup>76</sup> In 1983, the State instituted the Governor’s Task Force on Marijuana Eradication, to seek out and arrest marijuana cultivators.

A series of federal laws, starting with the 1970 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, allowed for asset forfeiture in drug-related criminal cases. RICO was expanded in 1978 to include drug cases (Balko, 2014, 492). The 1984 Comprehensive Crime Control Act further expanded forfeiture legislation, while the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act put restrictions on asset forfeiture, not allowing federal law to override state and local laws limiting the practice (Balko, 2014, 493; Zilney, 161;

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<sup>74</sup> Cannabis is estimated to be Tennessee's largest crop in terms of revenue, bringing in three times as much money as any other crop. Sandor Ellix Katz, *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved*. White River Junction, VT, 2006: Chelsea Green, p. 231.

<sup>75</sup> Federal funding for the “drug war” grew dramatically during this time. States Michelle Alexander: “Between 1980 and 1984, FBI antidrug funding increased from \$8 million to \$95 million. Department of Defense antidrug allocations increased from \$33 million in 1981 to \$1,042 million in 1991. During that same period, DEA antidrug spending grew from \$86 to \$1,026 million.” Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, rev. ed. New York: The New Press, 2011, p. 49. Arrests related to marijuana more than doubled in the US between 1990 to 2002. Ryan S. King and Marc Mauer, “The War on Marijuana: The Transformation of the War on Drugs in the 1990s,” in *Controlled Substances: Crime, Regulation, and Policy*, ed. Alex Krett. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2013. pp. 97-8.

<sup>76</sup> The term “war on drugs” was first used in 1971, in reference to a set of policies implemented by Richard Nixon, including the 1970 Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. For more on this early history, cf. Chapter 2 of Alyson Martin and Nushin Rashidian, *A New Leaf: The End of Cannabis Prohibition*, New York: The New Press, 2014.

Rasmussen and Benson, 132, 134-5, see also Alexander, 78-80). Since, under this set of laws, the police gets a share of the forfeited property, drug busts became profitable and hence more common (Katz, 2006, 236; Balko, 2014, 493). Between 1985 and 1991, “total federal forfeiture revenues increased by 1,500 percent” (Balko, 2014, 493). Property forfeiture has also become an important source of revenue for many municipalities across the United States (Balko, 2014, 492).<sup>77</sup>

Several cannabis growers were forced to either sell or lease out their land, cheaply, hence making land in the region available for rent or purchase at affordable rates. At least two of the homes in the gayborhood, including Bucky’s, are former cannabis farms. In the early 1990s, the former owner of Bucky’s hollow was discovered by the police to be growing cannabis. He was able to avoid a prison sentence for his law-breaking, through collecting over fifty signatures attesting to his good moral character, and promising to leave the state of Tennessee and never come back. It was thus that he decided to rent out his land to Bucky’s. While being able to claim status as an upstanding citizen, and hence not deserving of a prison sentence, is not explicitly a racial privilege, the whiteness of the previous owner and his community is likely to have helped him avoid prison time. Drug offenses are committed in about equal proportions across ethnic and racial groups – if anything, white people are more likely than others to use drugs – yet imprisonment rates vary dramatically, with Black men being much more likely than other groups to go to prison for drugs (cf. Alexander, 98).

These days, cannabis growing has taken a backseat to methamphetamine production in the police’s concerns. Around the US, methamphetamine production is most

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<sup>77</sup> In rare cases, including a thousand-acre plot not far from Bucky’s, land forfeited in drug cases has been turned into state parks. Gonzalez, 5.

prominent in impoverished rural areas, so it is no surprise that the region around the gayborhood has seen a wave of new production facilities. While asset forfeiture can take place in methamphetamine cases, too, I have not heard of any such forfeitures in the area around Bucky's. Gayborhood residents seem happy about the police's shift in priorities: most people see cannabis as a fairly harmless substance, where police interference is unnecessary, but consider methamphetamine harmful enough to individuals and the community that some control is beneficial. Thus, while people at Bucky's in general hold a critical view of the police, there is some allowance for assuming that, at times, the police is working in the best interest of the people in the county. I have not heard expressed any desire or opinion that the police *should* get more involved in eradicating production of certain drugs, such as methamphetamine, but rather an acceptance of the fact that they are doing so, and an analysis that this could have positive effects. The difference in opinion about police involvement in cannabis and methamphetamine cases points to the ways in which Bucky's holds relative privilege as a white community, where many have the class and regional (i.e. "yankee," as I discussed in the Prelude) privilege to assume that police will treat them okay as long as they follow the law, and the ways in which this privilege for many limits a more fully structural analysis of police intervention.

Drug policy and consumption, and cannabis in particular, has a role in queer land beyond Bucky's. On the West Coast, a small but important actor in the queer land movement is Fancyland, located in Humboldt County in northern California. Humboldt County has a reputation as the prime location for cannabis production in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Sacha, the founder and owner of Fancyland, speculates that the price of, and

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<sup>78</sup> As with Tennessee, because of the largely illegal nature of cannabis production, there are no reliable statistics on the extent of the production. An article from 1990 estimates that 37 percent of all cannabis growing in California takes place in Humboldt, at a value of one billion dollars a year. The same article

access to, land in the area would be substantially affected by further decriminalization and legalization of cannabis. She states that growers in the region have been among the staunchest opponents of legalizing the substance, since prices would significantly drop (see also Brady, 10-12). Sacha's analysis is corroborated by a grower in Oregon, where medical marijuana is legal: while he is a licensed grower and sells his crops on the above-ground market in Oregon, he has offers to sell for three times the price to Texas, where the substance is not legal.<sup>79</sup>

Many participants in queer land projects support the legalization of cannabis, and some see it as a potential income-generating opportunity for land projects. In the summer of 2012, I interviewed Sarick, a former Bucky's resident now located on the West Coast, where he has been living at Black Butte Center for Railroad Culture, another land project. Black Butte is not a queer land – in fact, Sarick told me that he found the straight-dominance of the land project difficult, and wanted to make it a more queer-friendly space. Still, because many of the same people travel to Black Butte as travel to Bucky's and other queer lands, it can be considered part of the queer back-to-the-land circuit. Sarick, who at the time of our interview was studying herbalism, and was planning on going on to get trained in bioremediation<sup>80</sup>, has spent a lot of time thinking about ways to make land projects financially sustainable. He proposes legal marijuana growing as a viable business venture for queer land projects. It is a crop that has already been proven

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asserts that cannabis is the largest cash crop in California. Joseph Leeper, "Humboldt County: Its Role in the Emerald Triangle." *The California Geographer*, 1990, vol 30, p. 96, 102.

<sup>79</sup> Personal conversation, summer 2012.

<sup>80</sup> "In the emerging field of bioremediation, biological processes of nutrient cycling, involving bacteria and fungi, are encouraged in various ways, in order to decompose contaminants and clean up contaminated soils and waters." Sandor Ellix Katz, *The Art of Fermentation* (2012), p. 396.

suitable for growing in several of the regions where queer lands are prominent – Oregon, middle Tennessee, and northern California – and there is a large market.

The moments from history described above show that the existence of the gayborhood has been made possible through a process of commercialization and legislation that goes back much further than the first explicitly queer land projects in the region. This history is still present in the gayborhood, even if it often goes unaddressed. The next section will look at how these historical structures are upheld today.

### ***Upholding historical structures***

#### **Maintaining whiteness: viscosity and silence**

At the current moment, all permanent residents at Bucky's are white and US-born. Among the visitors, there are some people of color, but I have heard from several people of color who have visited Bucky's that assumptions have been made that they are white. The notion of this as a white space is deep-rooted, and race and racism have rarely been prominent topics of conversation at Bucky's or in the gayborhood, as I discussed in detail in the prelude. Recently, however, this has started to change. After several years of work by small clusters of people – calling out racist acts and comments, carving out space for people of color at gatherings and in day-to-day life – and after many frustrated sighs and moments of giving up, the entrenched racism and history of settler colonialism that structures Bucky's are starting to be addressed in a more systemic fashion. During a visit in December of 2013, after my official fieldwork was completed, I partook in a meeting of an anti-oppression reading group at Bucky's, which had been meeting bi-weekly since

earlier in the fall.<sup>81</sup> These regular formal discussions are spilling over into the informal life of the community, and conversations about white supremacy and unacknowledged racism abounded at Bucky's that winter. Further conversations and actions – most notably the creation of a year-round Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) autonomous zone at Bucky's – have taken place since I concluded my fieldwork.<sup>82</sup> I discuss these changes briefly in the postscript to the dissertation. In light of these new conversations at Bucky's, this chapter takes on a new importance. Among the questions frequently raised in conversations is “why are things this way?” The reading group is one attempt to answer this question. This chapter is another part.

In an article published in *Journal of Rural Studies* earlier this year, Panelli et.al. write that “the English countryside...denies the presence of ethnic minorities” building on “a stereotyped image of ethnicised Others as entirely urban” (356). A similar tendency can be found in the United States. bell hooks argues that, in the US academy, the experience of Black people is presented as urban, even though “before the 1900s ninety percent of all black people lived in the agrarian South” (41). Related to the notion of the rural as a white space is the image of farmers as white. In the US, both historically and in the present moment, much farm labor has been performed by people of color: enslaved and sharecropping Black people, and Latino migrant laborers. This labor has often been invisibilized, however, and images of “farmers” are of white families who own and work their own land.

While theories about the white image of the rural are helpful in understanding representation, they do not sufficiently engage with what bodies actually live in rural

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<sup>81</sup> At the end of 2014, the group was still in existence.

<sup>82</sup> The creation of the autonomous zone has involved long-term visits by people of color, but none of the people involved in the project were, as of late 2014, living at Bucky's permanently.

areas. The countryside is much more white-dominated than are cities in the US, and this is even more the case for queer land projects. Rural queer groups are not only *seen* as white, they *are* predominantly white. A useful framework for understanding this is Arun Saldanha's concept of viscosity. In physics, viscosity is a measure of “a fluid’s resistance to flow” (*The Physics Hypertextbook*). For example, molasses have a higher viscosity than water. Arun Saldanha develops the idea of viscosity as a property of human communities in *Psychedelic White*, his ethnography of the trance dance scene in Goa, India, to explain the workings of whiteness, “to make sense of racism when it's not supposed to be there” (5). Saldanha uses viscosity to explain “two dimensions of a collective of bodies: its sticking together, and its relative impermeability” (5). He writes:

The racial situation that the visual economy of Goa’s rave tourism leads to is not a binary based on negativity and opposition (white against brown), but a positive process of *purification*, a filtering out of contaminant bodies that gradually results in white viscosity. Purification is something internal, and should be seen less as a negation of contamination than as the affirmation of homogeneity and momentum (129).

Though in many ways different from Goa, the gayborhood is another location of racial exclusion that is “not supposed to be there.” I find viscosity a useful concept for two reasons: its allowance for a messy, incomplete whiteness, and its attention to materiality.

Saldanha proposes that communities are viscous. Bodies stick together, with little – though certainly some – room for infiltration. Like the participants in the Goa trance scene that Saldanha studies, the bodies at Bucky's and Hickory Knoll are mostly white, and like the trance dancers, they are escaping one respectable kind of whiteness, only to reinforce another, less respectable, kind (Saldanha, 15). The whiteness of the queer hollers in Tennessee is not total, but as Saldanha points out, whiteness does not need to be total in order to be viscous. Neither do bodies have to be phenotypically white in order to

be part of the viscosity of whiteness; in Saldanha's theory, "race is a shifting amalgamation" not only of genes and skin but also "artifacts, landscapes, music, money, language, and states of mind" (9). The white viscosity is thus reinforced through the choice of bands for Bucky's yearly music festival, the dialects spoken, the clothes worn, the price of a Greyhound ticket to Tennessee. Thus, a black body wearing a faux Native American headdress, as happened at the music festival one year, can be part of the tendencies of whiteness to appropriate other cultures in the queer hollows/hollers, and so be part of the thickening of white hegemony, through the foreclosure of telling of alternative narratives.

At times, the presence of people of color in the gayborhood is employed to reinforce white supremacist tendencies. During one of my visits to Bucky's, there was an ongoing conversation about the "ethnically themed" (for example, "Hawaiian") parties that happen every so often at Hickory Knoll. The frustration was exacerbated by the fact that the theme of a upcoming party had already been criticized a few years ago, and at the time the theme of the party had been changed. Why was the same theme being brought up again? Were the institutional memory and commitment to anti-racist practices really that weak? I was told that in some of the discussions around such events, a person of color would be turned to for affirmation: if one person of color found the themed party okay, this would be used as justification that the event was not racist.

Saldanha's analysis is useful here for several reasons. First, it explains how communities can maintain their whiteness even in the presence of a small number of non-white bodies. Second, it acknowledges that whiteness is real, without essentializing racial differences. Finally, by defining race as sticky, he points to the difficulty of overcoming



segregation, no matter how well-intentioned people might be. Race, in Saldanha's theory, functions on the level of the community and of relations, rather than the individual. When attempts are made at addressing white supremacy and racist structures within the gayborhood, they come up against a viscous culture of whiteness, one that is prone to either squash or usurp attempts at change, as we will see in the final section of this chapter.

### **Denial of safe space**

The most common way for people to visit Bucky's is through attending one of the large events that take place on the land, most prominently the yearly music festival. While there is a steady trickle of visitors throughout the year, and at most points somewhere between three and ten non-residents can be found staying at Bucky's, during the music festival the number swells to around five hundred.

Most festival-attendees either arrive with a group of friends, or come to the festival in order to reconnect with friends and acquaintances from other parts of the country. The event thus has a somewhat cliquish or insular quality, as nurturing already-existing relationships is prioritized over forming new ones. Another division that takes place are the different campgrounds. For the past several years, there have been five main places where people stay during the festival: for visitors, there are three campgrounds, one "loud," one "medium," and one sober; for organizers, there is camping space at the back end of the hollow; residents stay in their houses or trailers. This set-up is meant to give everyone as much comfort as possible, while also having the space to engage in whatever activities they want. Respecting the borders of the varying spaces tends to be one of the primary things that need to be negotiated during festival meetings: there are

reminders to not consume alcohol or be visibly inebriated in the sober spaces, and to stay out of residents' homes unless invited.

The music festival, like most activities at Bucky's, is predominantly white; my estimate is that over ninety percent of festival-attendees are white. Over the years, there have been numerous discussions about this, usually initiated by the people of color who do attend. A couple of years back, a proposal was made to the festival organizers: designate people-of-color camping space. This would give people who feel isolated in a sea of whiteness a space to retreat and connect with one another. The idea of a POC-only campground was welcomed by some of the organizers. Many of the residents and other people involved in the organizing of the music festival and other events at Bucky's are concerned with the homogeneity of the people who attend, and whether the space feels welcoming to all queers. Yet getting a people-of-color only space has taken years. It was not until 2013 that a steady queer people-of-color (QPOC) space was established. I was not at the 2013 festival, and my formal fieldwork had already ended, but from informal conversations I have had with people in the gayborhood, the space seems to have been appreciated and utilized. It was also, however, criticized by white festival attendees, who did not understand the need for this space, and saw it as taking space away from them.

### ***Steps forward***

While the histories of exclusion and whiteness are deeply engrained in the queer land movement, as evidenced by section above, there are also significant efforts to change these exclusionary practices and culture. In the last section of this chapter, I look at how three land projects – Bucky's, Fancyland, and Sojourners Land – have approached anti-racist work.

### **Starting conversations: Bucky's**

The Eggplant Faerie Players do engage in a conversation about the politico-economic-historical location of Bucky's and the gayborhood. “Welcome to Homo Hollow” includes a brief history lesson, which mentions lynchings, the Trail of Tears, harassment of Black people in the county. In a recent version of the show, a new section has been included: MaxZine, dressed in a black-and-white striped mock prisoner suit, makes a Public Service Announcement about the prison-industrial complex, especially the Corrections Corporation of America, which is headquartered in Nashville, just over an hour’s drive from the gayborhood.

These conversations fall short, however. They become acknowledgments, not a deeper work of engaging in an ongoing dialogue leading to change-work. The skits in the performance become the equivalent of the letter Chi Mei and I wrote in response to the “joke” in chapter one: acknowledgment as a form of postponing or moving responsibility. At one point in the most recent iteration of “Welcome to Homo Hollow” that I have watched, one of the guest performers, Annie Danger, says that Bucky's is a place where you can take off “almost all your armor. But I'll tell ya, it's pretty white there.” This utterance acknowledges the whiteness of Bucky's and the gayborhood, but it is not followed by any further discussion. Unintentionally, it becomes a warning: know that this is a really white place – if that is a problem for you, you might not want to come here. This warning can serve a purpose: in recent discussions about QTPOC space at Bucky's, it has been pointed out that Bucky's is yet far from a space safe from racism, and that this must be acknowledged. However, without actions to follow them up, warnings such as that presented in “Welcome to Homo Hollow” simply deter people from coming here.

### **Providing guidelines: Fancyland**

Fancyland, the queer land project in northern California which I mentioned in the section about the War on Drugs, has since its beginnings striven to be an anti-oppressive space. Sacha, the founder and owner of Fancyland, considers anti-oppression work key to her role as facilitator of the space. Fancyland, founded in 2001, is one of the more recent queer land projects, and has therefore has the possibility to reflection the hurdles that other land projects had encountered, and preemptively address these issues. One of the main issues that Sacha wanted to address is the white dominance of many queer land projects. The relatively small size, both in numbers of people (usually between one and three full-time residents) and area (12 acres), might also help in keeping Fancyland more focused on its mission. Fancyland has a two-pronged approach to anti-racist work: support for queer and trans people of color to stay at the land, and self-education for white people.

One of the ways that Fancyland addresses anti-oppression issues is by providing guidelines for visitors, presented in a binder together with a collection of articles on anti-racism and white supremacy. The binder also contains documents outlining the financial arrangements of Fancyland (including who owns the land, how high the property taxes are, and how much residents are expected to contribute), and the decision-making structure of the land project. When I visited Fancyland, this binder was among the things that Sacha showed me upon my arrival. It included articles on cultural appropriation and racism, as well as expectations for anti-racism at Fancyland. There was also a study group for Fancyland residents (at the time, Sacha and one other person was living on the land) about racism and white privilege.

Anti-racism at Fancyland is considered a work in progress, and Sacha acknowledges that Fancyland still has a long way to go to address issues of racism and white privilege. Establishing policies and guidelines and providing visitors with information are not the same as creating structural change; indeed, they can become what Sara Ahmed refers to as “nonperformative speech acts” where making a statement, without acting on it, comes to stand in for action (2006). At Fancyland, while there was not a clear sense of how to address structural racism and settler colonialism, there was an understanding that these systems do need to be dismantled; the provision of information and guidelines was seen as a first step, not an end point.

Fancyland is the only queer land project I know of that provides material support for individuals to come to the land, through its artists' residency program. This program provides room and board for artists to spend time at Fancyland to work on their own projects, and a stipend of \$50 a week. At the time of my research, in 2011, about \$600 were available in stipends. In recruiting applicants and deciding on who to award residencies to, Sacha tries to broaden who has access to queer land, for example through reaching out to queer people of color. Yet Fancyland remains a predominantly white space.

As Sacha points out, the reasons for the whiteness of queer land projects lies not only in the projects themselves, but also in the areas where they are located. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the county where Bucky's is located has gone through a process of whitening over the course of the past two centuries. Fancyland, too, is located in a predominantly white region. Sacha recalls that non-white visitors to Fancyland have felt unsafe on the drive to the land, feeling out of place in this rural white landscape.

Of the land projects that I visited in the course of my research, Fancyland provided one of the most hopeful model for addressing racism in the queer land movement, as it took a proactive stand, rather than waiting for moments of crisis to arise. Still, the whiteness of the region – in this case, Humboldt County – as well as the idea of queer land as white space, made the efforts at creating an anti-racist land project extremely difficult.

### **Rethinking queer and women's land: Sojourners Land Movement**

Over and over again, during my research trips to Bucky's, I heard the name Valencia mentioned. Valencia was the first woman to live at Hickory Knoll, and during that time, she was a frequent visitor to Bucky's. By the time I started my research, she had already moved out of the gayborhood, so it was not until after completing my official fieldwork that I had a chance to meet her. Valencia's current activities are thus not part of the scope of this dissertation's main research, but they are worth mentioning, as they provide exciting insights in how the queer land movement might move forward.

Valencia's main project is called Sojourners Land Movement. This project organizes land-based gatherings. As of yet, Sojourners does not have a permanent land of its own. While this would be a desirable long-term goal, Valencia does not see it as a strategic priority at the moment. As projects like Bucky's show us, gaining access to land is a costly and energy-consuming process. For a small movement like Sojourners, the process of acquiring land would take away valuable resources from the work of organizing gatherings and maintaining community.

Sojourners centers women of color, but is open to all people supportive of its goals. This differentiates Sojourners from other women's and queer land projects, which

tend to be separatist. At Sojourners, it is one's political affinities, not identity, that are central to participating. While much more diverse than Bucky's, Valencia did tell me that, because of the dominance of white people, and often white men, in the queer land movement, at some of Sojourners' gatherings, white people tend to take up more space than she would want. She is appreciative of the involvement of these allies, but would like a different division of space and power.

It is telling that among the new wave of queer and women's land projects, it is the one focused explicitly on people of color that does not have a steady land base. This reflects the history of women's and queer lands: projects focused on people of color have tended to have an even harder time than white-dominated projects finding and keeping land. There has been talk among some of the residents of Bucky's that the property is big enough that it could be divided into two land projects. More specifically, the idea of gifting part of the land for a queer-of-color land project has been proposed. The parcel of land to be gifted, however, would be at the back of the property. Because of the topography of the hollow, the only way to get to the back of the land is through the front: a hollow is a narrow passage with steep hillsides on both sides, and at the end of this particular hollow is a waterfall.<sup>83</sup>

There is logic behind gifting a parcel farther back on the property: the front-most area is where all the current houses are, and the areas further back are still open for construction of new living quarters. The implications of this gifting idea are telling, however: once again, people of color would be marginalized within the queer land

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<sup>83</sup> This is one of the significant changes that has taken place since I concluded my fieldwork, and wrote this chapter: the parcel that was eventually granted is more centrally located than what was originally proposed, though it is still not connected to the water or electricity system of Bucky's. I will address this land transfer further in the postscript.

movement, this time by being asked to live in the shadow of the predominantly white community.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have presented an alternate history of Bucky's and the gayborhood than the conventional narrative presented in chapter one. Rather than tracing Bucky's roots to the 1993 March on Washington, I have centered local events – though ones taking place within a global economy – to explain how this land became available for its current residents, and hence how the creation of the gayborhood was made possible. These two histories, one based in the land and the other based in migration, are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement each other. The history I have presented in this chapter does, however, challenge the foundational metronormativity of conventional LGBT creation myths; here, an event taking place in a major city is not the central event in the creation of queer community, but rather one of many events that formed this particular community. The specificity of life in the region is, I argue, just as important for the existence of the gayborhood.

Taking into consideration both the March on Washington creation myth and the history of land tenure presented in this chapter helps us understand the current structures of the gayborhood and the way that groups of people are included or excluded. While the March was a starter culture – an event that initiated the creation of the gayborhood – a long history of settler colonialism and racialized and classed land tenure served as the fertile conditions for the gayborhood growing and thriving. We see a history of expulsion of Native people, people of color, and poor people from economically desirable land in the area, and in some cases an expulsion from the area altogether. These expulsions



opened up land for lease or purchase. Gayborhood residents did not simply move onto leftover land, however, but rather have utilized a rhetoric positioning themselves as poor and in some instances pseudo-Native, in order to claim a belonging and a right to this land.

This chapter also presented the work being done at queer land projects to address the exclusionary practices in place on the land. At Bucky's, as well as at other land projects, we see attempts at challenging the racist, classist, and settler-colonialist structures that exclude some individuals and populations from the land. This work is still limited, and its effects are not (yet) systemic, but there is a will to address difficult issues, and this will has grown stronger over the last few years. Scholarly work engaging with queer land, such as this dissertation, can potentially have a role to play in furthering this work, both at current land projects and among those who are looking at starting new lands.

### **Chapter 3: The Specter of Polygamy<sup>84</sup> – Marriage, deviant sexuality, and access to land**

*My old friend Bill Dobbs used to say, “Real estate determines culture.”*  
 – Sandor Ellix Katz, 2006, p. 79

In January of 2015, five months before the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriages across the United States, Reverend Neil Patrick Carrick filed a lawsuit against the state of Michigan, claiming that laws prohibiting same-sex as well as polygamous marriages violated his religious freedom to perform marriage ceremonies according to his faith (Brand-Williams). A year after the lawsuit was filed, the court has yet to come to a decision. In August of the same year, following the Supreme Court's same-sex marriage decision, Nathan Collier of Montana filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court in Billings, to have Montana's anti-bigamy law overturned so that he can legally marry his second wife, Christine Collier. Collier's suit cites SCOTUS's same-sex marriage decision, affirming the fear of many opponents of same-sex marriage: that it will lead to polygamy (Volz). These connections between polygamy and same-sex marriage are intriguing, and deserve further attention; however, there is a crucial difference in the reasoning behind the arguments for the legalization of each of these two kinds of marriage. While the foremost argument used in the campaign to legalize same-sex marriage was for inclusion into state-based civil society, the most commonly used argument for the legalization of polygamy is one of privacy – of less state interference, not more.

In the United States, the primary form of polygamy has, since the mid-nineteenth century, been plural marriage, as practiced by members of the Church of Latter-Day

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<sup>84</sup> Thank you to Bryce Renninger for this phrase. Later, I found the same phrase used by Christine Talbot in *A Foreign Kingdom*.

Saints and various off-shoots of the official Church. In the ongoing struggle around plural marriage, the tension between claims to privacy from state interference and desire for state protection and inclusion has been ever-present. This tension grows out of a nexus of settler-colonialism, sexual desires, family bonds, economic structures, and religious beliefs. In mainstream media reports on the issue, however, sexuality and religion are the only two vectors that receive significant attention. This could be flippantly explained with the platitude that “sex sells.” While certainly part of the explanation, I believe that there is more to the incessant focus on multiple wives in the attention given to Mormon family structure: salaciousness hides capitalist destruction. As Christine Talbot convincingly argues in *A Foreign Kingdom*, plural marriage was one component of a larger economic and societal structure among nineteenth-century Mormons; she describes Mormonism as “a participatory utopian faith” (52). By focusing on sex and marriage, rather than on communal ownership and welfare-provisions, the debate is moved away from the challenge that de-privatized ownership poses to the US American nation-state.

The case of the Church of Latter-Day Saints is part of a longer history of religious dissidents or heretics who have challenged hegemonic relationship structures and also practiced communal forms of resource distribution. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici shows how such heretical groups were persecuted in Medieval Europe, as part of the development of a capitalism based on the privatization of land. Reading the opposition to Mormon plural marriage through Federici's lens, rather than strictly as a matter of sexual and family morals, allows us to further understand the role that the regulation of sex and marriage have had in the development of the United States as a settler-colonial state based on racialized capitalism. The end of plural marriage within the

official LDS Church must be understood in relation to the dismantling of communal property structures within the Church. It must also be understood in relation to the federal government's enclosing and privatizing of Native lands, which was carried out partly through forcibly restructuring Native kinship networks into nuclear family units.

In the two previous chapters, I argued that the history (including the present) of queer land must be understood as one of materiality and capitalist dispossession, and that a historical narrative that takes gay rights and LGBTQ social movements as its focal points misses the ways in which racialized land tenure, settler colonialism, and capitalist violence structure queer land projects. This does not mean that sexuality is not a key component of queer land, but rather that we need to re-read the place and function of sexuality. The case of Mormon plural marriage is a productive place for analyzing how relationships and sexuality affect access to land, and can illuminate the complexities of queer claims to land tenure. In this chapter, I focus on the nineteenth century, when the official LDS Church decided to discontinue the practice of plural marriage in order to gain statehood for Utah. I read nineteenth-century Utah not as an isolated event from the past, but as part of an ongoing history that, while given plenty of attention, can still benefit from further re-readings.

Making sense of how marriage and other means of disciplining sexual and family relations are tools for structuring property relations requires stepping back and taking a historical perspective. I point to 19th-century Mormons because it is a moment when this is visible, but they are not unique. By including a chapter on the process of gaining statehood for Utah in this dissertation, I also aim to locate Bucky's within a larger history of access to land in the United States. Visiting multiple queer and women's lands in

different regions of the country as part of my dissertation research, one theme that came up at every single location was residents' worry about losing their land, and at some location actual histories of dispossession. These worries were frequently related to the precariousness members felt due to non-normative sexuality, gender, or relationships. By considering plural marriage, I provide further analysis of the ways in which sexuality is deployed in order to further consolidate land ownership among a white settler elite.

I started my research not long after Bucky's had bought the 220 acres down in the hollow, having previously rented it, and among at least some of the residents, there was a sense of relief, of "finally." The thirty-year mortgage<sup>85</sup> weighs heavily on a community usually strapped for cash, yet it seemed preferable to paying rent, even though the monthly amount of money that residents needed to come up with had now doubled. This was their land now, in the eyes of the law. Nobody could deny them the right to be here; there was no longer a landlord who could decide to sell the land to someone else.

There is no way of knowing if the fear of the land getting sold to someone else was rational or not, but there was an interested buyer: the church up the road. According to the people I spoke to at Bucky's, the church wanted the queers out of the area. Maybe this was an accurate assessment, maybe not.<sup>86</sup> In either case, the fear had real consequences, and became one factor for further privatizing life. In the face of this fear, ownership becomes a form of defense, a way of asserting one's own security: "*we own*

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<sup>85</sup> As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the mortgage is not an official bank mortgage, but rather a collection of loans from several friends; however, residents usually refer to it as a mortgage, so I, too, am using that terminology.

<sup>86</sup> It is not a realistic option for me to include the church in my research, in order to ask church representatives directly. Bucky's residents are concerned about visitors interacting with the church, and the long-term consequences this might have for them; thus, doing fieldwork or interviews at the church could jeopardize my work at Bucky's. Further, church representatives would most likely read me as affiliated with Bucky's, even without me saying so, which could influence which information they would be willing to share with me.

this land, *you* can't take it.” But it is a precarious defense, because it is asking the government to protect the group, which the government might not actually be very invested in doing. It means buying into a state-sanctioned property regime, in order to get and maintain protection.

My argument in this chapter is that in both the cases of the Mormon struggle for statehood for Utah and in Bucky's purchase of its land, we see an ongoing compromise where in order to gain autonomy, sexually deviant communities – precariously poised on the edges of the nation – choose or are forced into belonging within the nation-state: they seek protection from the government through the government itself. Statehood was important to the early Mormons for reasons similar to why landownership has been important to the residents at Bucky's: it provided security and, paradoxically, stronger incorporation into the legal structure comes with an increasing degree of autonomy. Being a state as opposed to a territory, which was the status of Utah at the time, would mean that the federal government had less say in Utah's affairs, as the Constitution grants greater rights and powers to states than to territories (Bowman, 115; Roberts, online version, np).

In claiming this sense of belonging to the nation that enables control over land, be it 200 acres or the state of Utah, the Mormons and Bucky's alike utilize their privilege as predominantly white: while not adhering to all the rules of the nation-state, they are populations that could be convinced to follow these rules, and that often strategically do follow some of them. These groups have agreed to partially fit into the norms of white land-owning families. We can see the value that white heteronormativity has in accessing land in the recent occupation of the Malheur national wildlife refuge in Oregon. Rather than violently breaking up the occupation, the government politely asked the occupiers –

all white, almost all men, consistently heteronormative-presenting – to leave, and when they refused, waited weeks before arresting anyone. These occupiers, although breaking the rules set up by the government, were still seen as members of the nation-state, who might be overstepping a boundary, but whose lives and ideas are to be respected. Their claims are seen as, if not altogether legitimate, at least worthy of consideration.

In all the cases discussed in this chapter, groups with non-normative sexual and family practices are constructed as simultaneously inside and outside the nation-state. Being categorized as native or foreign is to be labeled an Other outside of settler-colonialist subjectivity, and these categorizations are used to justify withholding access to land. While queer land and polygamist Mormon groupings alike have refused to adjust to hetero- (or homo-)normative monogamous marriage, they have also argued for their own inclusion within the nation-state and capitalist property regimes, and used this system to gain more secure access to land. This dual relation to the capitalist state – as both protector and alienating force – will be further explore in the concluding chapter, when I look at queer land's relation to commons and enclosures.

Mark Rifkin argues in *When Did Indians Become Straight?* that “questions of kinship, residency, and land tenure lie at the unspoken center of the heteronorm, which itself can be understood as always-already bound up in racializing and imperial projects” (2011, 6). This chapter focuses closer attention on a theme that runs through the whole dissertation: queer land's location within the matrix of settler colonialism. Building on the work of Mark Rifkin and Scott Morgensen, I argue that indigenization and racialization have been conflated with non-heteronormativity, and this assemblage has been used to

both claim and deny access to land. In this meditation, I take seriously Scott Morgensen's imperative that "Native and queer studies must regard settler colonialism as a key condition of modern sexuality on stolen land, and use this analysis to explain the power of settler colonialism among Native and non-Native people" (2011, 2).

### ***Turning the Ground into Property***

*"As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common."*

– John Locke, chapter 5, section 31

*"What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions. To isolate it and form a market out of it was perhaps the weirdest of all undertakings of our ancestors."*

– Karl Polanyi, p 178

Underlying the conundrum of who has been allowed or encouraged to own land is a more fundamental question: how did land come to be something that could be owned in the first place? Land is a material substance, but it is also socially constructed: it is assigned meanings, and we see it through lenses that shape our notions of what land is. A lens for understanding land that has predominated in Western Modernity is the notion that land is an object, and that as such it is owned by a human being or another human-constructed entity, such as a company or family. This view of land as an object that can be owned may be hegemonic within Western Modernity, but it is historically, culturally, and geographically specific.<sup>87</sup> The concept of land as an object that can be owned does not exist in all societies (Dekker, 14), and the model of ownership that US law demands is not

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<sup>87</sup> An overview of forms of land tenure is beyond the scope of this project. For more on this topic, cf. Peter Boomgaard, 2011, "Land Rights and the Environment in the Indonesian Archipelago, 800-1950," in *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 54, pp. 478-496; Lotsmart Fonjong, Irene Sama-Lang, and Fombe Lawrence Fon, 2010, "An Assessment of the Evolution of Land Tenure System in Cameroon and Its Effects on Women's Land Rights and Food Security, in *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 9, pp. 154-169.



the only possible one.<sup>88</sup> For example, Dee Brown, in the canonical text *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, describes the very first deeding of North American land to European settlers as follows:

In 1625 some colonists asked [Pemaquid leader] Samoset to give them 12,000 additional acres of Pemaquid land. Samoset knew that land came from the Great Spirit, was as endless as the sky, and belonged to no man. To humor these strangers in their strange ways, however, he went through a ceremony of transferring the land and made his mark on a paper for them. It was the first deed of Indian land to English colonists (48).

In this version, land as property is a game, a strange custom to be humored, yet it has grown into something much more permanent. The Pemaquids, just like other Native groups with forms of land tenure that did or do not match the models brought by European settlers, now have to negotiate within the legal structure upheld by the United States, a legal structure where private ownership is central.

Prominent Enlightenment philosopher John Locke initially formulated his theory of land as property to be owned in 1698. Locke argued that whatever is found in “nature” and is transformed by humans becomes the property of those humans. Land in itself has no value within this framework; value is created through the labor of people, and without this labor, land is waste. Thom Kuehls argues that Locke's notion that “land that is left wholly to nature” is waste has two consequences: by using land, humans make it into property; further, this is the ethical approach to land (xii). We must improve upon the land, lest it stays in a state of waste. Kuehls connects Locke's theory of making land into property to the notion of sovereignty: a people that does not utilize land the way Locke envisioned, as was the case with many of the peoples living in the Americas at the time of the arrival of European settlers, could not claim sovereignty over territory (xii). Indeed,

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<sup>88</sup> In the final chapter, on commons and enclosures, I will discuss other models, specifically anarchist and commons-based ideas.

the *Johnson vs. McIntosh* decision, which stated that the Cherokees had a right to occupancy but not ownership of the land, made its argument on the basis of the Cherokees supposedly not properly working and improving upon the land (Andrea Smith, 358-360).

Not adhering to an ideology of land as property does not necessarily mean not making claims to land; there are a wide range of human approaches to land tenure that do not involve ownership. In the case of the land upon which Bucky's is located, at the time of the arrival of European settlers in the eighteenth century, the land was a hunting ground shared among multiple Native groups (State of Tennessee, 381; Hale, 3). The hunting grounds of Middle Tennessee were largely unpopulated prior to white settlement, and were contested ground between Cherokees, Chickasaw, Shawnee, and Creek groupings, though the Cherokees were the main users. (Faulkner, 11). Though unpopulated, the land was heavily used; according to Wilma Dunaway, the area was over-hunted to the point that a move to a more agricultural economy became necessary (1997, 156).

Even when land is seen as property, this is not necessarily a static condition. Walter Johnson, in his history of capitalist relations in the cotton-growing antebellum South, writes that land and enslaved people as "property was actualized in daily agricultural and disciplinary practices: in the gestures of clearing, planting, picking, packing, shipping, watching, beating, starving, stealing, raping, and hunting" (228). The physical borders of Bucky's are also amorphous. Is the waterfall at the back of the hollow part of the land? What about the hillsides, the parts that are owned but intentionally left unutilized by humans? One day when clearing a path to a new campground at the back of the land, we come across barbed wire. When is it from? When was there a boundary here?

When did this boundary become irrelevant? Any land as property is upheld through actions and practices. At Bucky's, the notion of how far the community's land stretches is based not on the legal boundaries of the property as stipulated by the deed – most people on the land are not aware of where these boundaries are – but rather is based on where labor takes place: where there are gardens, where trees are cut down, where the water is drawn from. The sense of how large Bucky's is varies based on one's tasks or time of year; if one is finding firewood on the hillsides in the winter, the property seems bigger than if one is focused on the summer gardens. The boundaries can also be stretched when need be: when at one Winter Solstice, members of the Bucky's community want to go skinny-dipping in a nearby water-filled cave entrance, technically outside of Bucky's property, they decide that if the residents of this neighboring property ask, they will tell them that this is actually on Bucky's land. The cave is part of how the Bucky's community relates to this land, and claiming it for a ritual does not strike anyone as out of bounds.

And, not too long ago, neither had land universally been something to possess in the places where the white settlers were coming from. Struggles around the enclosing the commons were still going on in Europe; land as an object had not yet been fully established there either (cf. Federici). I will discuss this history of the enclosing of the commons in further details in the concluding chapter.

Yet, even with these dents, history keeps being read as one of naturalized ownership. Consider this quote from 1830s Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, in relation to the status of the Cherokees: “Indian nations had always been considered as distinct...as the undisputed possessors of the soil, from time immemorial” (cited in Deloria and Lytle, 17). Perhaps Chief Justice Marshall is right; from his perspective, there

is no memory before or outside of a regime of ownership. But from the perspectives of the Native people living in the region, the land was not something to “possess”; as mentioned earlier, the land was collectively used by several groups, not owned by one individual or nation. In the region around Bucky's, communal land ownership continued among the Cherokees after European settlement; in the Cherokee Constitution of 1827, all land was owned by the nation, rather than by individuals (Denson, 23). Writes Andrew Denson: “Individuals and families had the right to use and cultivate available land, but ownership was in common, with the National Council alone having the authority to sell” (23). According to Denson, this law had a dual purpose: it maintained the notion of “land as a shared resource,” and also prevented land from being sold to white settlers (23).

In capitalist nation-states, property is intimately connected to the state. Writes Grace Hong: “The concept of property defines the subject and also constructs the subject's relationship to the state – the state is narrativized as guaranteeing the citizen's right to property” (Hong, 11). We see this in the claims around both same-sex and plural marriage, even though one is about a closer relationship with the state and the other about more distance: in both cases, subjects are asking the state to respect and protect their right to property. Feminist, queer and indigenous scholars have argued that entering people into “appropriate” marriage and family structures has been a key component in the formation of capitalist state power (cf. Federici, Rifkin, D'Emilio). John D'Emilio does argue that the development of capitalism was a prerequisite for the growth of queer communities in urban areas. This, however, does not contradict heteronormativity as a structure for capital accumulation: both models focus on the individual as wage earner. Indeed, as D'Emilio himself points out, “the privatized family fits well with capitalist relations of production.

Capitalism has socialized production while maintaining that the products of socialized labor belong to the owners of private property” (quoted in Seymour, p 62).

As Mark Rifkin argues in *When Did Indians Become Straight?*, (colonial) landownership has been regulated through heterosexualization (2011, 6-8). This is also connected to a process of creating proper national subjects through heterosexual, monogamous marriage (Rifkin, 2011, 144).

The appropriate marriage and family structures in settler United States have, not surprisingly, been those espoused by, and beneficial to, relatively wealthy men of European ancestry: monogamous, intraracial/endogamous, heterosexual, and with men as the heads of households (cf. Shah, 153). Not only has a certain model of marriage been promoted; others have been actively destroyed. Nancy Cott writes about early nineteenth-century United States:

The native Americans living on the continent had their own forms of political authority, sovereignty, and marriage practice. In the government's intentions to accustom native Americans to the sovereignty of the United States, or else remove them from the continent, marriage patterns could not be forgotten. For if monogamy founded the social and political order, then groups practicing other marital systems on American soil might threaten the polity's soundness (25).

Cott continues:

Both political and religious officials assumed that native Americans' assimilation had to be founded on monogamous marriage, from which would follow the conventional sexual division of labor, property, and inheritance (26).

The trend that Cott describes was not unique to the North American context, but rather part of the global ideology of European colonialism. For example, a connection between settler colonial views of Zulu polygamy and queerness has been made by T.J. Tallie in a recent article in *GLQ*: “For [European] settlers [in Natal], polygamy failed at being properly heteronormative, instead indicating the overweening hyper-heterosexuality of

Zulu men. As a result, to white observers, polygamy presented a dangerous and disruptive challenge to the gendered, raced, and sexual order they wished to construct – in short, it became queer” (168). Tallie goes on, giving one rationale for studying the reaction of non-normative family structures in the process of settler colonialism: “The destabilizing queer potential of indigenous polygamy to the settler project reveals the assumptions about sexuality, civilization, and conjugality that underwrite colonial aspiration and postimperial anxieties” (168).<sup>89</sup>

Regulating marriage relations has been a key mechanism for controlling property relations throughout US history. The earliest denials of legally sanctioned marriage in the United States were for relationships between slaves, followed by interracial relationships (Calhoun, 1023). As Peggy Pascoe shows through several case studies in her book *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, forbidding interracial marriages was a way of keeping property, such as land, in white hands. In cases where white people were not the primary property owners, for example when Native people had access to land, interracial marriage was more accepted, as it allowed white people access to property.

The campaign to bring Mormons into nationalist monogamy must be understood in this broader context. Writes Nancy Cott:

While Congress was trying to eliminate Mormon polygamy, it was also taking further steps to bring native Americans into “civilized life” so that they too could join the nation. The government’s reservation policy, instituted in 1867, dispossessed native Americans in the west of all land except for two major areas – in the Dakota and Oklahoma territories – to which they were expected to migrate. By instituting this reservation policy and enforcing it militarily, the federal government destroyed tribal unity and the power of the chiefs (120).

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<sup>89</sup> It is notable that both polygamy and same-sex marriage are legal in present-day South Africa.

In the cases of both Native groups and the Mormons, the US government was attempting to create a more individualized population, using the rhetoric of “civilizing” to do so.

As Cott further explains, “‘Civilizing’ [for example through boarding schools for Native American children] meant instituting faithful monogamous households, turning Indian men into farmers motivated by the work ethic, and urging Indian women toward norms of modesty and domesticity” (121). We see here a connection between proper sexuality, family structures, individualized landownership, and capitalist values. The Dawes Act of 1887, with its focus on individual landownership, continued this trend (cf. Cott, 122). And today same-sex marriage can do some of this work. Rob Portman, Republican senator from Ohio, explains why he supports same-sex marriage from a conservative point of view: “We should encourage people to make long-term commitments to each other and build families, so as to foster strong, stable communities and promote personal responsibility” (Portman). Here, gay marriage becomes an antidote to communal responsibility, even as it is framed as a building block for community. Portman continues by claiming that “gay couples’ desire to marry [is] a potential source of renewed strength for the institution [of marriage].”

### ***Privatization of land in the creation of the United States***

Privatizing land was part of the creation of the US as a settler-colonial nation-state. This privatization took the form of heteronormatization, and especially the privileging of the nuclear family, and this heteronormatization was (and is), as so much else in US history, imbricated with white supremacy. As late as 1959, in the *McLaughlin* case, the beginnings of *Loving v. Virginia*, which would overturn miscegenation laws, Mildred and Richard Loving were not only told that their interracial marriage was invalid, but were

legally mandated to leave the state of Virginia, thus effectively losing their home (Pascoe, 273). Laws around marriage thus do not only govern *whom* a person can live with, but also *where* couples, families, and communities can live.

The insistence on privatizing land is especially noticeable in the US government's relation to Native populations. In 1887, the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (ARCIA), states: "One of the prime objects of the Government in the management of Indians, and to make them self-supporting, is to break up the old tribal relations and effectually destroy tribal authority over them" (cited in Rifkin, 2011, 158). Self-supporting means something specific here: the ability of the nuclear family to support itself. The ARCIA further spoke of "the polygamous taint attached to [Native Americans]," linking this "taint" to a lack of work morals (cited in Rifkin, 2011, 160). Labor and nuclear families go hand in hand in this analysis.

Rifkin argues that individualization was a deliberate strategy for breaking down indigenous societies, and hence being able to better control the Native population. By breaking up land into nuclear-family sized patches, people were forced into caring primarily for a small, immediate circle, not a wider community. This same year, 1887, the US government passed a land law that would have far-reaching consequences for de-communalizing and individualizing land tenure among Native Americans, including the Cherokees. The Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act, broke up communally-owned Native lands into privately-owned plots. Though there were exceptions, under the Dawes Act, land was given out to heads of households in plots of 160 acres. Single people and minors got smaller allotments (King, 2012, 130). This process was "devastating" to Native communities, according to David Chang, as the



amount of land held by Native Americans diminished from 138 million acres in 1887 to 52 in 1934 (108). Each head of household got allotted a certain amount depending on the size of the family, within existing reservations, under the condition that they accept US citizenship (Churchill, 139). While ostensibly the purpose of the Dawes Act was to turn Native Americans into productive individual farmers, this was not the outcome; in fact, a 1928 report from the Brookings Institute “identified the Dawes Act as the primary source of the further impoverishment of native peoples and implicated the allotment in increasing the rates of disease and infant mortality” (Byrd, 159).

David Chang argues that the main supporters for the Dawes act were liberal whites who saw private property as an important step in the civilizing of Indians (109). This grouping of liberal whites was referred to as “Friends of the Indian,” and they considered integration into Western individual society the best option for the Native population. Through several organizations, meetings, and lobbying efforts, the “Friends of the Indian” played a key role in U.S. policy toward the Native population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Harmon, 96). According to D.S. Otis' germinal work on the Dawes Act, the “Friends of the Indian”'s “supreme aim...was to substitute white civilization for [Indians'] tribal culture, and they shrewdly sensed that the difference in the concepts of property was fundamental to the contrast between the two ways of life” (8-9). In this liberal analysis, private property would shift identification from the group to the individual. This individual would be “independent” and “industrious” (Otis, 10). “Creating and dispossessing visible private property, in this case land, served to expropriate intangible political sovereignty” (Chang, 117). In Ward Churchill's analysis, the General Allotment Act was “a measure designed expressly to destroy what was left of

the basic indigenous socioeconomic cohesion by eradicating traditional systems of collective landholding” (139). This shift in land tenure of course had wide-ranging consequences; here, I want to focus on its role in regulating familial relationships, focusing them around heterosexual coupling.

Though not explicitly about sexual or marital relations, the Allotment Act also enforced heteronormative couplings. Mark Rifkin points out that privatized landownership “privileg[es] the companionate couple over more diffuse webs of 'fraternal feelings' organizing residence and labor” and that this “reaffirm[s] a capitalist vision of isolated nuclear families as necessary in order to stave off the chaos of a surrender to degeneracy” (2011, 160). Coupling in forms recognized by the state helps secure property relations, investing the individual in the small family unit, and in holding onto what belongs to this unit. Moving land from communal usage regimes to individual ownership means moving it into the hands of specific people; not every human being gets allotted the same amount of land. Globally, as land has been privatized it has primarily gone into the hands of men, often with the justification that they are heads of households. Middle Tennessee was no exception: “[b]ecoming civilized' [which, as we shall see, has been central to the privatization of land in the US] meant that Cherokee *men* must become agrarian capitalists, like their white neighbors” (Dunaway, 1997, 156, italics in original). Further, a small percentage, no more than twenty percent, of Cherokee men in Southern Appalachia owned substantial parcels of land, with most families farming small and often poor plots (Dunaway, 1997, 159). According to Wilma Dunaway, prior to the introduction of private landownership in Cherokee communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women had, in their role as primary farmers (while men hunted)

garnered a significant control over land (170). The privatization of land, turning it over to men, thus led to a decrease in women's power and control. Even though women were still farming the land, they no longer had the same control over it.

Communal ownership simultaneously challenges and hardens the private ownership regime. In a case such as Bucky's, where the community's membership is constantly in flux, questions are raised about who the actual owners are, and whether ownership is really permanent. The owner here is a constantly shifting, amorphous grouping. Legally, the land belongs to Hickory Knoll, with the plan that the deed will eventually be transferred to an incorporated entity, "Bucky's." This entity is currently in the process of applying for 501(c)3 status; that is, becoming acknowledged as a non-profit organization, and hence further entrenched in the legal system.

Although Bucky's is in a process of becoming increasingly official, the community still lives on the fringes of the financial system. For example, the "mortgage" with which the land was bought is not from an official bank, but rather is a collection of loans from friends. From the conversations I have had with residents, this loan structure does not seem to be an ideological decision, but simply the only way to get the money: banks would not lend such large sums to Bucky's. Bucky's as a corporate entity has close to no money, and most residents have very low incomes; therefore, they are not considered viable recipients of bank loans. Thus, even in entering the official structure of land ownership, Bucky's is at the margins of the formal economy.

This is a trend we see throughout the displacement of people from land using ideologies of heteronormativity: not only are the groups the government has displaced –

in the case of this study, nineteenth-century Mormons, Cherokees in early colonial Tennessee, and to some extent women's and queer land residents – not properly reproductive, they are also not properly productive. Though widely divergent in their practices, all three groups are or were producing for a unit larger than their immediate family, and they are all mutually dependent on their communities for food and shelter. None have, as a general rule, been particularly interested in production for the sake of accumulation, and they use common resources, thus disregarding Locke's fundamental principle of raw material mixed with human labor becoming property.

### ***Plural marriage and statehood for Utah***

Founded by Joseph Smith in upstate New York in the 1820s, Mormonism was one of many new Christian sects that appeared during this era of religious revival. Unlike many of its contemporaries, the Mormon Church survived intense persecution, and today the official Church of Latter-Day Saints claims over fifteen million members. Due to the Church's focus on missionary efforts, Mormonism has spread across the globe; it is, however, a distinctly US American faith, claiming that Jesus traveled to this continent, and admonishing its adherents to follow the US Constitution (*Doctrine and Covenants*, section 98<sup>90</sup>). As we shall see in the following paragraphs, this centering of the US Constitution did not mean that Joseph Smith's successors took staying in the United States for granted.

Today, Mormonism has come to be closely connected to Utah; however, the road there was not simple. The Mormons arrived in the Utah Territory after being displaced, at times violently, from several locations farther east. During the years that it took the

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<sup>90</sup> This very section of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, one of the holy texts of Mormonism, has been quoted by the Oregon occupiers to justify their actions. Wisconsin Public Radio.

Mormons to migrate from New York to Utah, Joseph Smith was assassinated, and the final move to the Southwest was led by Brigham Young. Once they arrived in Utah (at the time referred to by the Mormons as Deseret), the Saints viewed it – as they had with other locations, such as Missouri – as their Zion, a land granted to them by God.

At the time of the Latter-Day Saints' migration south-west, in 1846 to 1847, in the midst of the Mexican-American War, the Utah Territory was a contentious area. It was not until 1850, when the Mormons had petitioned for statehood for a larger region they named Deseret, that the United States officially declared Utah a territory of the US (Gordon, 25-6). The Mormons thus did not come here with the intention of being part of the United States, but rather to find a land where they could create a theocracy with minimal state interference (Tonkovich, 11). The Mormon settlers had varying opinions about their new settlement being in the US, as opposed to Mexico. The church leadership's final decision was to accept the authority of the United States federal government, and apply for US statehood (Bowman, 115). This was a strategic decision – for example, the Mormons received money and other resources from the US government by contributing troops to the war (Hyde, 389) – rather than an ideological allegiance.

In the incorporation of the Mormons into the US national body, marriage became a key concern. This was not unique, but rather part of a broader trend in the development of settler US heteronormativity in the mid-nineteenth century, where marriage was repeatedly a place where proper citizenship could be constructed. The case of Utah was especially troubling, however, due to Mormon polygamy, or plural marriage, a practice based on a revelation by Mormon founder Joseph Smith in 1843. At first practiced in secret by a small number of Mormons, Smith's revelation was made public in 1852, and

included in LDS official policy in 1876 (Bennion, 24). The United States' government actively worked against Mormon polygamy; proper marriage should, it was widely argued (as is the case today), be between one man and one woman. Plural marriage was never widespread in the Mormon community, if for no other reason than that the math does not add up on a large scale: a very small percentage of men can have ten or twenty wives. At its peak, polygamy was practiced by under 20 percent of adults in the Utah Territory (Bennion, 24).<sup>91</sup> Still, the practice gained extensive national attention.

Understanding plural marriage and the concerns it raises requires understanding Mormon theological and political ideas about Native Americans. Unlike other Zionist or Manifest Destiny project, Mormon settlers had not only an awareness that the Utah Territory was already inhabited by Native people, among them the Utes, but built this Native presence into their theology. They viewed the Native peoples of North America as “the descendants of a fallen patriarch” and set out to convert them to the Mormon faith (Roberts, online version, np). According to the *Book of Mormon*, one tribe of Israelites were guided by God to North America more than a millennium ago, and there had been a Christian church here for hundreds of years, though it fell before European settlers arrived. In this mythology, Native Americans are the descendants of the patriarchs Nephi and Laman, and should be converted and brought back into the fold of Christianity, and more specifically the LDS Church. These early conversion efforts were not very effective (Bowman, 106); they were also accompanied by violence toward the Ute and Paiute populations, and in some instances enslavement (Blackhawk, 238-9). Further, there was violent push-back from Native inhabitants, and ongoing raids by the local Ute population

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<sup>91</sup> Present-day fundamentalist Mormon groups frequently kick out young men for minor infractions, creating a gender-balance more favorable to plural marriage.

into Mormon settlements (Blackhawk, 235). Still, alliances were made (Blackhawk, 238). We thus see, in the cases of both the Radical Faeries and the Mormons, a perceived connection to the Native population, which is used as an implicit claim to indigeneity, and hence the right to land. In this very process of claiming indigeneity, however, actual Native people are excluded from the land the communities are occupying.

Both plural marriage and theological concepts of Native Americans feature prominently in scholarly discussions of nineteenth-century Mormons; however, very rarely are the two connected. In my research, I only came across one scholar who related Joseph Smith's doctrine of plural marriage to his theological views of Native people. In a 1984 study of “alternative marriage and sexual patterns” (v) among nineteenth-century Protestant sects, Lawrence Foster mentions an early revelation by Joseph Smith that states that the purpose of plural marriage is to enable Mormon men to marry Native women “that their posterity may become white delightsome and just” (134-5). There are no original copies available of this 1831 prophesy – the oldest known copy is from the 1850s or 1860s – and thus its authenticity cannot be fully proven; still, such a document is surely worthy of closer study.

Encouraged by a strong, nation-wide anti-Mormon campaign, in 1862, the federal government passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act<sup>92</sup>, which banned polygamy. Though the act criminalized all forms of polygamy, the main target was Mormon plural marriage (Calhoun, 1024). The Morrill Act did not, however, succeed in ending plural marriage. Such marriages were exceptionally hard to prove, since “Utah did not require marriages

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<sup>92</sup> The Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act is not to be confused with the Morrill Land-Grant Act, both of which were passed in 1862, and are referred to in shorthand as simply “The Morrill Act.”

to be registered with the state” (Talbot, 148). The Utah police and judicial systems were also dominated by Mormons, who were reluctant to persecute their fellow Saints. In order to gain further control over the judicial process in the Utah territory, in 1874 Congress passed the Poland Act, which shifted jurisdiction over polygamy cases from territorial to federal courts and put in place new procedures for selecting jurors that Congress hoped would result in more convictions” (Talbot, 148).

The federal government continued its legal battle against plural marriage with the Edmunds Act of 1882, imposing harsher penalties for polygamy and “unlawful habitation”: up to \$500 in fines and five years in prison. “The law also made it impossible for anyone practicing polygamy to perform jury service, to vote, or to hold public office,” leading to the disenfranchisement of 12,000 Mormons in the first year of the act's implementation (Foster, 222). Finally, in 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act was passed, which forced plural wives to testify against their husbands, “disincorporated the Church, disbanded the Perpetual Emigrating Fund<sup>93</sup>,...and attacked the economic structure of the Church, escheating all Church property in excess of fifty thousand dollars” (Talbot, 156-7). Notably, the act also ended women's suffrage in the territory (Utah had granted women the right to vote in 1870<sup>94</sup>).

The argument that plural marriage must be abolished was linked to the racial and national anxieties of the time, much of which centered on marriage and romantic relationships. The term miscegenation was coined in the 1860s, for example (Pascoe, 1). On a more local level, in 1888 Utah outlawed marriages between white and “Mongolian”

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<sup>93</sup> A fund with which Mormons paid for the expenses of European converts to move to the United States.

<sup>94</sup> When women were granted suffrage in the Utah Territory, many opponents of plural marriage saw this as a victory, thinking that women would surely vote for candidates who opposed polygamy. This did not happen; instead, women's voting patterns were remarkably similar to those of men.



(i.e. Asian) people (Shah, 161). Ethicist Francis Lieber, a prominent contributor to the debate over plural marriage, worried that this highly un-European behavior “might prove [Utah] to be the first ‘*bona fide* Africanized’ state of the United States,” a sentiment shared by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, Morrison Waite (Cott, 115). Lieber also claimed that “monogamy was ‘one of the pre-exist[ing] conditions of our existence as white men’” (Denike, 2010b, 142).

The political situation of the mid 19th-century cannot, however, be depicted in binary terms. Margaret Denike argues that anti-polygamy campaigns were paired with anti-slavery campaigns, understanding polygamy as the practice of savage/enslaved people, and also as a form of slavery, a notion that persists to this day in the fears of trafficking in polygamous child brides (2010a, 856). At the same time, as Denike documents, Mormon polygamy was read as Chinese, or Muslim. In a 1902 article, the *Colored American Magazine* described Siam as “the place for Brigham Young’s followers” where “you can have as many wives as you like” (quote in Cho, 57). Plural marriage was, then, in a variety of ways described as “Oriental.”<sup>95</sup> This notion of Mormon polygamy as fundamentally foreign is crucial to my argument here: the granting of access to land only to those who fit into the nation as properly sexual subjects. The Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, which was passed in 1882, only eight years before the Mormon church gave up plural marriage, had as one of its justifications the prohibition of immigration of those in polygamous marriages (Denike, 2010a, 866). Monogamy was thus posed as a prerequisite for belonging to the US American nation.

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<sup>95</sup> The characterization of polygamy as racially Other continues in the present-day, as documented by Arland Thornton, in “The International Fight Against Barbarism,” in *Modern Polygamy in the United States*, eds. Cardell K. Jacobson and Lara Burton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 261-2.

Due to the notion that plural marriage was un-American, monogamy became a requirement for Utah statehood; further, the Supreme Court opinion on the matter stated, in the words of Nancy Cott, “that polygamy was so abhorrent that it could not be considered a religious tenet” (120). Since the Mormons were acting in such an irreligious fashion, the Church of Latter Day Saints was not actually a church, and certainly not Christian. As a non-Christian entity in a Christian nation, the government did not have to treat the LDS sect as a church, nor did it see fit to grant Utah statehood (Cott, 119-120). This changed the Mormon outlook on plural marriage. Cott continues:

At this point the saints<sup>96</sup> saw the light. In September of 1890, the church issues a manifesto acceding to the federal prohibition of polygamy and advising its members to “refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.” Plural marriages continued to take place secretly for a decade, but in public the Mormons realigned themselves with the rest of the nation, paving the way for Utah's statehood in 1896 (120).

Mormons could thus not properly belong to the nation of the United States of America until they practiced marriage in a way that was considered appropriate by the government.

### ***The United Order and the Law of Consecration***

The argument laid out above – that Mormon marriage did not fit within the United States' conception of itself as a civilized nation of Anglo-Saxon heritage – is fairly common in analyses of the end of plural marriage within the official LDS Church. Something that has received less attention is the connection between the campaigns against plural marriage and the Mormon institutions of the United Order and Law of Consecration. Christine Talbot writes about the United Order that “[t]he kingdom of God...had an economic dimension that worked against nineteenth-century American notions that private property, at least in part, constituted the private individual” (48). In the “Law of Consecration and

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<sup>96</sup> “Saints” is the term used within the LDS Church to refer to members of the faith community.

Stewardship,” a revelation from 1831, Joseph Smith stated that all property belonged to God. The Law required members to donate all their property to the Church (consecration); then, bishops would divide the property to families according to need (stewardship). The distribution would not necessarily be equal, but rather take into account the situation of each family. This system of communal, God-consecrated, property was called the United Order or Order of Enoch (Talbot, 48-9). In the early days of Mormon settlement in Utah, it included farming a communal “Big Field” and community responsibility for water resources, and dividing up farm land according to the church leadership's perception of each family's needs (Hyde, 454). While the mainline LDS Church no longer practices the Law of Consecration in the way described above, present-day fundamentalist Mormon groups still use various versions of this practice.

The Law of Consecration and Stewardship goes against the ideology of individual property so central to the United States' conception of itself as a capitalist democracy. As Talbot argues, the system set up by the Mormons “constituted a radical critique of the excesses of private property under capitalist individualism” (49). I wonder, then, if the United Order and Law of Consecration might not have posed as big, if not bigger, of a threat to the United States' sense of self as did plural marriage.

A closer analysis of the role of the United Order and the Law of Consecration in the anti-Mormon fervor of the nineteenth-century is especially crucial in rethinking history in light of current campaigns against fundamentalist Mormon groups, which tend to focus on women's situation, and avoid discussing the economic structures of these groups. Anti-polygamist rhetoric has been a mainstay in the US for the past 150 years. In recent years, a new fascination with plural marriage has also blossomed, seen in TV series

such as *Big Love* and *Sister Wives*. This renewed interest in polygamy, and its appearance at the same time as a growing acceptance of same-sex marriage, is a rich site for analysis.

### ***Present-day debate***

Though no longer sanctioned by the official LDS Church, the looming threat of Mormon polygamy is by no means gone from North American discourse. According to a 2011 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, “plural marriage is as serious an issue as it's ever been – and is even on the rise in the West” (McDermott). We see this sentiment repeated in numerous newspaper articles and television programs. Witness the attention that the arrest and trial of Warren Jeffs, leader of the polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), have received.<sup>97</sup> Two (ghost-written) memoirs were published in 2007 and 2008, not long after Jeffs' arrest: *Escape* by Carolyn Jessop<sup>98</sup>, and *Stolen Innocence: My Story of Growing Up in a Polygamous Sect, Becoming a Teenage Bride, and Breaking Free of Warren Jeffs*, by Elissa Wall, both of whom broke away from the FLDS, with Jessop's book becoming a national best-seller. Without a doubt, the situations Jessop and Wall describe were severely abusive, with teenagers being raped, children beaten, women closely monitored and not allowed to interact freely with the outside world, and bans on parents hugging their children. These forms of abuse are not, however, limited to polygynous situations; abuse of women and children takes place in all kinds of family constellations. Yet we do not see a similar genre of “I escaped from an abusive monogamous marriage” books. While they do exist, such books are often

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<sup>97</sup> Warren Jeffs was arrested, tried, and in 2007 convicted for polygamy, sexual abuse of underage girls, and officiating marriages of underage girls to older men.

<sup>98</sup> While Jessop's case has been one of the main media examples of the evils of polygamy, when the possible decriminalization of polygamy was brought up by the government of British Columbia, Canada, Jessop gave a testimony arguing for decriminalization, reasoning that this could lead to better structures for women and children in polygamous families to seek help. Bennion, p 6.

published on small presses, and are not presented as exposés about a horrific system. In narratives about abuse on polygamous fundamentalist Mormon communities, the practice of marriage to more than one person is presented as the root of the abuse. It is a sexy problem, quite literally, and one that sells.<sup>99</sup> This marketing of literature based on the abuse of women in Mormon communities is nothing new: in the nineteenth century, there was a flourishing market of anti-Mormon fiction, narrating the plight of plural wives.

This is not to say that the ideologies and practices fundamentalist Mormon sects are benign; the groups often prescribe to severely racist<sup>100</sup>, homophobic, and misogynist beliefs. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes the FLDS – the polygamous Mormon group that has received the most attention – as follows: “Still actively practicing polygamy more than a century after the mainstream Mormon Church abandoned the practice, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) is a white supremacist, homophobic, antigovernment, totalitarian cult.” The wording in this sentence is noteworthy, however: by starting its article on what it labels an “extremist group” by pointing to its polygamous practice and labeling this as a remnant from a previous century, the SPLC connects the racism and homophobia of the FLDS to its supposedly backward practice of men marrying more than one woman. As the SPLC points out in its article, “While media attention has often focused on the sect's polygamy, less attention has been given to its racism and homophobia.” Ironically, by placing its discussion of this racism in a brief paragraph toward the end of the article (and failing to discuss homophobia altogether), the SPLC's reporting becomes yet another example of

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<sup>99</sup> A notable exception to this simplistic view of abusive within polygamous communities is the scholarship of Janet Bennion.

<sup>100</sup> Black people are believed to be the descendants of Cain, and are associated with the devil. Cf. Bennion, 34.

polygamy getting media attention, while the hatred and discrimination within the FLDS gets brushed to the side, receiving less attention than the characteristic hair-dos and dresses of the plural wives.

The renewed fascination with plural marriage is coinciding with the debate over same-sex marriage in the United States. In some senses, the moral panic around these forms of marriage, and the solutions presented, line up neatly: we must reaffirm heteronormative marriage structures. At the same time, plural marriage and same-sex marriage are presented as inhabiting different temporalities from one another. A common theme in media reports about plural marriage is the question of when this practice will die out. At the same time that reporters are sensationalizing new polygamist formations, they label them as remnants of the past. Why this need to proclaim this practice as a remnant of the past, even though, at least judging by media representations, plural marriage is having somewhat of a revival in North America? And is this related to the presentation of gay marriage as the future?

There is a joint history of the two marriage practices that most same-sex marriage advocates would rather stay away from. In her article “The Racialization of White Man's Polygamy,” legal scholar Margaret Denike argues that “It is in part thanks to the effectiveness of this campaign [to eradicate polygamy in nineteenth-century United States] that millions of fearful people can continue to talk today as if there was only ever *one* definition of marriage, namely, 'the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman'” (2010a, 854). Denike's argument here is that opponents of same-sex marriage draw on a rhetoric that grew out of the campaign against polygamy, primarily Mormon plural marriage (see also Denike 2010b, 137); however, we can extend her reasoning to

argue that *proponents* also draw on this rhetoric, through their appeal to lifelong monogamy. Indeed, one of the quotes that Denike provides, from same-sex marriage advocate E.J. Graff, displays a rhetoric that could easily have come out of the nineteenth-century anti-polygamy campaign: “Those who fear that same-sex marriage will lead to incest and polygamy aren't looking at the facts. Tribal and despotic societies put kin first, allowing in-marriage and polygamy” (2010b, 143). As was the case more than a hundred years ago, polygamy is racialized, painted as the Other, and by extension same-sex marriage is painted as Euro-American, properly civilized. Indeed, Graff assumes that same-sex marriage grows out of democracy (Denike, 2010b, 143), further tying the nation-state to raced and sexed practices: in democratic (read white, Christian, Western) societies, gay people can get (monogamously) married, while polygamists are outside of the nation.

Could it be that some of the aversion to polygamy and the embracing of same-sex marriage has to do with property relations? Plural marriage is distinctly communal, with a group (or, depending on one's point of view, one patriarch) owning houses, land, and objects together. In patriarchal, polygynous communities, women often have limited control over this property; still, the group is central. This was especially true for 19th-century Mormons, who kept much property communally, as we saw above, in the discussion of the United Order and the Law of Consecration.

Same-sex marriage, on the other hand, is about keeping property within the small, privatized unit of the couple; indeed, this is what the court case that led to the dismantling of section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act was about. In a monogamous marriage, benefits are awarded to the couple, not a group or society. Showcasing this worry of

polygamy as group access to resources, Rose McDermott, in the *Wall Street Journal* article cited above, points to the main problem with polygamy – or, more specifically, polygyny – as being the collection of welfare benefits by wives with “ambiguous legal status.” Implicitly, only a wife with a husband all of her own should get to be part of the welfare state. Only after going into this problem (if indeed it is a problem) at some length does McDermott cite statistics on higher HIV infection rates and more domestic violence in polygynous marriages. Apparently societies where polygamy is practiced also spend more money on weapons than do monogamous societies. McDermott ends by speculating that unmarried men in polygamous societies might be more tempted to engage in terrorism, a claim for which she provides no supporting evidence.

Polygamy serves as a scapegoat in media representations such as McDermott's article, turning the analysis away from societal structures. Libby Copeland writes in *Slate* that “Historically, problems have cropped up when polygamy is widespread in a culture with great disparities in wealth, and a few men hoard all the women.” She quotes an interdisciplinary scientific team: “Monogamous marriage reduces crime” (Copeland). According to this study, it is marriage that keeps men from committing crimes. Is it possible that the problem is not multiple spouses, but misogyny and class structures? Janet Bennion, a feminist scholar who have conducted extensive ethnographic research in Mormon polygamist communities, argues that polygamy is not inherently good or bad, but rather comes with benefits as well as disadvantages, and should be considered within the cultural contexts where it is practiced (not an altogether uncommon argument from social scientist scholars on other topics). Bennion suggests that there are

five conditions that, when combined with polygamy, may produce a greater risk of abuse and human rights violations....They are: the absence and low parental



investment of the father, an isolated rural environment or circumscription (the inability to leave a group because of geographical barriers), the absence of a strong female network, overcrowding in the household, and male supremacist ideology (15).

Bennion's analysis urges us to focus on the actual structures that put women and children at a disadvantage, instead of on the number of spouses involved. The issues identified by Bennion are not, as she points out, exclusive to polygamist families – they happen in families of all configurations. Women are isolated, male supremacy is one of the foundations of our society, many parents are absent either by choice or necessity. Yet plural marriages are presented as radically Other, the stranger within from which the women and children of the US need to be protected.

Certainly, there are many practices engaged in by the FLDS and other fundamentalist Mormon sects that are deeply damaging to members of the community. Accusations of forced marriage, rape, child sexual abuse are not to be taken lightly. An educational system that leaves many people illiterate, and a prophet who severely restricts members' contact with the outside world are cause for concern that the FLDS is indeed a cult. These groups do need to be criticized, and intervention is quite likely called for in some cases. However, the focus on polygamy, and the way it is portrayed as one of the prime causes of dysfunction and abuse, serves to hide the damages done both by the FLDS system, and by mainstream capitalism. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, salaciousness hides capitalist – as well as communalist – destruction. In interview after interview with plural families, reporters ask wives and husbands how they manage sleeping arrangements. The logistics of sharing a bed with different people on different nights seem almost impossibly difficult for outsiders to wrap their heads around. Underlying this question is, of course, an unspoken curiosity about sex, which most plural

wives and husbands who agree to be interviewed are quite adept at circumventing. What the wives *are* likely to speak about, even though reporters rarely ask, are the material benefits they find in sharing a household with other women. The childcare and housework does not all fall on one individual. Yes, there is a deeply patriarchal aspect to this division of labor, but this should not stop us from noticing that people find a value in communal labor.

By paying attention to the communitarian aspects of fundamental Mormonism, we can start to see a broader spectrum of reasons for why people join or stay in these groups, and how men's control of women and children is just one aspect of how the groups recruit and keep members.

In the face of this media attention and state persecution, polygamous groups have had to continuously recalibrate their relationship to the nation-state. On the one hand, groups often call on the state to grant legitimacy and security, as in the case of the community of Bountiful, with its leader's invocations of human rights and Canadianness. Bountiful, in British Columbia, Canada, is a key location in the geography of fundamentalist Mormonism. It is home to Winston Blackmore, a leader of a splinter group of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Blackmore is married to more than a dozen women and, in 2009, he was arrested for polygamy. Wally Opal, then Attorney General in British Columbia, who took legal action against Winston Blackmore, reasoned that "I don't think right-thinking Canadians want this situation to exist" (quoted in Ahnemann). Blackmore was born and raised in British Columbia, but is still labeled as foreign, due to his beliefs. Blackmore, on the other hand, argues that it is a matter of

human rights – and therefore of Canadian democracy – to be able to marry whomever one wants.

Rose McDermott's article, quoted above, states that those who supported a trial against Winston Blackmore claims that not allowing plural marriages “is about protecting human rights.” Those fighting for plural marriage use similar arguments; they, too uphold acceptance by the legal structure of the nation-state as a virtue. In defending the practices of his community, Winston Blackmore states that “we [Canada] have a charter that guarantees all people in Canada the right to live their religion” (quoted in Ahnemann). Here, Blackmore locates polygamy squarely within an Enlightenment framework of human rights; polygamy should be allowed not only because God wants it, but also because it fits with the notion of liberal, rights-based governance. The Mormon churches, fundamentalist as well as mainstream, have by and large accepted national governments as governing their lives.

The acceptance that fundamentalist Mormons seek from the state, however, is largely about arguing that it is the role of the government to leave people alone. As I discussed earlier, Mormonism is a faith founded on Constitutionalism, and its interpretation of that document is that the government should not impose restrictions on marriage (Talbot, 31).

A Mormon blogger, writing under the pseudonym “Bored in Vernal,” ponders that “I have often thought that had I not joined the Church at age 19 I would have like to join a kibbutz in Israel, or to have lived on 'the Farm' in Tennessee (back when I was more hippie-like), or at least to have been part of an intentional community.” She writes that

when considering joining the (mainline) LDS Church, she “was drawn to the strong emphasis on cooperative community which began under the direction of Joseph Smith and continued in Utah under Brigham Young and survived even to the present day,” but goes on to write that “[t]hirty years later, I’ve been disappointed”: “All around me I see Mormons who are saturated in capitalism and as far as can be from my conception of the Enoch-founded City of Zion.” Zion, in this interpretation of Mormonism, is a place where capitalist relations have been abolished, or at least decentered, and where cooperation and the provision of mutual needs are core principles. The present-day mainline LDS Church has moved away from these principles. In the words of Christine Talbot:

Economic accommodations accompanied political and theological shifts. The Church adjusted to modern American capitalism by de-emphasizing the practice of consecration. The economic cooperatives that characterized United Order experiments became joint stock corporations modeled after other American businesses. At individual and family levels, the Church began to speak of the law of consecration in more limited ways, embodied by the payment of tithing....In the twentieth century, consecration came to look more like church offerings than communal living (160).

Arguably, a similar situation can be found in the move of the queer and LGBT movement(s) toward marriage rights and other ways of being incorporated into mainstream society. Via this circuitous route, through nineteenth-century and present-day Mormonism, with a pitstop in a national park in Oregon, we come back to Bucky's. One visitor likens Bucky's to a kibbutz: it is the claiming of a communal homeland in a place that one is not from, but can claim a mythical connection to. This is a sense of belonging that risks erasing history. One land dyke's narrative about buying land (not in the gayborhood), published in *Maize* magazine, includes the following sentence: “I’ve felt like I was destined to ‘own’ this land since the first time I set foot on it and the owls greeted me from the woods” (*Maize*, issue 105, page 48). The scare quotes around “own”

shows a discomfort with, or questioning of, the concept that this land can be owned. No quotes are put around “destined,” however. What does it mean that this person feels destined to have this land? As we learn from this sentence, the author is not from this place, having at some point “first...set foot” there. She is buying a piece of property that has belonged to a different family for at least two generations (48). No mention is made of who was on the land prior to that, nor the privileges that allows this particular woman to buy and stay in a place.

In this chapter, I have argued that Bucky's and the Latter-Day Saints church, both groups marginalized in the broader US society because of their uncommon sexual practices and the connection of these practices to communal modes of organizing life, had to enter themselves into the capitalist nation-state system in order to gain (what is perceived as) secure land tenure and some degree of autonomy. While nineteenth-century Mormons were looking for inclusion in the state in some ways, it was also challenging the state regime, as are fundamentalist LDS groupings today. In considering the fraught and complicated relationship between queer land projects and the nation-state, we have as much to learn from the history of Mormonism as from histories of LGBT inclusion.

## **Part II: Non-Capitalist Materialities**

“The waste products of capitalism would become the energy of an alternative community” (Povinelli, 2011, 122). This is how Elizabeth Povinelli, an anthropologist with connections to the Radical Faeries, describes the initiation of a biodiesel project in the gayborhood. She continues: “The idea was to turn a commodity into an anticommodity and thus, in the long run, turn an exhausted object of capital into a viral form that reworks the logics and socialities of the 'mainstream' from which it had come” (122). The words are not of the kind used in the gayborhood, but the sentiment is: take what is there, and turn it into a form of life, one that slips through the fingers of capitalism and respectability. Take all these clothes, accumulated over years of participation of many individuals in the consumer economy, put them all in a room in the barn and call it the Goat Boutique. A place where clothing can be taken freely, a never-ending supply of new outfits, an abundance of rhinestones and mildew. Then write a song about it, and perform it in front of five hundred of your closest friends. These discarded clothes – this waste – reinvigorate, energize: they become the inspiration and building blocks for costumes and music. Or those shredded carrots from “Free Bread,” a weekly food pantry in one of the tiny towns down the road. Nobody else is going to take them; most people know they are already starting to go bad, and that they were not even very good to begin with, these left-overs from some fast-food restaurant. But the folks from Bucky's will take them, figuring something could surely be made from these. Once at home, they end up in old deli-sized pickle jars on the kitchen floor, mixed with whatever else happens to be around, generously salted, spending a week turning into an improvised sauerkraut. Bucky's and the gayborhood thrives on the wastes of global capitalism,

creating energy from what others have discarded.<sup>101</sup>

Bucky's is thus not outside of the system of global capitalism, but rather functions in the crevices of it. This is not a neutral place to be, and comes with the risk of cooptation by, and reinforcement of, capitalist production. Povinelli continues her analysis a few pages later: "even as [those involved in the biodiesel project] engage in a practice of life whose ethical substance is biospheric, their project is liable to absorption by capital whose economic horizon is global" (124). Biodiesel has become big business. Bucky's and the gayborhood are constantly absorbed into the system they are resisting. Living fully outside of capitalism proves impossible. In order to stay on the land, to live in a place where making a living is so difficult, many gayborhood residents work real estate jobs in other parts of the country for part of the year. Bucky's, a space where property relations are loosened, is thus partly funded through the business of buying and selling houses and plots of land.

Povinelli explains hers and others' fascination with locations such as the gayborhood: "Critical theory and progressive activism invest in the endurance of life in spaces of state and social abandonment because they consider these spaces capable of providing a potential for cultivating a new ethics of life and sociality" (2011, 128). This is part of what drew me to think about Bucky's from an academic perspective, too. Regions such as borderland-Appalachia have been largely abandoned by the government and national society: stereotypes abound about the poor, dirty, and ignorant people living here, and there seems to be little hope that this poverty, filth, or ignorance can be changed, so

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<sup>101</sup> Sometimes, however, these wastes are just too heavily processed. Sandor Katz mentions that "[t]he worst kraut [he] ever made" was from pre-shredded vegetables picked up at "Free Bread," originally destined for Kentucky Fried Chicken. He believes that the vegetables "must have been sprayed with some kind of preservative chemical" that prevented fermentation (2012, 108-9).

why even try? This becomes a zone of social abandonment, an example of the backward to hold up to proper, hardworking Americans: “this is what happens if you do not follow the protocol.”

The notion of Appalachia as a region that fails at proper capitalist relations hides the ways in which extreme capitalist exploitation takes place here. Businesses have not completely abandoned this region; on the contrary, there is intensive resource exploitation, most spectacularly in the practice of mountain-top removal mining. The social abandonment that Povinelli points to is thus intimately tied to extensive and intensive capitalist activity. The monetary benefits of this activity just do not stay in the region, which remains extremely poor.<sup>102</sup>

Bucky's as a project is not particularly concerned with changing the stereotypes about the region; instead, the community is figuring out what can grow out of living in an abandoned zone. If the government and capitalism see this as a failed zone, how do people themselves build a reality?

This does not mean that residents at Bucky's glorify poverty. Everyone would like for there to be more employment opportunities in the area. Currently, a couple of residents work part-time through the Internet, while several others are gone for months each year working a real estate job. Some patch together a living from food stamps and odd jobs, others survive off of disability insurance or other government assistance. Other people in the gayborhood are starting small agricultural ventures, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms and a moonshine distillery. None of these are easy

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<sup>102</sup> It is one of the contradiction of capitalist development that the industries that are destroying human and more-than-human bodies, and arguably contributing to long-term poverty, such as mining, are among few sources of relatively well-paid jobs in Appalachia and other regions of intense resource exploitation. Mining has also been an industry of militant union activism, as well as violent suppression of labor unions. Cf. Peter Galuszka, *Thunder on the Mountain*, p 2&10.



ways of making enough money to pay the bills, and usually do not come with health insurance or other benefits. The residents at Bucky's certainly do not find this an ideal way to live. True, they are not interested in moving to the city, donning a suit, and sitting in an office all day, but they do want to feel secure that their income can cover the necessities, and that illness and old age will not lead to financial devastation.

Yet, without glorifying the hard times and stress that a lack of steady income cause, Bucky's residents do find positive aspects of their living arrangements, and find them preferable to a more mainstream way of making a living. They find that meager individually-owned material resources means that people reach out to one another to share tools, food, and skills. Lack of money for extravagances such as paying for entertainment means that people are more likely to create their own fun: mid-day dance parties, game nights, and lots of potlucks.

The three chapters in part II theorize the world-making of the gayborhood within the crevices of global capitalism, as a creative and profoundly material process.

Chapter 4: Kitchens, compares the kitchen at Bucky's to two communal kitchen projects established as part of political movements: the Black Panther Party's Breakfast for Children Program, and the People's Kitchen at Occupy Wall Street. All three of these kitchens provide food with neither an expectation of compensation in the form of money or labor, or a requirement to show need. I argue that such kitchens challenge the work imperative so central to capitalism, and hence provide models and visions for others modes of organizing life.



— Chapter 5: Temporality, considers the ways in which time functions in the Gayborhood. I argue that queerness and rurality, as well as the material specificities of the region, affect the temporality of Bucky's

and the Gayborhood at large, and that queer theory is enriched by a serious consideration of the material conditions of non-urban life.

## ***Fermentation***

At midnight between Mondays and Tuesdays the air in our south Brooklyn kitchen fills with the smell of boiling milk.<sup>103</sup> The stove top is covered with pots and jars, and a couple of old table cloths are lying on a chair, ready to swaddle the milk-filled jars before putting them in the warm womb of the pre-heated oven. We go to bed knowing that the following morning the expired, slightly weird-smelling milk which our stomachs can't digest will have been transformed by invisible organisms into creamy, sour yogurt. This is the magic of fermentation: the ability to turn seemingly any substance into a nourishing, strange-tasting yet delicious food. Dying materials become the source for new life.

Can we write a theory that explains the successes and the failures, something that opens up possibilities for thinking in terms other than positive and negative? This

103 Illustrations courtesy of Elvis Bakaitis.

question came to me one night, as I was going through the slow process of making yoghurt, while simultaneously working through the harried process of writing an academic paper with a deadline. The microbes in the air and ground of the gayborhood provide a starter not just for yogurt, but also for a theory of community formation.



Though not perfectly analogous, I argue that the concept of fermentation, where starter organisms interact with a

feedstock material in a process that combines decomposition and creation (Bamforth, 2), can help us think through how locations such as the gayborhood become possible, and how they change.

The conceptual framework of fermentation allows me to think about change without labeling it as positive or negative – in fermentation, degeneration and creation are in constant interaction. For example, the AIDS epidemic, a tragic and deadly process, brought a wave of new residents and long-term visitors to the gayborhood. Without this influx of people, would the gayborhood have thrived and grown throughout the 1990s? Tragedy and illness became instigators of community-building. As we will see throughout this dissertation, poverty, lack of resources, and population displacements have all helped

shape the gayborhood into a vibrant community. Fermentation helps me think through these complexities.

Fermentation also urges me to pay attention to the materiality of the communities, regions, and persons that I am studying. It is a concept that is grounded in the gayborhood: the fermenting of food is a central part of bodily nourishment as well as social interactions here. The kitchens at Bucky's and Hickory Knoll are full of fermentation projects, routine and experimental. By drawing on physical practices at Bucky's for my theoretical intervention, I am reminded to keep my feet on the ground of my fieldwork, and inspired to think in unconventional ways.

In a narrowly biological sense of the word, fermentation is the transformation of carbohydrates into acids or alcohols with the help of bacteria. It also proves to be a rich metaphor for the creation and constant mutations of community. Sandor Ellix Katz, gayborhood resident and one of the leading spokespersons for fermentation, writes (in a quote we'll return to in chapter four) that "[f]ermentation is everywhere, always. It is an everyday miracle, the path of least resistance. Microscopic bacteria and fungi...are in every breath we take and every bite we eat....They are ubiquitous agents of transformation, feasting upon decaying matter, constantly shifting dynamic life forces from one miraculous and horrible creation to the next" (2003, 2). Microbes float through the air, sticking to something, making their home in a new substance, birthing more of themselves. Their new home starts to change, decompose into a new form of life. Never starting out of empty space, fermentation takes unexpected paths, transforming the materials microbes attach to. A disaster can very well become a crucial part in the cohering of a community. And disasters abound. In some ways, you could say that the

story I am telling here is built around them. (I wonder, though, about the idea of “least resistance.” Least for whom, or what? Can different levels of resistance interact? What happens when desires collide?)

### **The biology of fermentation**

In biological science, fermentation has a quite specific meaning: “Biologists use the term *fermentation* to describe *anaerobic* metabolism, the production of energy from nutrients without oxygen” (Katz, 2012, 1). This is a process that has been taking place for millions of years, long before humans existed (Katz, 2012, 1-2). The production of lactic acid in muscles is one example of fermentation; the conversion of pyruvate into ethanol and carbon dioxide is another. Over several thousand years, humans have experimented with fermentation, using it in a wide variety of processes, most of them related to food production. Fermentation is used in order to develop certain tastes, and to preserve food.

In purposeful food fermentation, a starter culture (e.g. lactobacillus, in the form of a spoonful of yoghurt) is added to a medium (e.g. milk). This starter culture sets off a process where the medium is transformed: its taste develops, usually turning more sour, and the composition of micro-organisms changes, creating an environment suitable for some bacteria and yeasts (ideally ones beneficial to the humans making the food) but not suitable for others (those causing spoilage). The medium can then be used as a starter for another cycle of fermentation. Many ferments can also be made in what Katz refers to as a “wild” process: rather than adding a starter culture, a balance of salt, liquid, and surface yeast is created that will draw beneficial micro-organism already existent in the surrounding air to the medium. In this dissertation, I use these concepts from fermentation – starters, cultures, decomposition and re-creation, cyclicity – to theorize rural queer

life.

Fermentation is ubiquitous, and present in many commonly ingested items, such as bread, chocolate, soy sauce and cheese. Since the discoveries of Pasteur, however, Western society has grown increasingly wary of the micro-organisms involved in fermentation (as well as micro-organisms in general), and what is frequently referred to as a war on germs has ensued. Bacteria and other micro-organisms have been construed as threats. As so many processes in nature, fermentation is not inherently good or bad, but rather has varying effects. This is important to my use of it as a metaphor. This does not, however, mean that the effects of fermentation, or the material it uses, cannot be valued, be desirable or undesirable, even revolting.

### **Fermentation as metaphor/social process**

Like the fermentation processes I have described above, human community life is imperfectly cyclical. There is a constant breaking down and recreation of activities, relationships, spaces, and ideas. There are starter cultures that set off processes. These cultures can also, like the lactobacilli in yogurt, block out other cultures and organisms.

Thinking with fermentation has been a way for me to step away from the standardization of knowledge, and the hierarchies this standardization upholds. As Aaron Bobrow-Strain describes in his article on the industrialization of bread production in the US, the modernization of food production included standardization and hygiene, the removal of any unreliable agents, as much as possible staying away from the microbes and fires that was crucial to earlier cooking. Science and logical procedures became paramount. Ingredients and temperature were to be controlled, and research became a key aspect of professional baking, as well as of other food production. Researchers have since

discovered that this standardization was not altogether positive: there are components of nutrition that cannot be standardized (at least not with our current scientific knowledge), ways in which whole foods and food exposed to micro-organisms provide nutrition that factory-produced food cannot. Could it be that knowledge production is similar? What do we miss out on when we put our knowledge into sanitized boxes?

The professionalization of bread-baking had a distinctly gendered aspect: from having been an activity performed at home by women, baking became something men did, in factories and industrial bakeries (Bobrow-Strain, 30). The process was also, according to Bobrow-Strain, literally a process of whitening; think Wonderbread. White bread was supposed to be safe and modern, as opposed to the darker, unruly loaves produced at home (31). Drawing on this as a metaphor, I think that it is the imperative of feminist scholars to resist the standardization, and hence masculinization, of knowledge production.

As I have been talking with others about my use of fermentation as a concept, more than one person has pointed out the sense in which fermentation is already used metaphorically: as the stirring up of a process, such as “fermenting revolution.” This is not the main way that I use the term, but I do think it is an interesting connection. What are the processes fermenting on queer land? In chapter 4, I put Bucky's into conversation with two projects that were explicitly fermenting social change, and who did so in part through cooking for the people: the Black Panther Party's Breakfast for Children Program, and the People's Kitchen at Occupy Wall Street. While I do not think that Bucky's is an activist endeavor in the way these two projects were, I do think that

nourishing people, spiritually and bodily, has effects that can lead to lasting social change.

### **Fermentation as writing practice**

A note on fermenting as a writing practice: fermentation is not linear; rather, it is imperfectly cyclical. A starter sets off a process which comes to maturity, presenting us with food to chew as well as a new starter. The cycle overlaps itself, returning to traces – in the words of Joan Scott, fantasy echoes – of what came before. The same concepts – fermentation, viscosity, time – will thus reappear over and over again in the dissertation, each time in slightly different forms, informed by the bacteria they have met along the way.



## Chapter 4: Kitchens

*All of our survival programs are free. We have never charged the community a dime to receive the things they need from any of our programs and we will not do so. We will not get caught up in a lot of embarrassing questions or paperwork which alienate the people. If they have a need we will serve their needs and attempt to get them to understand the true reasons why they are in need in such an incredibly rich land.*

– Huey P. Newton<sup>104</sup>

*The problem is that the food movement's ideological pantry is rarely raided, and despite a rich history, there's not nearly enough talk about it.*

– Raj Patel, p 118

### ***A Labor of Belonging***

Kitchen labor has for decades been the subject of debate, discussion, and analysis: it is work that is highly gendered and racialized, organized according to structures of citizenship, racialization, heteronormativity, and class. Financially, it is often poorly compensated, or not compensated at all. It is a labor of love and a labor of resentment. It is highly political, yet all too often relegated to a supposedly non-political sphere. During my visits to Bucky's, the kitchen and the labor that took place there became one of my main fascinations. Why did people engage in kitchen work, even when it was the cause of resentment? A labor of love, for sure, but there was more going on. Some answers to the role of kitchen work at Bucky's were provided by putting this location into conversation with two other kitchen projects: the People's Kitchen at Occupy Wall Street and the Black Panther Party's Breakfast for Children Program. Though widely divergent in scope, all three projects feed or fed their community outside of the two spheres where food provision is usually found under capitalism: in the home or on the monetary market. In

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs*. The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation. Albuquerque, 2008: University of New Mexico Press.

doing so, I argue that communal kitchens such as these perform a labor of belonging that exceeds monetary or private spheres, providing a challenge to the individualized system of reproduction under capitalist modernity, while at the same time reinforcing structures of gender and settler colonialism. Drawing on fermentation as a theoretical framework, I argue that this labor of belonging bridges the seeming gap between *being* and *doing*.

The processes which I characterize as “labor of belonging” in the context of queer land projects and communal kitchens are distinct from the labor of belonging that Jackie Grey identifies in her research on indigenous-settler relations on Noëpe/Martha's Vineyard. Grey analyzes the overwhelming labor that has to be performed by Native individuals in the face of a settler-colonial bureaucracy in order to claim a belonging to this particular place. The labor I discuss, on the other hand, is the internal work within a group that creates a sense of belonging. These labors are distinct, though by no means contradictory to one another.

### ***August: The Story of Spree and the Kombucha***

Spree is singing in the background as I write this. We are housemates for a couple of weeks, while his regular housemate, MaxZine, is on tour with the show “Welcome to Homo Hollow,” which I discussed in chapter one. I am delighted to be sleeping on a futon in a house instead of on a thermarest in a tent, and I am equally delighted to spend some time with Spree. One of the oldest residents of Bucky's, both in age and in time spent here, Spree is a whirlwind of bangles and purple hair. Once upon a time, this whirlwind energy was directed toward the work of ACT-UP, in which she was active during her years in Los Angeles and New York in the late eighties and early nineties. Now, the focus is on three rowdy dogs, crocheting projects, and on homemade music videos. On rare

nights, Spree and MaxZine indulge us in impromptu story time, telling us of their adventures blocking roads, sneaking into AIDS conferences, and going to Republican Party fundraisers in full drag. As exciting as these activities sound, and as much nostalgia as they carry with them, they were not sustainable in the long run. MaxZine was exhausted and devastated from the death of many of his friends, and Spree was facing the reality of soon needing healthcare for his own AIDS. And so they ended up here. It was maybe not supposed to be permanent, but now nineteen years have passed.

Many memories have accumulated over these years. MaxZine sighs in exasperation at one of them: the time Spree decided to cure her AIDS with kombucha, a fermented tea beverage in vogue in the 1990s for its supposed health benefits. One of the more dubious claims made about kombucha was that it could cure HIV/AIDS (cf. Katz, 2012, 167-8). After a while, Spree had twenty gallons of tea fermenting in the Bucky's kitchen. Now, the amount is down to a gallon or two; the production has been handed over to eager young garden interns; and Spree sips the drink with dinner, nodding approvingly. Kombucha didn't cure her AIDS, but, as MaxZine points out, it gave her something to occupy her mind, and today Spree is still alive.

Walking into the kitchen at Bucky's, it is easy to imagine the twenty gallons fermenting away here. Part country kitchen, part laboratory, part carpentry experiment, the corners of the shelves, counters, and floor are covered with projects: cardamom beer, dandelion wine, sumac tea, usnea tinctures, mozzarella balls, dosa batter. From the ceiling, nettles and holy basil hang to dry; from the walls, garlic. One of the ovens has been converted into a tobacco curer. The dining room extension, built a few years back to accommodate

growing crowds of visitors, houses trays of wood-eating mushrooms from the hillsides of the hollow, as well as packet upon packet of rice noodles from Thailand via Nashville. The kitchen porch holds inedible but functional concoctions: aerating compost teas<sup>105</sup> and scattered cigarette butts.

This kitchen is a space that heals as well as aggravates. Nerves are inflamed and soothed. The spring water from the tap could be the best thing you ever drank, or it could make you ill for days if it doesn't agree with your stomach flora. Some days, sitting on the tattered and musty kitchen couch, it seems to me not altogether impossible that kombucha brewed with this water could sustain life in the most challenging of circumstances. You might get sick along the way, or go crazy. You might forget crucial aspects of the world. But something will happen over that glass of fungus tea.

### ***September: What communal kitchens do***

*This is liberation in practice.*

– Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Party

Already in the car on the way to my first pre-fieldwork visit to Bucky's, driving down into the hollow on dark, winding roads, MaxZine, who has picked me up at the Greyhound station, politely disagrees with my labeling queer land as a "movement." Land movements, he says, are groups like the MST<sup>106</sup>, groups that *do* something. I am not going to argue with MaxZine's point of view – my goal here is not to define "movement" – but it raises a series of questions. What does it mean to work for change? What does it

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<sup>105</sup> Compost tea is a form of liquid fertilizer made by mixing water and compost and letting the mixture ferment for a couple of days.

<sup>106</sup> Movimento Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, a landless rural workers' movement in Brazil, known for its land occupations/reclamations.

mean to challenge the power structures of land tenure and of ownership? And what else does queer land challenge? Is not *being*, rather than constantly *doing*, in itself a challenge to capitalist relations?

Three years later, I am squatting on the paved ground of Zuccotti Park, painting a grid that will contain the “workshop schedudule” (paint is so much harder to spell check than computer text). I took the subway to Wall Street alone, fairly certain I would run into some familiar faces there, and sure enough, I did. Both of the people who I am spending this particular evening with I met at Bucky’s, at the end of that road MaxZine and I drove down. We had a sense of community, of belonging, a common way of working that we had learned in the gayborhood (influenced, certainly, by other ventures we had previously, separately from one another, been involved in). And now we were taking that with us elsewhere. So Bucky’s served as a meeting space, a place to build relations. More importantly, though, it renewed our sense of how the world can be.

As Stephen Duncombe points out in the introduction to his new edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, “negation, itself, affects nothing. The dominant system dominates not because people agree with it; it rules because we are convinced there is no alternative” (x). According to Duncombe’s analysis,

if the system is firmly in control, it no longer needs belief [by the people in the system’s functionality and benefits]: it functions on routine...and the absence of imagination. That is to say, when ideology becomes truly hegemonic, you no longer need to believe. The reigning ideology is everything: the sun, the moon, the stars; there is simply nothing outside – no alternative – to imagine (xvii).

Part of what land projects such as Bucky’s do, then, is create space for envisioning alternatives.

Sometimes New York City and rural middle Tennessee seem worlds apart, and

sometimes they stand right next to each other. In this chapter, I want to read them together. More specifically, I want to think about queer land and Occupy Wall Street in relation to each other, and to a previous movement/moment: the Black Panther Party's Breakfast Program. This dissertation is about the phenomenon of queer land projects – isolated, semi-separatist, sometimes off-the-grid units. In this chapter, I read these as being in the world, as sites in an assemblage of social change. I draw a map of certain methods of change-making, using the Black Panthers and Occupy Wall Street to ask questions of queer land. The projects presented in this chapter – Bucky's, the Black Panther Breakfast for Children Program, and the People's Kitchen at Occupy Wall Street – show alternatives, and the people who encounter them often become able to imagine something they could not imagine previously. But these projects do not only open the imagination to the possibilities of living otherwise; they also engage bodies in the reality of that otherwise living. The very concepts of imagining, reality, work, and pleasure are intertwined and thereby dissolved as separate entities. So, with all due respect, MaxZine, I think you are wrong on this point: Bucky's might not be a movement, but it does something, nonetheless.

In addition to making a theoretical intervention into the study of communal kitchens, this chapter aims is to point to a genealogy that is frequently overlooked. The kind of hunger relief as political action that the BPP engaged in is exactly what the People's Kitchen at OWS saw as its mission, yet, as I mentioned earlier, there has been little to no acknowledgment that this People's Kitchen is drawing on the tradition of the Panthers. Could a better understanding of the historical precedent of political kitchens have

provided the People's Kitchen with stronger tools to address the challenges the initiative faced? Writer-activist Rebecca Solnit has in several writings pointed out the similarities between the food at Occupy, specifically in Oakland, and the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program (cf 2012). Both programs considered food provision to be central to organizing, with the reasoning that a full belly is necessary for engaging in sustained struggle. Yet, the connection between Occupy kitchens in New York City and elsewhere, and the BPP's food programs has not been further explored in either activist or scholarly writings. So what do kitchens *do*? Throughout working on this dissertation, kitchens take up much of my time, and form my thinking. The kitchen at Bucky's becomes the predominant location for conversations with my "informants"; the kitchen at Occupy Wall Street becomes the space for political action and ponderings about how to change the world; my kitchen at home becomes a space for recharging, for engaging in acts that provide concrete results in a way writing rarely does.

In the story of Spree's kombucha cultivation, kitchen processes became a form of survival, specifically through the engagement with fermentation. I use this moment as a starting point for thinking about what kitchens do. Fermentation processes are only partially dependent on human labor. By looking at three communal kitchen projects through the lens of fermentation, I argue that these projects provide a critique of – and an alternative to – the hegemonic force of the concept of labor. "Fermentation" is a concept that has quite frequently been used to describe social movements, in phrases such as "fermenting social change." This phrase is metaphorical, used without much thought to the actual processes of fermentation from which it stems. Here, I take this term seriously, looking at communal kitchens as social change projects, asking "what does it mean to

ferment social change?” Through the concept of fermentation, we can understand the work<sup>107</sup> of communal kitchens in a more complex manner. Sharing a meal “serve[s] both to express solidarity and to perform maintenance tasks” within a community (DeLanda, 57). Meals are a communion, where people literally eat the land, thus linking to each other, fostering an atmosphere rich with the metaphorical microbes necessary for community fermentation. The more communities interact, the more metaphorical microbes will grow, allowing for fermentation, hopefully of a desirable kind (remember, sometimes fermentation goes awry and leaves us with vinegar instead of wine). This is not dissimilar to what Manuel DeLanda refers to the density of a community – how close people are and how well they know each other (56). By constantly tending to a community, we build the ties necessary for nurturing each other.

Taking the metaphor of fermentation seriously in the context(s) of kitchens and social change allows us to: 1) break down binary thinking, especially around public/private, reform/revolution, and production/reproduction; 2) open up space for thinking about why and how these projects are seen as a threat, as I will discuss later in the chapter; 3) question the labor imperative and consider to the usefulness of being lazy (fermentation is not about individual effort but about symbiosis, a larger, mutually beneficial, cooperation). Let us take Spree’s kombucha as an example: in addition to the human work of growing, picking, and processing tea and sugar, and mixing the ingredients, the work of a collective of microbes, referred to as a SCOBY (Symbiotic Colony of Bacteria and Yeast) is crucial to the kombucha developing. You leave the tea

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<sup>107</sup> “Work” is, as we will see in this chapter and the next, not an ideal term for conceptualizing the processes of communal kitchens and queer land that I am interested in; however, capitalism is so hegemonic that there is a dearth of language addressing processes of change and transformation without referring to laboring.



and sugar and SCOBY, and something happens. We can think of this in terms of symbiosis and cooperation instead of demands, payment, or work. At the core of the anti-capitalist world-making of these projects is the feeding of people without them having to justify being there or receiving food. Being fed is untied from payment. Of course there is an immense amount of work that goes into these kitchen projects, but it is not within the regime of capitalist labor exchange. Communal kitchen projects are sites that are conducive to theorizing how (and whether) work can be decoupled from capitalist exchange; however, the issue of de-hegemonizing the labor imperative is a bigger issue than just these projects, and than food provision. It speaks to the precarity of current capitalism.

### ***October: The work imperative and the threat of laziness***

*Challenging the present organization of work requires not only that we confront its reification and depoliticization but also its normativity and moralization.*

– Kathi Weeks, p. 11

When, in a course on feminist food politics, several of my students get incensed about food stamp fraud, I decide to use this as a teachable moment, and change the conversation to one about values, not about people misbehaving. Yes, we can make the argument that food stamp fraud is not as big of an issue as it is made out to be; when I ask students to bring in research, as opposed to hearsay, fraud does turn out to be a miniscule issue, representing an estimated one to four percent of the budget for the EBT program. This, however, still keeps us in the mindset that using food stamps to buy, say, whiskey is wrong, or that applying for food stamps even though one has an income is wrong, or that living off of food stamps and other welfare programs and not looking for employment is wrong.

We are supposed to work; the labor system as the basis for the distribution of resources is rarely questioned (cf. Weeks, 3). We might complain about the conditions of a specific job, or argue for changes to the amount of hours considered “full-time,” but almost never do we hear a questioning of why we need to have a job in the first place, or why counting hours or quantity produced is a good way of deciding when our mandated labor is completed. In Weeks's words, “[w]ork is not just defended on grounds of economic necessity and social duty; it is widely understood as an individual moral practice and ethical obligation” (11). Working hard, but still never getting enough done, becomes internalized as personal failure.<sup>108</sup> And showing a work ethic is rewarded. We see this, for example, in the NYPD's first attempt to evict the Occupy Wall Street encampment from Zuccotti Park: when the occupiers spent the night laboring at cleaning the park, the police backed off. Queer land speaks to me in large part because it presents a model for stepping away from the precaritization of work and life. True, paid work is hard to come by, but somehow there is always food on the table, always a place for everyone to sleep. No evictions here. Individuals can pay rent several months late, when some income is found, and the collective budget will cover their share in the meantime. This causes tensions, but it functions.

Yet a dearth of paid employment does not mean a lack of things to do. Labor is constant at Bucky's and in the gayborhood at large. Rural living, combined with limited “modern” amenities, can be hard work. During the winter, fires have to be lit and tended to throughout the day. In the summer, gardens have to be watered. There is wood to be

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<sup>108</sup> In an article about working conditions for graduate students in the neoliberal university, Roberta Hawkins, Maya Manzi, and Diana Ojeda addresses this. They quote one doctoral student: “I have no complains as of now of the actual structure of the program that I'm in... what I would change about the experience is internal, like I need to be, I need to work faster. I can't spend so much time reading and writing because it's just really hard to get everything done” (336).

chopped, and before that, trees to be chainsawed and dragged down from the hillsides. The water tanks and filtering system have to be checked up on periodically, to make sure they are in working order so that there is clean water for everyone. None of this work is paid. Putting in substantial amounts of work for the community can be used in the calculation of one's rent contribution, but everyone contributes, regardless of this. Contributions can also be emotional, such as holding space for groups marginalized within the queer land movement. This emotional labor is difficult to calculate, but the community is in the process of figuring it out.

When I ask Bill, a gayborhood resident quoted earlier in this chapter, to be more specific about what kind of activities that bring the gayborhood community together, his theory of positive, rural community building revolves around three things: construction projects, food, and beer. I am inclined to agree. My first summer in the gayborhood, I got to know people while wielding a hammer in the building of a kitchen extension, and over nightly dinners, as well as a seemingly endless supply of beer and whiskey. It was food and drink that brought people together, gave everyone an excuse to sit down and enjoy each other's company. It is at meals and over drinks that ideas are shared, and that people get to know each other better. These moments are the glue that holds the community together.

The three kitchen projects discussed in this chapter all question the work imperative, and present alternate models for fulfilling needs, models that are built on joy, abundance, and solidarity. The implementation of these models is messy and often difficult, but it is based on a sense of possibility to opens up new horizons. Leading Black Panther Eldridge

Cleaver wrote in *Ramparts*, a 1960s New Left magazine, that “Breakfast for Children pulls people out of the system and organizes them into an alternative. Black children who go to school hungry each morning have been organized into their poverty, and the Panther program liberates them, frees them from that aspect of poverty. This is liberation in practice” (quoted in Heynen, 407). Cleaver's statement points out that not only are there groups like the Panthers organizing for a different society, but some force – unnamed in this quote – is organizing hunger and poverty. Hunger and poverty are not unfortunate effects of an imperfect system, but central aspects of this system (which I see to be a combination of large capitalist ventures and governments across the world).

A not-very-distant comparison can be made to arguments currently formulated by prison abolitionists. Rather than arguing that the despicable conditions in prisons in the United States (and around the world, but most prison abolition scholarship is still US-centric) are, as prison reformists claim, signs of a horribly broken system that needs to be fixed, according to prison abolitionists, these conditions show that the system is working exactly as it should (cf. recent talks by Ruth Gilmore and Erica Meiners). Prisons are supposed to break people down; they are supposed to uphold social inequalities and hence the status quo. Likewise, drawing on Cleaver, I argue that hunger and poverty are not unfortunate side effects of neoliberal capitalism, but central parts of this system. They are two of the factors encouraging a scarcity model, one in which people are fighting each other for precious resources. They are also factors hindering people from organizing, or from “improving” their/our lives. In the case of breakfast for children, numerous studies have shown that eating in the morning has considerable impact on one's ability to do well

in school (cf. Staub, Baylor College of Medicine).<sup>109</sup> A breakfast program such as that organized by the Panthers is therefore not simply a way to temporarily alleviate hunger, but also about creating a baseline of well-being that enables people to then fight for change. The power of this sort of initiative was not lost on the government; J. Edgar Hoover wrote about the BPP free breakfast program:

The BCP (Breakfast for Children Program) promotes at least tacit support for the BPP (Black Panther Party) among naïve individuals... And, what is more distressing, provides the BPP with a ready audience composed of highly impressionable youths... Consequently, the BCP represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for (quoted in Mascarenhas-Swan).

The term the Panthers used to describe the breakfast program and other welfare initiatives was “survival pending revolution” (cf Alkebulan, 28). Programs ranged from free food and clothing to sickle-cell anemia screenings, health clinics, eviction resistance, legal aid, and free plumbing and other home maintenance (Bloom and Martin, 184). The programs built a base, and helped the population acquire and maintain the level of well-being that the Panthers considered necessary for engaging in struggle. The Panthers viewed these programs as revolutionary because they were motivated by systemic change, as opposed to reformist programs that are meant “as an appeasing handout, to fool the people and to keep them quiet” (Bobby Seale, quoted in Bloom and Martin, 195).

In a 1968 memo, J. Edgar Hoover established that one of the goals of COINTELPRO<sup>110</sup> in relation to Black nationalists such as the BPP would be to “Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability” (quoted in

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<sup>109</sup> Studies differ in their conclusions of how big the impact of breakfast is on school performance; nonetheless, all of the articles I read did agree that the impact is noteworthy.

<sup>110</sup> Short for Counter Intelligence Program, COINTELPRO was an FBI program that executed covert and barely legal actions against domestic political organizations between 1956 and 1971. The Black Panther Party was one of its main targets.

Bloom and Martin, 202). The breakfast program was one way in which the Panthers gained respectability within poor Black communities, and hence destroying the program was given high priority by the government.

### ***November: Raids***

The morning of November 15, 2011, I wake up with the intention of heading to Zuccotti Park to do the same thing as the day before: make and serve lunch to the hundreds of people gathered there. A few moments of optimism, before I reach for my phone and find text messages from three friends: 1:23am – “FWD: Zuccotti park being raided now! go 2 park!” 7:53 – “Ows was shut down. Police destroyed everything and threw away everything in library.” 8:03 – “Hey FYI they cleared Zuccotti last night/this am. Just read it in the times.” I stay away from Zuccotti that day, cautious of the arrest risk and aware of the precariousness of my legal status in this country. Over the next few weeks, as the movement's anger and sadness turns into frustration and a renewed will to organize, I find out that the kitchen was one of the main sites of struggle during the eviction. Not only did the NYPD destroy thousands of books<sup>111</sup> (Oman-Reagan, 2011a&b) – a politically highly symbolic act that deservedly got a lot of media attention – but they also targeted the kitchen station, an event that barely made the news. The extent of the losses the kitchen suffered are still unclear, but a claim filed against the city in February of 2012 puts the monetary loss at close to \$20,000. Among the items confiscated or destroyed by the police were pots and pans, a bicycle used for generating electricity, plastic utensils, and cold-weather clothing.<sup>112</sup> What, one might ask, makes a sauce pan such a danger to the

<sup>111</sup> In August of 2012, the city shifted the blame to Brookfield Properties, the owners of Zuccotti Park. Cf. Nick Pinto, “City and Brookfield Turn on Each Other in Lawsuits over Zuccotti Eviction, *Village Voice*, [http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2012/08/city\\_and\\_brookf.php](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2012/08/city_and_brookf.php). Accessed September 23, 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Email correspondence among kitchen volunteers.

city, the nation, democracy, or public health, the reasons city officials have given for cracking down on Occupy Wall Street? One answer is that the damage to property at the Zuccotti raid was merely a byproduct of the wanton brutality the NYPD is so fond of engaging in. Perhaps. I want to suggest, though, that there is another possible answer: the pop-up dining service in Zuccotti Park actually did pose a danger to the current public order. It was not a coincidence that the police targeted the kitchen, nor that the kitchen was one of the areas of the park most carefully guarded by the occupiers during the raid. It *did* something: it refused proper labor relations, hence threatening the capitalist imaginary.

The people in the park understood the importance of the kitchen, as evidenced by the efforts to protect it during the raid. These efforts did not save the kitchen's physical space, but it did convince the kitchen workers present that their efforts were worthwhile and should be continued in other forms. And, indeed, the People's Kitchen continued to serve two to three meals a day for the next six months.<sup>113</sup> When, in early 2012, the Occupy Wall Street finances were reaching a dire situation, the kitchen was one of only two operations that continued to receive full funding from the General Assembly<sup>114</sup>, again pointing to the value the movement puts on feeding its participants.

The destruction of the People's Kitchen was not a historical anomaly. In 1969, police officers enter a church on Chicago's West Side, urinating on food meant to be served at the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast program, scheduled to open its

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<sup>113</sup> While not completely discontinued, kitchen operations were scaled down significantly after May 1, 2012.

<sup>114</sup> The other operation was housing. The General Assembly is the decision-making body of Occupy Wall Street. Assemblies take place three times a week (originally there were two general assemblies a *day*) to discuss everything from budgets to cleaning to racism to drumming curfews. Anyone can participate in the assemblies, which are run on a consensus model. For more information, see the NYC General Assembly website: <http://www.nycga.net/events/category/assemblies/>.

Chicago branch the next morning. In the federal government's vicious efforts to eradicate the Black Panther Party, the Breakfast Program was a key focus of attack. The government seems to have comprehended something that many left-wing organizations overlook: that feeding people in ways that restructure social relations is indeed a crucial aspect of systemic change. In the kitchen projects discussed in this chapter, the statement “If I don't work, I don't eat” no longer holds true. Nothing needs to be given in order to receive. And, yet, people work(ed), and participate(d) in community and movement building. It is in this decoupling of participation/work and provision of basic needs that the power of the kitchen projects lies.

In the fall of 2011, at Occupy sites around the country, kitchens were set up and meals doled out two or three times a day. The occupation in Zuccotti Park in New York City had an efficient kitchen operation, dubbed the People's Kitchen, where I volunteered from November 2011 to September 2012. The food at the People's Kitchen was free (though there was usually a donation box, and many of those who ate did contribute some money, albeit not enough to cover costs); no claims to contributions of money or labor would get you to the front of the line. If you were at a meeting, you might get food delivered, though not as a reward for the meeting – all the bread pudding in the world could not make up for sitting through spokes council<sup>115</sup> – but in order to make sure that projects could be carried out without sacrificing bodily nourishment.

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<sup>115</sup> A spokes council is a directly democratic decision-making model that allows large groups to come to consensus. Subgroups each designate a “spoke”; the spokes come together to discuss decisions, regularly going back to their subgroups to come to consensus. Spokes are not representatives, and cannot make decisions without their subgroups. Because of the multiple levels of conversation, spokes councils can often take several hours.



My interest in the kitchen working group<sup>116</sup> was piqued in October of 2011, when rumors started circulating that the People's Kitchen was shutting down because the working group members did not want to serve the homeless people who came to Zuccotti Park. Disturbed by these rumors, but even more by how uncritically they were accepted as true by movement participants, I decided to start attending kitchen working group meetings. I quickly found out that the kitchen never shut down – in fact, not a single meal was missed – but had decided on a week of minimalist meals of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and pizza, in order to have some time to figure out how to respond to the growing population of Zuccotti Park. While core working group members were overwhelmed by the influx of people, and frustrated that the police and city soup kitchens were directing hungry people to Zuccotti Park rather than providing help,<sup>117</sup> there was no question within the group as to whether everyone had a right to food or not. The issue the organizers wanted to address, then, was not who was deserving, but how to meet the food needs of a growing movement.

### ***Surveillance and capitalism***

RK Byers calls the Breakfast for Children Program “perhaps the most creative, ingenious, daring and visionary of [the Panthers'] initiatives.” The program, he argues, was so important because it mixed nutritious food with political and cultural education. It was a

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<sup>116</sup> The activities of Occupy Wall Street were organized through “working groups”: a group of people dedicated to a specific task, problem, or goal. Some working groups, such as kitchen, library, and “comfort” (which provided clothes and other items to make life in the park more comfortable), maintained infrastructure; other groups worked on organizational tasks, such as facilitating meetings; some working groups addressed specific political questions.

<sup>117</sup> Whether accurate or not, kitchen working group members had heard that soup kitchens around the city, as well as the NYPD, directed those they felt they did not have resources to serve, to Zuccotti Park, promising that there would be food and a safe place to sleep there. I am inclined to believe this, especially in light of the response of the city government and large humanitarian groups like the Red Cross to Occupy Sandy a year later: seeing Occupy's effective and cheap aid to those affected by the hurricane, the city and large organizations stepped back, arguably doing much less than their fair share of the emergency and recovery work.

core part of the Black Panther Party's effort to “create an organization that would be a microcosm of the world they were trying to create” (Spencer, 92). First implemented in Oakland in early 1969, after being announced in the fall of 1968, at its peak forty-five BPP chapters across the nation partook in the breakfast program, feeding thousands of children each morning (Heynen, 407). A year later, the number of branches had dropped to twenty-nine, but at 22,000, the number of participating children was still significant (Murch, 174). Roger Guenveur Smith, award-winning playwright and performer of “A Huey P. Newton Story,” argues that, in the eyes of the FBI, “it was not the guns [of the BPP]; it was the Free Children's Breakfast Program that was the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States of America. ... It was the Free Children's Breakfast Program because [it] engendered a certain following on the Black community's part. I mean, nobody can argue with free grits” (PBS; see also Heynen, 414). Yet, even though (or, in Smith's analysis, because) “nobody can argue with free grits,” the FBI made sure to shut the program down. Tactics included convincing stores to not contribute food; dissuading property owners, such as churches, from hosting the program (Jones, 424-6); and spreading rumors that the food served by the program had been poisoned (Bloom and Martin, 186). According to one Panther, in Chicago the police broke into the church where the program was housed and urinated on the food (Heynen, 414). The government also engaged in activities that did not directly target the breakfast program, but effectively prevented it from functioning; for example, by putting Black Panther Party members in jail on high bails for “disturbing the peace,” the police could restrict members' capacities to carry out the day-to-day tasks of the party (Jones, 424).

The Breakfast for Children program was just one branch of the BPP's “survival

programs” (a term I explain below); these programs also included giving bags of groceries to families, as well as other initiatives geared toward the welfare of the Black population. In this chapter, I focus on the breakfast program, for two reasons: it most closely parallels food operations at Bucky's and Occupy, in that participants ate together, rather than bringing food to their individual homes; and the program received spectacular attention from the government, which saw it as a threat to national security. I am interested in what exactly made this program such a threat, and pose that there is something about eating food together, without money being exchanged, that is inherently threatening to a capitalist state system.

The kitchen at Bucky's has never been raided by the police, nor is this a direct concern. When military planes repeatedly fly over Bucky's one summer, people wonder what horrible things they could possibly find here. People growing turnips, sitting around talking forever. Someone jokes that we should build a giant cannon out of papier maché. Of course we don't do this – no need to draw unnecessary attention to the hollow, especially considering the police intervention that took place on the land shortly before Bucky's was established.

Are the military planes actually surveying Bucky's, or are they just passing by? While the latter is the more likely option, the thought that maybe the military is keeping an eye on Bucky's is not mere paranoid self-aggrandizing on the part of community members. Previous police and FBI presence on the land raises these thoughts in people's minds. The government knows things, this much it has made clear when it has sent agents

to talk to residents at Bucky's.<sup>118</sup> These worries, while presented jokingly at Bucky's, might actually be worth taking seriously, in light of stories such as this one: in the summer of 2013, Garden of Eden, a small organic farm in Texas, was subject to a SWAT raid. Police claimed that they were searching for marijuana plants, but the plants that were seized were legal ones including okra and blackberry bushes (Balko, 2013).<sup>119</sup> It seems quite possible that Garden of Eden was subjected to a raid because it was “odd,” outside of proper relations to the state and capitalism. Could Bucky's, too, be at risk of arbitrary raids, especially considering that the land was once used for growing cannabis?

For the time being, Bucky's has a cordial, if tense, relationship with the police, at least the local sheriff's office. Every summer, the police will show up a few days before the yearly music festival starts, checking in and asking if Bucky's needs anything. Recently, they have offered to patrol the temporary guest parking lot. These gestures, presented as helpful, make residents at Bucky's uncomfortable: they mean that the police is watching them, and are seen as a warning to behave and keep guests in line. The Bucky's community also knows that behind the friendly words are actions that speak to a stricter behavior: during the week of the festival, cars with out-of-state license plates, especially those looking like they are carrying hippies or punks, are routinely stopped and searched.

In Oakland, California, crime rates went down 19 percent in late October of 2011, the most intense period of the Occupy movement there (KTVU). Rebecca Solnit writes that

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<sup>118</sup> The governmental information gathering on Bucky's is further reason why the IRB regulations are largely moot here. The information is out there, already in the “wrong” hands.

<sup>119</sup> While all three have leaves with five points, blackberry, okra, and cannabis plants do not look very similar.

“Occupy was such a powerful force for nonviolence that it was already solving Oakland's chronic crime and violence problems just by giving people hope and meals and solidarity and conversation.” Solnit's claim needs to be read critically: crime rates are subjective, reflective not only of violence but also of the social construction of crime, the criminalization of bodies, populations, places. What kind of crimes were committed less than usual during this period? (Or, to be more exact, which crimes were found out about less than usual?) But regardless of the “truth” of these statistics, they had an effect. Consider the police and city government's reaction to the statistics of declining crime rates. Police Chief Howard Jordan wrote in an email to one of Mayor Jean Quan's advisers: “Not sure how you want to share the good news. It may be counter to our statement that the Occupy movement is negatively impacting crime in Oakland” (KTVU). A few days later, the Occupy Oakland encampment was raided.<sup>120</sup>

The raids on Occupy sites around the country were not sudden; according to an article published in the *New York Times* on Christmas Day 2012, “The F.B.I. Records show that as early as September 2011 [that is, the month that the occupation of Zuccotti Park started], an agent from a counterterrorism task force in New York notified officials of two landmarks in Lower Manhattan – Federal Hall and the Museum of American Finance – ‘that their building was identified as a point of interest for the [sic] Occupy Wall Street’” (Schmidt and Moynihan, A18). As Schmidt and Moynihan report, this monitoring started well before the Zuccotti encampment: “For example, according to a memo written by the F.B.I.'s New York field office in August 2011, bureau personnel met

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<sup>120</sup> It would potentially be fruitful to read the situation in Oakland together with the events in Oaxaca in 2006, where during the uprising/movement of APPO (The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca), there was no police force in the city of Oaxaca de Juarez. According to Gustavo Esteva, “a human rights group reported that in those months there was less violence in Oaxaca than in any other similar period in the last 10 years” (23).

with officials from the New York Stock Exchange to discuss 'the planned Anarchist protest titled "Occupy Wall Street," scheduled for September 17, 2011"' (A18). An article in *Common Dreams*, a leftwing news source, states that the surveillance of Occupy activists begun already in August of 2011; that is, while OWS was still in the planning stages (Brown, 2012). What is notable about Brown's article is not so much the fact that the FBI surveilled Occupy – this hardly came as news to organizers – but rather the close cooperation between the FBI and businesses. Brown states: "As early as August 19, 2011, the FBI in New York was meeting with the New York Stock Exchange to discuss the Occupy Wall Street protests that wouldn't start for another month. By September, prior to the start of OWS, the FBI was notifying businesses that they might be the focus of an OWS protest."

The locations of these events matter, of course. Occupy Wall Street and the branches of the BPP Breakfast Program were located in cities, with heavy police presence. The location of the first Occupy camp in the heart of global capitalism was not accidental, and was meant to draw attention. Bucky's, on the other hand, is intentionally located in a "remote" location, without permanent state surveillance. Still, it would be a mistake to think that surveillance and police intervention is limited to cities; as the section above, as well as the previous chapter's discussion of the FLDS, shows, state surveillance and violence functions differently depending on the locale, but it is rarely altogether absent. By juxtaposing these examples, I want to highlight the connections between these interventions, especially as they relate to food and non-reliance on global state-sanctioned capitalism.

### ***Still the long month of November: Thanksgiving***

A week after the raid on Zuccotti Park, I am cooking again, this time at one of the People's Kitchen's satellite locations, a soup kitchen in East New York, Brooklyn. At 2pm, after the soup kitchen has finished serving its daily lunch, a change of shift takes place, the regular staff being replaced by Occupy volunteers. Under the tutelage of skilled chefs, both crews are adept at cooking up wonderfully tasty and fairly nutritious meals for hundreds of people each day, all done on a shoestring (nay, a thread) budget. Today, both meals are slightly more extravagant than usual, the mood definitely more festive, as we are preparing Thanksgiving feasts. The People's Kitchen has been planning the Thanksgiving lunch for weeks, and although the raid threw a wrench in the works, we are determined to find a way to serve the meal. Even before the eviction, the planning process had not been an easy one. In addition to all the logistics (soliciting donations, cooking and transporting food, avoiding police barricades), there was the question of the ethics of celebrating a holiday founded on colonialism and genocide. While the many critiques that have been aimed at the whiteness and the obliviousness to racism and settler colonialism of Occupy Wall Street are valid and necessary, there was also a great deal of awareness, discussion, and “diversity” in the movement. The kitchen still had a long way to go before it could even begin to call ourselves anti-racist or anti-colonialist (or feminist), but the discussion was been ongoing, albeit often interrupted. In this particular discussion, about Thanksgiving, the final decision was thus to serve a meal, but to do so while talking to people about the history of the holiday.

The thought behind the meal was that people come together around food, and Thanksgiving was a strategic moment to bring people back to Zuccotti Park, if only for a

few hours. Is it this capacity to bring people together that makes food operations so dangerous? A community that feeds itself can function on its own. On Thanksgiving Day morning, we met at Texas Rotisserie – a small restaurant in the Wall Street area owned by an Egyptian man supportive of the movement – and assembled hundreds of boxed meals from the food we had cooked the day before. These were then handed out outside of the barricades of Zuccotti Park, together with hundreds more meals donated by labor unions. One of the reasons the city gave for removing the encampment was that the park should be available for individuals to sit down and eat their own lunch, an activity that was hampered by too many people engaged in collective endeavors. This meant that we could not serve food in the park, but we could give people individually boxed lunches that they then could, on their own volition, decide to eat in the park, sitting next to each other.

Thanksgiving in the park was a partial success: we served the meal, but the conversation about settler colonialism was limited, and most people in the park did not partake in it. So, as seems to be the case with OWS events, the good intentions to address oppression did not lead to much. This claim, however, needs to be complicated. Yes, Occupy often failed to live up to its intentions of addressing oppression. The question must be asked, though: how does one have difficult discussions within the movement, while arguing with police about being allowed to bring boxed lunches into a park on a city block, where for years businessmen in suits have been eating lunch undisturbed? These challenges do not excuse the oppressive structures within Occupy, but must be taken into consideration.



### ***May: Labor***

It is May Day, the General Strike<sup>121</sup> that is supposed to revive the Occupy Movement. On May first, 2012, a range of groups and individuals, many of them Occupy related, others parts of the immigrant rights movement, hold a May Day protest-celebration in New York City. This day marks the end of the People's Kitchen's daily operations, though the group continues to come together to cook food for specific events for several months after this, and the network says alive, albeit with very sporadic contact, to this day. Although only weeks ago resources seemed to have dried up, the kitchen pulls together funds, donations, and volunteers, and on May first we serve thousands of meals, in seven installations, ranging from breakfast in the rain in Bryant Park in Midtown, to dinner at the lower tip of Manhattan after the afternoon's march downtown.

As I am handing out breakfast sandwiches, eggs, and oranges at Bryant Park in midtown Manhattan, I get the same series of questions over and over again: “Am I allowed to have this food? For free? Why?” These conversations strike me as the core of the kitchen's work (and that of Mutual Aid, the Occupy working group we are serving breakfast together with). There is a pensive look on people's faces when we tell them that, yes, this food is free for everyone, because we believe everyone deserves to eat. People stop, ponder this notion, then take another egg, give us a big smile, and say “thank you!” Something changes in that moment: a thought-process starts in people's minds that maybe they do deserve to eat, that maybe we all deserve nourishment, and that maybe people are goodhearted enough to share with one another, without expecting anything in return. This

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<sup>121</sup> A general strike is a strike that stretches across workplaces, ideally throughout a whole community. It has been used as a political strategy, and was revived by the Occupy movement. Though none of the strikes Occupy initiated involved even close to the majority of workers in a city, a couple on the West Coast, notably in Oakland, reached proportions large enough to disrupt trade.

thought-process is dangerous to capitalism, and to a hierarchical state system, because it opens up the possibility that maybe oppressive systems are not needed, that maybe people do not need to be managed, that maybe not everything has to be about fending for oneself.

Decoupling basic needs from money can serve to de-privatize our lives, through subverting the work imperative. At a plenary talk at the first United States Social Forum, held in Atlanta in the summer of 2007, Native Studies scholar-activist Andrea Smith discussed the relation between reproductive labor and “the revolution”:

Finally, when we think of the work of the revolution, we do collective work in the public sphere, but we don't collectivize the childcare, we don't collectivize our income-sharing, we don't collectivize feeding ourselves. So we build a movement that's not accessible to most people...Because we don't have a sufficient intersectional analysis about race and gender, we end up with groups supporting all sorts of bizarre platforms that are completely counterproductive.

Queer land, and to some extent Occupy Wall Street, are collectivizing private life. Of the activities Smith mentions, feeding is the most collectivized, as I have described above. Other projects are also in the works. As I was leaving Bucky's after a recent visit, two residents were setting up an informal structure for providing childcare – free of charge – to children in the neighborhood. Larisa Mann, scholar of copyright and decolonialism, wrote after a visit to Zuccotti Park:

The society we live in parcels out living space and space to talk and think, based on money first and foremost. Caregetting/giving, learning, reading, talking, getting/giving food, communicating – all are privatized more and more. People assume they are supposed to happen in our homes, but fewer people can actually afford to do them at home, or can't afford the home itself. We are supposed to hire people or services to provide them, if we can afford it, and ration our participation in all of these most human and humanizing activities based on their cost.

So the most radical thing the occupations have done is made visible a lot of that work, and made it accessible. They show it is possible for people to self-organize things like food, like medical care, childcare, a library, media centers, internet, etc. (108).

Bucky's and Occupy thus both perform the kind of social services that under a neoliberal

regime are outsourced from the state onto the “private sphere” and “civil society.” And yet, they are read as threats to the order, not good citizen projects. We should thus not read these ventures simply as service providers, alleviators of the pain of capitalism.

Earlier in her speech, Andrea Smith had pointed to the limits of the revolutionary imagination:

This sense of natural social hierarchy [that hetero-patriarchy institutes] then impacts what kind of revolutionary imagination we can even come up with. First of all, let's just look at the slogan of the US Social Forum, “Another World Is Possible, Another US Is Necessary.” But the question to put on the table is, if another world is possible, is the US itself necessary? If we put all our radical imaginations together, is the best we can come up with a kinder, gentler settler colonial state that's based on slavery and genocide?

What is our imagination capable of? How can we expand it to hold deep social change?

The limits of the imagination that Smith points to are not surprising; of course we think we need the state if we have not figured out how to take care of needs and desires outside of the state system. Only once we do not need the state for survival can we move away from the state structure. Considering the Black Panthers’ “survival pending revolution” within Smith’s framework shows what differentiates these programs from service-provision: they are not a way to avoid revolution, but to make revolution possible. No wonder, then, that the FBI found free grits to be such a threat.

### ***June: Gathering***

Each day, more and more people are arriving at Bucky’s. The land’s yearly music festival – a fundraiser for the mortgage – is drawing nearer by the minute, and guests and organizers are making their way here. From a comfortable dozen, the number of human beings on the land is growing to thirty, fifty, a hundred. In a week or two, an estimated five hundred people will be here.

At the Nashville airport and Cookeville bus stop, festival-goers waiting for a ride are easily recognizable: white, tanned from weeks on the road, with asymmetrical haircuts or dreads, patched clothes, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes. Once, when going to Bucky's, another passenger on the Greyhound leaving Asheville – five hours away – asked me if that's where I was going. We rode the rest of the way together, sharing stories and discount-store chocolate.

As this crowd descends, I retreat, often into the kitchen. Full of cooks and burning stoves, the heat of the Tennessee summer air is magnified, yet it is somehow easier to breathe in here. It becomes a safe space for many a festival-anxious person – those who find the crowds too overwhelming, the drunken rambunctiousness intimidating – who are put to work chopping vegetables or washing dishes, mundane tasks that take the mind off the hustle and bustle outside. Work slots fill up fast; people *want* to do kitchen prep work, sweating and laboring for a few hours, taking a break from lazying on the lawn with friends.

This willingness to partake in the work of feeding the community is not limited to the carnivalesque times of festivals; on the contrary, it exists year-round. This aspect of the kitchen at Bucky's has fascinated me from the start, and I am still astounded by the meal system. People take care of their own breakfast needs, lunch is improvised, and dinner is always a communal affair. With a dozen residents and a slew of visitors to feed, I had expected a chore wheel or similar mechanism for dividing up tasks, but none exists. A week or so before the festival, when the number of people on the land approaches fifty, a chore chart is instituted, but it is voluntary to sign up. Despite this lack of order, I have never encountered a missed meal at Bucky's. Most people who have ever lived

communally would, I am sure, agree that such a disorganized yet successful meal system is nothing less than utopian. And it is not unique to Bucky's; similar meal systems can be found in the broader queer land community. In this scenario, labor cannot be exchanged for food. Nobody has more claim to the meal than others. If somebody is not present at dinnertime at Bucky's, a plate will often be put aside for them. Food is a communal right, not the wages of work. In this way, although a good portion of the food is bought on the so-called free market, meals at Bucky's chip away, if even in the slightest of ways, at the capitalist economy, instituting instead a gift-economy for the vital needs of life.

The gift-economy of food at Bucky's and the larger gayborhood is tied to a distinct temporality, where food is provided, but not on demand. Peter Hennen, in an ethnography of the Radical Faeries, analyzes the approach to efficiency and inefficiency in these communities:

For example, there is widespread agreement within the group that Faeries never agree about anything, yet their very existence depends to some degree upon consensus. Most Faeries understand their community as intentional, but exactly what this intentionality consists of is an open question. Refreshingly, Faerie culture seems to continually privilege process over results. Faerie enterprises, from preparing a meal to creating a sanctuary, are notoriously inefficient affairs – and this is just the way the Faeries like it (61).

This same inefficiency can be found at Bucky's, and I see it as part of what makes the disorganization there function. If people expected to be fed at a certain hour, a system for ensuring that cooking started on time would be needed. This is not, however, the temporality of Bucky's: there is time to wait for a meal, and if it takes too long, one can always have a snack.

The inefficiency at Bucky's and Hickory Knoll is accepted – and appreciated – only in conjunction with a sense of security. People might not know exactly when dinner

will be ready, but they do know that it will appear eventually. On days when crowds are larger than usual, and there is concern that the food will not be enough for everyone, or at least that not everyone will get a share of the most delicious of the items (chocolate, homemade wine, newly picked snow peas) and will have to make do with beans and rice, the sense of frustration in the air is palpable. Frustration also arises around unacknowledged privilege, and the way this plays out in who completes tasks. Dishes, for example, are predominantly washed by people socialized as girls and women. The same division of labor that is found in mainstream capitalist society is thus reproduced in the voluntary labor system at Bucky's.

A tendency toward inefficiency does not fully explain the work of kitchen operations where individual input and "reward" are disconnected, however. The large-scale kitchen operations of Occupy Wall Street and the Black Panthers were highly efficient. And, yet, they functioned outside of the capitalist economy which touts itself as the beacon of efficiency. At the People's Kitchen, money was rarely, if ever, a problem. Donations of both food and cash were plentiful, and the decision-making bodies of OWS were always forthcoming with financing for the food operation. Staffing the kitchen was more difficult; while many people offered to volunteer, gaining consistency was extremely challenging, and a small group of people ended up spending most of their waking hours on the project, with no compensation, leading to burnout and, in some accounts, trauma.<sup>122</sup> While we certainly can – and should – critique an activist culture that pushes people to work to the point of burnout, it is also important to note the role of the capitalist system in the lives of the kitchen members. People had other full-time jobs and

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<sup>122</sup> Personal communication with kitchen members, 2012.

were still imbricated in a capitalist economy that demanded too much of us. It was the combination of paid and unpaid labor that eventually drove people to leave the movement.

### ***January: Retreat***

I haven't seen Samantha for weeks when, in early 2012, I run into her at Bluestockings, a volunteer-run feminist-radical bookstore on New York City's Lower East Side. "Well, I left the Kitchen, as you probably figured out," she says, "I'm doing work with Feminist DA<sup>123</sup> now." She looks relieved, embodying a calm notably different from the state of constant stress I am used to seeing her in. For most of the fall, Samantha was one of the core members of the People's Kitchen, shopping at wholesale markets, coordinating food deliveries, and attending seemingly endless and usually chaotic meetings. "You got stuck with the kitchen," she says to me, "but there's so much else in this movement." Yes, I respond, I know: "I still care so much about the kitchen and believe in its mission, but it has turned into such a white-dude fest." Samantha scoffs: "Turned into? It always was."

Maybe Samantha is right that the kitchen was dominated by white men since its early days; however, things have gotten progressively worse in this regard since I joined the kitchen crew in early November. Over the past few months, women and people of color have left the kitchen group in a steady stream (and, it should be said, others have joined, and some – including the women who were crucial to founding the kitchen –

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<sup>123</sup> DA is the acronym for Direct Action, one of the plethora of short-hand terms that simplifies and exclusivizes discourse in movements like Occupy Wall Street. While in a broad sense, "direct action" refers to any activity that attempts to create change directly, not through the mediation of political representatives, in the context of Occupy Wall Street, "direct action" tends to refer to the DA working group, whose activities are often more confrontational than other OWS working groups. The Feminist DA was started to create a direct action group free from the male dominance of DA. For an in-depth look at direct action in the non-parliamentary North American left of the late 20th and early 21st century, see David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography*, Oakland, CA, 2009: AK Press.

stayed). I stopped attending regular Kitchen meetings in March, tired of being shut down by the same voices from the same bodies engaging in the same in-fighting and male bravado as usual. Loud voices screaming at each other, fighting about what often seemed to me to be nothing at all. Or engaging in side conversations, keeping everyone at the meeting waiting as they said hello to their buddy walking by. A gesture was made toward respecting women through a comment of “Ladies first.” Yes, people spoke up against the male chauvinism, but it had scant results. After months of this male supremacy, I decide to focus my energies on two Kitchen special projects, also predominantly made up of white men, but white men who are willing to listen and examine their privilege.

Though almost summer warm this year, January in the US Northeast is still dark, still a time of retreat and reflection. Having lost its home base in Zuccotti Park two months earlier, Occupy Wall Street has decided to use this time to reevaluate: think through what happened in the fall, and devise strategies for the spring. The People's Kitchen does not get – or, rather, does not give itself – a break. There is a feeling of constant urgency, a necessity and a pride in serving at least two meals a day no matter what. Some of us float the idea of a retreat, or at least a potluck, one night of cooking for ourselves instead of for The Movement, but there is never time, always too much to do. As any experienced organizer could have told us, the result is not a continuously efficient kitchen, but rather burn-out, a constant overturn of members as people take their own retreats and never come back. The core group shrinks, volunteers become less steady and hence less reliable.

I also take a temporary retreat, hopping on a midnight train to Georgia and finding



my way to Tennessee, down into the hollow. Here, too, January is a time of reflection and rest. There is not much else to do when daylight is portioned out in such small doses. As the outside becomes too cold for day-long porch-sitting, the kitchen at Bucky's fills up, a huddle of people around the wood stove. There is always some winter drama here, I am told; how else are you going to pass time sharing a small space with the same dozen faces for three months? But the drama here arguably does not reach the same proportions as on Wall Street. You just have to work it out. Soon enough, your room will get cold and you will get tired of sitting wrapped up in a sleeping bag by yourself all day, and you just have to make your way over to that wood stove to make amends.

As spaces, Occupy Wall Street and Bucky's facilitate two completely different modes of dealing with challenges and conflicts: at Occupy Wall Street, outbursts and dissipation reign supreme; at Bucky's, constant community process within a small isolated group is the common mode of resolution. There are outbursts at Bucky's, too, but they must eventually be addressed, or, as one community member has said, they fester.

The Black Panther Party saw their “survival programs” – which in addition to food also included health care, buses, schools, and clothing – as neither revolutionary nor reformist, but as a way to organize people for the revolution (Spencer, 106). One cannot fight for systemic change on an empty stomach. Further, by providing high-quality services, the Panthers aimed to show that Black people (though far from everyone who accessed their services were Black) did not have to put up with the sub-par services provided by the government: the program showcased that good food could be available to everyone (Spencer, 107). It is this perspective which make ventures such as the Black Panther

breakfast program and the OWS People's Kitchen different from the pure charity model of what has been referred to as the non-profit industrial complex. The goal of a soup kitchen is to feed hungry people, period. It is about alleviating symptoms. While I am sure that most people who run soup kitchens would like to see a world without hunger, the non-profit model of service provision paradoxically requires that problems are sustained. As the contributors to the influential anthology *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* argue, non-profit organizations, especially those with paid staff, risk losing their livelihoods if the underlying conditions that cause problems such as hunger are changed (INCITE!, eds.). The Black Panthers or Occupy did not have to worry about this. Though at times the BPP was able to pay its core activists, the stipends were quite paltry and arguably not enough that someone would join the party for the economic benefits. The People's Kitchen was completely volunteer-run. While some participants held down fulltime jobs, others worked odd jobs or part time, or even lost their employment due to their movement involvement. The participants do not benefit, at least not financially, from hunger. As Larisa Mann puts it, projects like OWS shows “how you can do without the Man” (109).

### ***Calls and creation***

*[If I moved] I would take my community-building skills with me. I've learned a lot out here. The community has taught all of us a whole lot. Some of us gonna stay for a week and go on and take a bit of that with with them, some of us stay for decades and go on and take a bit of that with them. Some of us are up there in heaven right now saying, “Bitch, shut up, I don't care if you are God, I know how to do it.”*

– Bill, long-time gayborhood resident

Occupy Wall Street operated on a different model than most social movements in the past few decades. There were, as I discuss elsewhere in this chapter, no clearly articulated demands. The movement was also flexible in its approaches, re-appropriating the waste of

the state apparatus. For example, when the police decided to enforce a law against using sound amplifiers, OWS instituted the “people’s microphone” to carry voices through loud crowds. The concept of fermentation can help us think through this: waste is not discarded, but rather re-integrated into this system, turned into something useful. Protesters could have decided to defy police commands and used amplifiers anyway, which surely would have led to the amplifiers being taken away, and the speakers likely being arrested (not inherently a bad strategy). Instead, the people in the park used the restrictions set up by the government to practice a method of speaking that turned into one of the movement’s most emblematic tools: “mic checks” are still being used to disrupt events and call out oppressive structures.

Separatist land projects and Occupy Wall Street have both been referred to as prefigurative; that is, as modeling a different way of being, a new world to come (cf. Sine Anahita, and David Graeber, 2011). Farhang Rouhani, in his article about queer anarchist organizing in Richmond, VA, describes prefigurative politics as being about process – living the change you want to see – but also as “requir[ing] a utopic vision committed to defining and realizing a desired future” (376). Such a futuristic vision is not central to Bucky’s, nor was it frequently discussed in Zuccotti Park. Considering the demands by the media to articulate long-term goals of Occupy, participants were surprisingly focused on the here-and-now. While in some ways these projects do serve as models, I do not see this as their key function. They are not about prefiguring what could be; they about living it in the present. A “figurative” politics, if you will. Bill, a resident of the gayborhood, puts it this way: “here in the country...people come together to build, to create. I mean,

it's still supportive, it's still working with people in need but...the projects tend to be not quite as depressing as the city projects.”<sup>124</sup> Among the projects Bill and I have talked about are pancake breakfasts for four hundred people, putting up walls on houses, and building paths through the gardens.

One can question Bill's assertion that the difference in forms of community building is due to geographic locale, but the way that he describes community building in the gayborhood is still of crucial importance. Community is created through building what you want, not protesting what you do not want. It is not about asking for things for the future, or even really about showing what things can be like. People come together not to protest the government or a corporation (although gayborhood members sometimes venture to nearby cities to partake in these activities), but to build houses, cook meals, put on concerts. Rather than demanding something from the government, this is about shaping the present through seemingly mundane practices.

The mundane, figurative politics of Bucky's are echoed at Occupy Wall Street. So much of the work there – at least in the first 59 days, when there was an encampment in Zuccotti Park – was about these mundane activities. It was about serving food, about making sure people were clothed and dry, about sanitation. I believe it is to a large extent this focus on day-to-day maintenance that has made the Occupy movement so effective at getting people engaged and providing the kind of hope that leads to action, and that differentiates it from many other social movements. True, there might be goals that Occupy wants to achieve in the future, but by its mere existence, it has already achieved something big: a different mode of life for those involved. This is a mode of life that at its

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with “Bill,” Tennessee, August 2010.

best sustains further action (though it can also be draining and, as we saw in the discussion of male dominance in the People's Kitchen, a source of oppression and abuse, as it is not isolated from the power structures of society at large). Goals and methods line up: basic needs are taken care of, and taken care of in a way that shows that "a different world is possible" (to quote the alterglobalization movement many core Occupy organizers came out of); indeed, this different world is already happening.

As the media – established sources as well as blogs and other informal outlets – began reporting on the Occupy phenomenon in the fall of 2011, one of the common topics discussed was the Occupy movement's lack of demands. Those reporting would either be critical of this lack (a movement cannot work without demands!) or confused (what's the point of having a movement without demands?). Responses from within the movement were varied: some argued that the lack of demands was indeed a weakness, and that Occupy should formulate demands; others claimed that "we don't make demands, we *are* the demand"<sup>125</sup>; and some said that demands were beside the point. My analysis falls into the latter category: Occupy was not about demands, it was about something else. But what is this "something else"? How do we make sense of organizing efforts that do not aim to force the government, businesses, or other institutions to change their practices? The media's confusion around the lack of demands is understandable, because the concept of demands is how we make sense of social movements; it is the term we have for describing their work. We need, then, other conceptual frameworks. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten discuss the notion of "call" as being more applicable to Occupy than "demand." Says Harney:

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<sup>125</sup> The argument behind this statement is that simply by taking up public space, occupiers were forcing the powers-that-be to pay attention to the masses, and to take people into consideration in decision-making processes.

a call, a call to disorder,...is already an enactment, an ontological enactment of something. So, the demand is uncompromising, but it's still in the realm of positing something that's not there, which is fine because there are indeed things that are not there. But I think the call, in the way I would understand it, the call, as in the call and response, the response is already there before the call goes out. You're already in something (Harney and Moten, 133-4).

The moment a person stepped foot in Zuccotti Park during the occupation, they were in this “something” that Harney refers to. In the case of the kitchen, the call “everyone should get to eat” was already answered, through the provision of food for everyone. Being given a response – food – is what prompted people to make the call – an analysis of food as something everyone deserves.

Shifting from a framework of demands to one of a call can also help us understand the culture of silence in the gayborhood that I discussed in the prelude to the dissertation, and how this silence should not be read as a failure at doing political work. We can pose the notion of the call in response to MaxZine's statement, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, that Bucky's is not a land movement: even if it is not a movement, something happens here. In the gayborhood, the call is more of a whisper or a soft conversation, yet a call nonetheless. Rarely do people arrive here knowing exactly what they want. Instead, it is through living here, and encountering certain modes of living, that desires are shaped. Visitors to Bucky's are given a response, for example in the shape of outdoor shitters, and this elicits a call: “I want to live a life not structured by indoor plumbing.”

A demand institutes limits. The students who in the fall of 2009 occupied buildings on campuses across the University of California system write: “Why No Demands? First, because anything we might win now would be too insignificant” (*After the Fall*, 20). They write that when students organize against cuts at universities – the kind faced at the University of California at the time of the occupations – they often

“only...win back half of what they had already lost, a half that [is] again taken away one or two years later” (*After the Fall*, 20). Further, they point out, whatever demands they could make, such as “a reduction or freeze of student fees, an end to the layoffs and furloughs....would mean only a return to the status quo of the last year or the year before,” which they occupiers considered to be “inadequate by any but the most cowardly measure” (*After the Fall*, 20). By moving away from a politics of demands, the student occupiers could formulate a much more expansive vision, one that put into question the very structure of the university.

Though the UC student occupiers warn against demands, stating that they lead to a “process of negotiation [that] is dangerous for a movement” and “often signals its death,” I do not see demands as inherently in opposition to a politics of the call. Demands can be woven into the call. The Black Panther Party's ten-point program and platform is an excellent example of interweaving call and demand. To a large extent, the platform consists of demands on the US government; however, as the reader moves through the ten points, it becomes increasingly clear that the demands are so large as to fall outside the scope of the government's actions, and thus become a call. Point 1: “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.” Freedom and self-determination are not something the government just gives, which the Panthers were well aware of. This point, then, is not a demand but rather a declaration of what the BPP is fighting for. Point #2, however, is directly focused on the government: “We want full employment for our people.” The BPP go on to explain where the responsibility for this lies: “We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every man [sic] employment or guaranteed income.” Point #3 is a combination of large-scale

visionary societal demand and direct demand on the government: “We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community,” further explained as “We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules was promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of black people. We will accept the payment as currency which will be distributed to our many communities.” The following demands, 4 through 9, are directed to the government, demanding housing, education, exemption from military service, an end to police brutality and the murder of black people, and a release of all black men [sic] from the prison system. Point 10, however, calls for the possible independence of a Black nation from the United States: “We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.” In the explanatory paragraph, the BPP quotes the Declaration of Independence to argue that an independent nation should be formed. Surely, the BPP never thought that the US government would agree to these demands; rather, the ten points served as a rallying cry, showing the enormous issues facing the Black community, and the systemic quality of these issues.

The kinds of politics engaged by the call are by necessity material, inscribed in people’s bodies and in the spaces where participants exist. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam, in an exchange with Jayna Brown, on the collaborative website Bullybloggers, writes about Occupy:



the occupation groups do not need an agenda, their pain and their presence *is* the agenda. They do not want to present a manifesto, they actually are themselves the manifestation of discontent. The 99%'ers simply show up, take up space, make noise, witness. This is a form of political response that does not announce itself as politics, instead it enters quietly into the public sphere, sits down and refuses to leave.

Bucky's is not as noisy, does not announce itself as widely, but also takes up space as a way of manifesting its existence, partly as a "political response," but largely as a way of being.

To me, it is in this figurative politics, as much as in community members' sexual preferences, that the queerness of Bucky's and the gayborhood lies. This means that "queer" is a matter of political economy as much as sexuality; indeed, as I argue in chapters two and three and the conclusion, the history of land struggles shows that sexuality, politics, and economy cannot be separated. In making the argument that figurative politics are (at least in the cases of Bucky's and Occupy Wall Street) in a sense queer, I draw on Lisa Duggan's post, also on *Bullybloggers*:

It isn't enough to critique neoliberal capitalism's devastating impact on the quality of life of the 99%[,] as OWS has shown at Liberty Plaza<sup>126</sup> and elsewhere, beginning to actually live otherwise is crucial to generating a sense of political possibility. Imagining alternative life worlds – other ways of living, being, knowing and making, beyond conventional arrangements of production, intimacy and leisure – is the primary work of queer politics and queer theory.

This argument about figurative politics as queer does not deny the sometimes stiflingly heterosexual environment of Occupy Wall Street, but it does point to how OWS challenges some of the foundations of heteronormativity: the public-private divide, the

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<sup>126</sup> This is the original name of Zuccotti Park, a name which was reclaimed by the Occupiers to mark the liberation of public space. Many occupations have provided new names for the parks they are staying in, symbolizing the spirit of the movement, such as Oscar Grant Plaza in Oakland and Troy Davis Park in Atlanta. In New York City, Liberty Plaza and Zuccotti Park are used interchangeably by movement members; in this dissertation, I use Zuccotti Park, since this is the name I have heard most frequently from participants.

privatization of reproduction that has been such a crucial aspect of the process of enclosure (cf. Federici, 2004).

The focus on day-to-day life and survival, and the use of what Moten and Harney terms the call – rather than demands – decenters the government. This is, I have argued in this chapter, what is threatening about the three projects discussed here. We can think back to chapter 3, where I analyzed the ways in which property-owning and proper heteronormative behavior were key in the Mormons' receiving government approval and protection: the community was not allowed to function outside of a state-sanctioned matrix. This – the integration of community survival, care, and joy within movement work – is what links the Black Panthers, Occupy Wall Street, and Bucky's, and what makes these projects both so complicated and so hopeful.

## Chapter 5: Temporality

*City life is like this, you get up by the time, you go to bed by the time, you eat by the time, you've got to catch transport. ...I'm not really a cheery person, but out of the city, rural people are really friendly. You can sit and have a talk with them, you can do that on the Lands when you are shopping. On the Lands you do not do anything by the time, because you have your own time. But in the city, you have no time. It is not your own. No wonder people in town walk around with their faces scraping the ground. There are no friendly faces or even happy faces. They all walk around like zombies. No one has the time of day.*

– Bebe Ramzan, p 439

*Nevertheless, from early on, telling time went hand in hand with telling people what to do.*

– Carl Honoré, p 22

At Bucky's, so often things do not get done. All of a sudden the day is over, and half the planned projects have not even been started. Things just take time. Hours are spent sitting around the table talking and doodling on scrap pieces of paper. A cigarette break on the porch swing turns into an hour of socializing. The rain starts pouring down, putting everything on hold. Sometimes, I feel as though the land holds us, hugs us, slows us down when we get out of hand with our ideas of rushing around accomplishing things.

I developed a fascination with time at Bucky's, the irregular rhythms of life; here, in its materiality, time became tangible. Time in the gayborhood is tricky, sticky, slippery. It veers off its path, returns to status quo or finds another route. Or it slows down, even stops. It runs in circles and meets up with itself. It crawls into bodies, changes breath patterns and muscle movements. This is a temporality intricately related to the material world, to earth, topography, bodies, days and seasons, food and excrement.

One could argue that all temporalities are material, that we cannot escape the material

world of which we are a part. True. And it would be wrong to argue that rural locales are somehow more material than urban ones – asphalt is not less real or tangible than soil. What is different, however, is how we relate to materiality in different locales. At queer land projects like Bucky's, the material aspects of temporality become well-nigh impossible to ignore. A grocery store in Brooklyn will be open rain or shine; green beans, however, will grow at different speeds depending on the weather. And if the beans do not get sold or eaten, the temporality of their demise will also differ. In the city (barring necropolitical moves such as those witnessed in Detroit in recent years), the beans will be disposed of in garbage bags, which will be picked up in the middle of the night, invisibilized laborers performing the feat of invisibilizing our waste. At Bucky's, uneaten food will rot, mold, smell, make itself noticed. This chapter, then, is a meditation on the temporality that is materialized and embodied in a particular space – Bucky's – and the ways that this particular temporality can help illuminate the particularities of time in rural queer spaces.

Considering these differences in temporalities and our relation to them, queer theories of time need to take the rural into account. The last decade has seen a careful theorization of the role of time for queer subjects. Urban queer subjects, to be exact. Questioning established notions of temporality as based on a heteronormative life pattern, theorists such as Judith Halberstam, José Muñoz, and Elizabeth Freeman have formulated new ways of viewing the role that time plays in people's lives. Temporality is shaped by norms and actions, they note, and thus varies between groups.

The models that Halberstam and Muñoz have presented to explain queer patterns of time are focused around the pace of city life, and center on events such as late night

partying, aided by rapid communications and large crowds of people. Accepting the urban as the space of queerness limits our ability to conceive of queer time. What happens to time when queerness meets rurality? The movement of the earth and other bodies informs time differently here than it does in the city. Things look different when the sun is the main source of light and the nearest gay bar is an hour away.

Scott Herring, in *Another Country*, writes about the stereotype of the countryside as backwards: “**Temporal**: Exemplified by the oral history simile 'like a hick,' the hierarchized assumption that a metropolitan-identified queer will always be more dynamic, more cutting-edge, more progressive, and more forward-looking than a rural-identified queer, who will always be more static, more backward, and more culturally backwater” (16). Like Herring, I find that we need to challenge this stereotype, as it is not altogether accurate, but also ask if there might be positives to this view. In this chapter, I develop a theory of rural queer temporality, one that is messy, sticky, slow. My question: what can we learn about temporality from a mason jar filled with last summer's pickles in a rural gayborhood outside of Smithville, Tennessee?

### ***Colliding temporalities***

Perhaps a meditation on rural queer time is best begun with a trip to the city, where the collision of rural and urban temporalities becomes apparent. Our protagonists are a group of queer folks from Bucky's, living far down in a hollow out in the countryside of middle Tennessee. On occasion, the country queers will make their way into Nashville, the nearest metropolis, preferably when it is karaoke night at the gay bar. It takes hours to get ready: planning out who is going to ride in which car or truck and making sure everyone has a spot, putting on make-up, rummaging through closets and piles of clothes to find

sparkly yet mold-free outfits.

Eventually, the crowd does make it out of the hollow. Before karaoke, we go out to dinner, at a medium-sized Ethiopian restaurant in a strip mall close to the gay bar. It is crowded, but not horribly so, as the group rambles in. The usual shuffling of tables to accommodate a large crowd takes place. Then waiting, and waiting. The group from Bucky's starts to get anxious, partly out of hunger, but there is also the unsettling worry that maybe this is all taking so long not because the staff is busy, but because we look “wrong.” Other guests seem to be getting their food. And are we “wrong” because we are queer or country, or both, that mix of rhinestones and dirt? The slow time of the hollow follows us into the city, and here it is so obviously out of rhythm.

The anxiety over the food cannot be strictly a matter of time; after all, dinner back at Bucky's frequently takes longer than expected to be ready, and this does not usually lead to a collectively anxious mood. But there is an expectation of time functioning differently here, in the city, and the discomfort could be about the way rural time seems to be sticking to us, having traveled with us all the way down the highway, so far from the hollow. Though unspoken, there is quite likely an element of projecting homophobia onto African immigrants, suspecting that the Ethiopian staff is inherently disapproving of queer people, and not giving them the same patient benefit of the doubt as that given to the outspokenly homophobic white US-born neighbors down in the hollow. The anxiety is also related to money, and the way it interacts with time. In neoliberal capitalist contexts, money can, or is at least supposed to be able to, grant us speed. Most of the folks living in the hollow do not, however, have enough financial resources to buy a speedy passage through the world. As people read the menu, there is discussion over splitting dishes,

calculations over how to make this meal reasonably priced. This is not, by city standards, an expensive restaurant, but compared to the largely non-monetary existence in the gayborhood, everything that costs money is expensive. Saving money takes time, and this lingering is noticeable, making us less desirable customers.

The food does arrive eventually, and people eat uncomfortably, murmuring about how they should have just eaten at home, in the kitchen. The meal doesn't taste right. Not because the food itself is bad – it is perfectly decent – but because we are out of place, out of time.

Finally arriving at the bar, later than planned, it turns out to be a fun night. There is karaoke and line dancing and hanging out, beer and fried chicken. We sing, talk, try to learn the dance steps. Then, by midnight or 1 am, people are ready to go home, knowing we have at least an hour's drive ahead of us. When we head out, the night is still young for the others at the bar; none of the locals are making any move to leave. We pile back into the cars and trucks, speeding down the highway, then going slower on the winding roads down the hill, slowing down to a crawl on the dirt road leading down into the hollow, silence engulfing us as the radio signal fades away.

### ***Night as break***

I first make my way to the gayborhood as a retreat from my day-to-day life in New York City. After a 24-hour bus ride and another forty minutes by car, I roll into the hollow just after the sun has set. The journey down the dirt driveway, which will years later be a comfortably short afternoon stroll, seems interminably long. Though this particular home is on the grid and there is electricity in most of the buildings, in-between is a night ranging from pitch-black to gray, depending on the moon. Night here is a break, a time

when one can only venture out safely with a flashlight (the rattle snakes, like the people, migrate from the hills to the hollows). And flashlights are wonderful but they don't make for any extensive partying. Life starts again in the morning.

Yes, people stay up talking sometimes, or dancing or reading or having sex. But these nighttime activities take place in private, in the residences scattered across the land, rarely in public spaces. Occasionally someone will wander into the kitchen at nine or ten at night, looking for company, and sigh at the near-empty space, at how everyone is already tucked away in their houses and trailers. The collectivity has receded, and will start appearing again in the morning, one by one, looking for coffee, mumbling sleepy hellos, taking hours to re-establish the day.

It is a rhythm created by the interweaving of early sunsets in the hollow, the moving of serpents across the land, the addictive elements in coffee beans, and human desires for company or solitude. These pieces exert more influence over temporality at Bucky's than the rhythm of bar hours or annual Pride parades or nine-to-five office schedules.

### ***“Standard” time, urban time***

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in an article about sacred time, writes that “History’s own time is godless, continuous, and, to follow [Walter] Benjamin, empty and homogeneous” (36). Time is something that just is, unchanging, an empty vessel that we pour the contents of living into. As Chakrabarty puts it, “[e]vents happen in time, but time is not affected by them” (36). This model of time is culturally and historically specific; importantly to this chapter, it is a model based in urban life, and in the productivity and trade of capitalism. A “continuous,... empty and homogeneous” time must be measured, because it is nothing



beyond this measurement. It does not have a substance of its own. Italian cultural historian and anthropologist Piero Camporesi argues that “[t]he precise measurement of time began with the rise of urban mercantile society, and from that measurement arose a stern philosophy of time for work and time for death” (35). With markets came exactitude, a use for dividing the day into hours, rather than times of light and darkness, heat and cold. In Camporesi's analysis, the standardized time of the clock is, further, secular, whereas the peasant time of the rhythms of the earth spinning, marked by church bells rung at approximate times, was/is connected to a religious framework (35-6). Prominent sociologist of time Eviatar Zerubavel, on the other hand, traces our culture's reliance on clocks and schedules to Benedictine monasteries, where keeping a strict schedule has been a tool for maintaining the routine so crucial to Western monastic life (1980, 157). In this same article, Zerubavel also mentions the importance of the weekly rhythm in Benedictine communities (159), another temporal mechanism that is crucial to Western society today, but that plays a limited role at Bucky's. Chores on the land need to be completed without consideration for the day of the week, and events often associated with weekends, such as parties, can happen on any day. Some events, such as meetings, are scheduled on a weekly basis, but most things are not.

This standardized version of time has become hegemonic, structuring our lives through timetables, regular work hours, recipes, schedules. Zerubavel writes in an article from 1984 that, in today's world, the kind of system that Camporesi describes is a necessity: “Were it not for the public acceptance of a single yardstick of time, social life would be unbearably chaotic: the massive daily transfers of goods, services, and information would proceed in fits and starts; the very fabric of modern society would

begin to unravel” (39). I feel this threatening chaos bubbling up within me as I wait for the bus from campus back home after each day at the university, where I have delivered a product – education – in a neatly packaged 80-minute block. The rush hour traffic, carrying thousands of people home from a day of productivity, is slowing itself up, the minutes ticking by, eating up my “free time,” the break from being a good productive non-citizen. Trucks rumble by, carrying the pre-packaged food these tired producers will eat for dinner. Along the road, we are exhorted by billboards to buy new cars that will carry us faster along these congested roads. The timetable is not functioning; the bus is ten, fifteen, twenty minutes late, and I feel the chaos and panic, thinking it will actually never come, that I will be stuck here by the New Jersey highway forever, staring at my time-telling device that is also my phone, a tracking apparatus that makes me continuously available to the world. The “compression” of time – the speeding up – that David Harvey characterizes as emblematic of modernity (1989, 240), meets the congestion of neoliberalism. This congestion and speeding up can be linked to disposability: bodies can be piled up, made to wait indefinitely, as long as that wait happens outside of capital accumulation, outside of “work hours.”

Rural queer temporality provides a model where there is no uniform “yardstick of time,” yet where society does not unravel, because there is not such a “massive... transfer[] of goods, services, and information.” It is okay to give vague time frames such as “around dinner,” because *there is time enough to squander it*. We will be here, probably in the kitchen or on the porch. If someone has wandered off, they will come back. At times, people come home from a dinner or party a day or two later than scheduled, without this being a cause for concern. They probably got sidetracked talking

with someone, the reasoning goes, and decided to stay for a while. Activities do not need to be scheduled around a nine-to-five office routine; thus, Zerubavel's observation of modern life, that "it is almost inconceivable that a dancing party ... would be given in the morning" (1980, 160) does not hold in the gayborhood, where daytime dance parties, though not as common as nighttime ones, are not unheard of.

### ***Queer theories of time***

Elizabeth Freeman, in an article from 2008, locates, as others such as Michel Foucault and John D'Emilio also have done, the emergence of "sexual minorities" in the development of modernity. Freeman adds to this already-established theory the importance of temporality in this development: "far from merely functioning as *analogies* for temporal catastrophe, dissident sexual communities and the erotic practices defining them are *historically* tied to the emergence of a kind of time – slow time" (32). Drawing on Benjamin, Freeman argues that time has a *feel*, and that modernity has a "staccato pace," which collided with what now came to be seen and felt as the "slow time" of previous existence (32-3). Continuing this line of reasoning, Freeman posits that "if we follow Benjamin's important insight into how modernity *feels*, we can see another site where slow time seems to offer some kind of respite from the emerging rhythms of mechanized life: the time of emotions themselves" (33).

Freeman's writing is part of a turn in queer theory toward the question of temporality. In the 2005 book *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam argues that straight, heteronormative life is structured around a series of life stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood-marriage-babies, old age. These stages are set up to facilitate reproduction, the creation of new humans through male-female intercourse and the

upbringing of these humans through cohabitation. Queers, having been excluded from the realm of socially acceptable reproduction, Halberstam argues, do not live according to this time line. Without the pressure to get married and have children, adolescence is prolonged: a period of adulthood without worrying about mortgages or child care. In Halberstam's model, queer and straight temporalities differ not only on a grand lifetime scale, but also in their everyday structure. If there are no kids at home who need to be fed and put to bed, there is really no reason to not be out partying all night. Queer life thus takes on a nocturnal quality, in opposition to a life structured by a nine-to-five job and a respectable bedtime.

Published the year before Halberstam's book, Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* also critiques heteronormative temporality, what Edelman terms "reproductive futurism"; that is, a political imperative to center the child. He poses queerness as that which is against reproductive futurism, that which "figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive" (3). This argument is not unique to Edelman, or even to queer theory; on the contrary, the notion of queers as against society due to their status outside of reproduction is a common trope in anti-queer rhetoric. Rather than arguing against "the ascription of negativity to the queer," however, Edelman argues for "accepting and even embracing it" (4).

Because of the non-linearity of rural queer time, Edelman's suggestion of embracing negativity is not easily applicable to rural queer contexts. Futurity does not stand in opposition to the present; the material world is constantly dying, rebirthing itself, and simply existing. Further, I would argue that a space where the connection to more-than-human life is more palpable is less likely to center a death drive, or even to pose life

and death as dichotomous, precisely because one can see birth and death happening simultaneously, and even nourishing one another (compost is a prime example of this). Edelman's model is in this regard a metronormative one. This is not to say that cities are “dead,” nor is it to say that the rural is somehow more “natural” than the urban, but that the connections to more-than-human materiality are often more immediately recognizable outside of cities, and life and death are viewed less in opposition and more in interaction. These interactions between life and death affect the temporal process of queer land; for example, a communal wood-chopping excursion gets put on hold because a deer has been shot and needs processing. The death of the deer will sustain human bodies, and the community will shift its routine for the day to allow for this.

Halberstam's and Edelman's models of queer temporality are useful, raising the notion that time functions differently in queer and heteronormative circumstances, yet the theories are incomplete, as they assume that queer people reside in cities (in chapter 1, I analyze how even Halberstam's discussion of Brandon Teena as a rural queer assumes a metronormative queer subject). We need to take other forms of queer life into consideration. Life cannot be structured around late-night partying when there are vast spaces with no electrical lights. It cannot be about the constant interaction with strangers when one's immediate vicinity contains only a handful of people. We need to think of time in different ways. Taking rural queer life into consideration allows us to see alternate models of queer temporality.

One model for thinking differently about queer time comes from José Muñoz, in the book *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz questions Edelman's high valuation of negativity, writing instead a text that embraces possibility; in Muñoz's own words, it can be “used to

imagine a future” (1). He does this by positing a queer futurity. *Cruising Utopia* starts with the words “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer” (1). But this equation of queerness with a never-reached futurity does not line up with life in the gayborhood. In the prelude to the dissertation, I quoted a Bucky's community member: “There's something queer going on in each of these hollows.” And she does not just mean the hollows populated by out LGBTQ individuals, but the whole region. Rural Appalachia, a culturally and economically marginalized region of the United States, can in many ways be read as queer, outside of properly normative behavior. Activities outside of the realm of the proper are survival mechanisms.

While Muñoz's conceptualization of queer temporality as futuristic does not line up with rural queer time as I conceptualize it, his book provides key insights into queer temporality that can be applied to the rural. Muñoz asserts that “[q]ueerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's 'presentness' needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of queer utopian hermeneutics” (25). In the case study of rural queerness that I use, this is combined with a focus on cyclicity. I argue, however, that rather than rejecting “presentness” altogether, queer rurality helps us see a different form of it.

In this chapter, I am using a case study of queer life in the countryside to explore different ways of situating temporality in queer theory. Elizabeth Freeman coins the term *chrononormativity* – “a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls 'hidden rhythms,' forms of temporal

experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege” (2010, 3). This chrononormativity is distinctly absent at Bucky's, replaced by another way of interacting with time. It is this other way, this break with chrononormativity, that I refer to as rural queer temporality. My argument here is not that “rural queer time” is unique, nor that it is exclusive to queer subjects in rural spaces. The gayborhood provides one model for theorizing queer temporality outside of cities, and by seeing that alternatives to metronormative time is possible, we can start looking at the multiplicity of temporalities that exist.

### ***Fermentation time***

In chapter 4, I discussed the meal system at Bucky's, which is quite inefficient yet always functions. There is no schedule for who is supposed to cook, nor for at what time meals are to be served, and still meals are made every day.<sup>127</sup> Here, I want to argue that part of what makes the meal-system work is its inefficiency. If people expected to always be fed on time, a more organized cooking regime might have to be instituted. In this mundane inefficiency, queer time and anti-neoliberalism come together. Judith Halberstam describes queer time as being that which does not follow the life trajectory of birth-marriage-reproduction-death; that is, time that elides productivity. On the other hand, there is a labor to inefficiency, and maybe it is not that time elides productivity but rather that here it is productive precisely because it evades the regiment of a clockwork. How do we explain this?

Let us start looking for explanations right at the table, with the help of the dinner

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<sup>127</sup> In the fall of 2014, after I completed my fieldwork, nightly communal dinners were discontinued – or at least put on hiatus – at Bucky's. This was not about inefficiency, though, but rather about other community dynamics.

guests. There are always guests. As remote as these hollows are, people find their way here, every day. One frequent guest is Sandor Ellix Katz, a long-time resident of the gayborhood. The High Priest(ess) of fermentation, Katz has written three books on food, the most influential being *Wild Fermentation*. Like Spree, whom we met in chapter 2, Katz came to fermentation at least in part as a relief from the stress of living with HIV/AIDS. He argues that “[f]ermented foods...help protect us from potentially harmful organisms and contribute to immunity” (2003, 4). Embarking on his fermentation adventure has “given [him] back a sense of the future as expansive and full of possibilities” (2003, xiii). Perhaps interacting with microbes, which are on a different time from humans, changes the time we are on?<sup>128</sup>

We can also use the theory of fermentation in a metaphorical sense to think about temporality. Fermentation – the transformation of carbohydrates into acids or alcohols with the help of bacteria – is an imperfectly cyclical process. A starter sets off a process which comes to maturity, presenting us with food to chew as well as a new starter. The cycle overlaps itself, returning to traces of what came before. Here is what Katz has to say: “Fermentation is everywhere, always. It is an everyday miracle, the path of least resistance. Microscopic bacteria and fungi...are in every breath we take and every bite we eat....They are ubiquitous agents of transformation, feasting upon decaying matter, constantly shifting dynamic life forces from one miraculous and horrible creation to the next” (2003, 2). In this section, I use the concept of fermentation to think through the sticky and ever-shifting time(s) of queer rurality.

Fermentation time is material, connected to the soil, the topography, the air.

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<sup>128</sup> Not to mention, of course, that human bodies are primarily (about 90%) constituted of microbes.



Fermentation happens at a pace set by the material factors surrounding it. It is not an oven turned to 350 degrees and set to twenty minutes. A batch of sauerkraut can take a week or a month. Likewise, life at Bucky's happens according to the nonlinear time of the landscape. A rainstorm halts all outdoor activities, puts a break in the day. People gather on the porch to watch, doing replaced by being, until the storm has passed. Sweltering summer heat slows everything down, makes moving fast difficult. For those living in tents, sunlight and bird sounds inform sleep patterns. Using the terms of fermentation, the birds are starters, setting off the day. The rain and heat are inhibiting agents, stopping the speed of certain forms of productive temporality. Time at Bucky's is thus constantly created. It shifts with the world, speeds up or slows down depending on the actions of animals, earth, and microbes. Time is material everywhere, but this materiality has a special immediacy when life is lived largely out-of-doors. Indoor life is less affected by material conditions: rain or heat does not reach into hermetically sealed office buildings, and light is adjusted by the flip of a switch.

### **Time is sticky**

In fermentation processes, the microbes need something to stick to: the flour in a dough, the milk in yogurt. Without these feeder substances, the microbes cannot complete the fermentation. And, indeed, time in the hollows is sticky. Say you want to leave for Alabama on a Saturday morning, but it's just too early for anyone to get up and drive you to the bus station, so your trip is postponed until Wednesday, when the next bus departs. Then on Wednesday you all simply forget to leave, and it is not until next weekend that you actually take off, and then not to Alabama at all, but wherever somebody happened to be driving. Or, consider a trip to the city. As mentioned earlier, on occasion, the country

queers will make their way into Nashville, the nearest major city. But it takes planning: finding rides for everyone, figuring out dinner, other *things* or *non-things* that just happen, that take up time. The homestead is sticky, hard to leave. Sometimes you get nowhere; sometimes you make it into the nearest town instead of all the way to the city, and end up singing karaoke with grandmothers, men in cowboy boots, and out-of-town moonshiners.

That which was supposed to be temporary becomes permanent. Bill and James met only months before James was scheduled to move to Tennessee. Instead of promises of ever-after, they set a September deadline for their relationship. Bill was happy with his life in Florida, tending bar, making slow progress on his master's degree. No way he was going to move to the Appalachian backwoods. So when September rolled around, James packed his bags and took off, and the relationship was over. But Bill couldn't get that strange little man out of his head, and one day he made a decision: he was moving. When James came back on a short visit to get the last of his stuff, Bill asked if he could come to Tennessee. James just smiled – little did Bill know that he had performed a magic ceremony at Hickory Knoll to make Bill consider moving. Seventeen years later, Bill and James are still together.

And seven years after he got his job as a bagger at the Food Lion, P is still bagging groceries. Sometimes permanence comes out of magic, and sometimes it comes out of the gnawing desperation of poverty. The median income in the county hovers around \$20,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b), and unless your grandfather knew somebody else's grandfather, your chances of getting a job are slim.

In these ways, the microbial cultures of life take the “the path of least resistance” (Katz, 2003, 2), sticking to what is available. This is in no way to say that *people* do not

resist, do not labor to find their own paths, but these paths are always co-created by a world that is sticking to itself. The process of cultivating a trip to Alabama refused to take off, but then the starter microbes found their way to a car going to New Orleans. Life is a mixture of our efforts at cultivation and the wild path of least resistance.

### ***Death and disposability***

Fragments, pieces; so much at Bucky's is broken. Mugs whose handles have fallen off. Ripped clothes. Mildewy blankets. It took me a couple of years, but eventually I learned to only bring things with me to Bucky's that were already broken or worn, or that I would not mind if they broke, or if I lost them altogether. Sometimes the hollow strikes me as a vortex, into which objects fall, never to be retrieved again. People, too, start to look worn, with half-finished stick-and-poke tattoos, unkempt hair, chipped nail polish, uneven tan lines. Perfection is looked upon with suspicion.

“When our milk goes bad, we just throw it out, and buy new milk,” my writing group friend in New York says when I go on yet another rambling tangent about yogurt-making and how really that is what this whole dissertation is about. Milk rarely goes bad at Bucky's; it is one of the food items that almost always get eaten quickly enough to not spoil, like butter and mayonnaise, and bananas (though those are often already in a state of decline when they arrive in the hollow, as I will get back to in a later chapter). But when other food items do start to spoil, they are reconsidered, perhaps reshaped into something still edible, or tossed on the compost pile. Expiration is judged by smell and taste and the desires of the humans present, not by a date stamped on the packaging.

Disposability: that which is at risk of demise, that which is uncomfortable, can be thrown away. We live in a culture of disposability; this argument is nothing new, nothing

only related to rural queer life. We see it in the prison system, in the whole ever-expanding carceral system (carceral culture, even) in the United States. If people do not behave, they get locked away, forgotten about. Disposability is also central to the corporatization of the university: a tenured faculty member or graduate teaching assistant can be disposed of, replaced with an adjunct instructor teaching for poverty wages. This instructor, in turn, can be disposed of if enrollments are too low, or if they complain, or just because, no reason needed.

People often come to Bucky's because they had to leave someplace else. Things were not working with their family, the city was too stressful. People who were thrown out, who could not, or did not want to, fit into the rat race. Arguably, by repeatedly creating certain (groups of) people as not desirable, or not deserving of care or love or sustenance, society is making people disposable. Whole regions, and all people in them, have also been designated as disposable, as wastelands, such as the Appalachian borderlands where the gayborhood sits, or Detroit, or Ferguson, Missouri. Places that are designated as failing to properly produce, and hence not worthy of decent living conditions, nor of sustained attention.

As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been a major force in people moving to the gayborhood, including to Bucky's. Spree, who has lived in the gayborhood for over fifteen years, tells me how he came to move here:

So, anyway, one of the reasons why I decided – this is getting to your question of “why Tennessee?” – was because they were going through this thing where they were starting this whole new program where everybody in the state was going to get healthcare. And they started a special program they called TennCare, and it is basically a whole jumbled up amalgamation of Medicaid and all these different programs put together that the state decided that they were gonna give everyone in the state health coverage. And since I knew I was gonna be needing it, that's why Tennessee was particularly appealing to me. Because it wasn't working out in the

Netherlands because of how their system is and it doesn't work the same way and all that kind of stuff, so I was like, I knew that eventually I was gonna be needing medical attention and medical care and that I better, you know, get serious about it and stuff like that, so I was like "oh! I could give that a try."<sup>129</sup>

When AIDS first hit in the 1980s, it was either a death sentence ("In 1986, the average remaining lifetime of someone diagnosed with PCP [a form of pneumonia common among people with HIV] was less than ten months" [Grover, 31]), or something to be shooed away like an annoying horsefly (the Radical Faeries, to which MaxZine and Spree belong, originally believed that they were too spiritual to need worldly protections such as condoms<sup>130</sup>). Now, 25 years later, we know that neither extreme was correct; plenty of people did die, including Faeries, but many have also survived.

The queer death drive is not the only way not to engage in desires of reproductive futurity. The death drive is, paradoxically, about the future: the person writing, thinking, is still alive, and death is about what the future should look like. Another alternative is to think of the present as elastic and moving, and to engage with disposability, repurposing, and a porous boundary between usefulness and waste. Consider, for example, the early days of Bucky's. For the past decade, the AIDS epidemic has wreaked havoc among gay men in the United States. Thousands are sick, dying, grieving, or burnt out. Many decide to leave cities; they go home to small towns or villages to die in the care of their families of origin. Others end up in the gayborhood. Up until this point, death rates have been staggering; those diagnosed with the disease have been given what amounts to a death sentence. The homes in the countryside to which people move are thus places to die, not to start a new life. The present is the space between life and death; the future,

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<sup>129</sup> T. Spree Vance, interview with author, Tennessee, August 2010.

<sup>130</sup> T. Spree Vance and MaxZine Weinstein, interview with T Fleischmann and author, Tennessee, August 2010.

nothingness. But something does not go as planned in the gayborhood. The months to live that people have been given by their doctors stretch into years, decades. Halberstam, in *In a Queer Time and Place*, writes that, for people living with AIDS “[t]he constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment” (2). Could the potential of the moment be so strong as to stretch it onto twenty-five years? Or, perhaps, if we don't have the kind of teleological idea of time that straight time advocates, the present and the future (and the past) blur together. The present is ever ongoing at Bucky's, constantly created in the detritus of industrial capitalism, agribusiness, aggressive policing, and illness. Life is not about the future, but neither is death the only option.

### ***Communicative slowness***

I am standing in Port Authority Bus Terminal one late summer afternoon, tired and stiff after the usual twenty-four hour ride back from Tennessee. There is one more thing I need to do to be back in New York City life: turn on my cellphone. Somewhere between town and Bucky's, cellphone reception fades away, and for my stay there, the only phone contact I have had has been through a land line shared by everyone on the land. Only a handful of people in my life have the number to Bucky's – people whom I love dearly, who might need to reach me in an emergency. They are close friends and family, nobody from work. And even those who have the number have a hard time getting through: the phone is rarely answered, most calls received by an overflowing voice mail system. Communication slows down – reaching someone takes not seconds, but days.

The lack of cellphone reception, and hence people not carrying phones with them,

also means that almost nobody at Bucky's carries a timepiece on their person. (Whether this was different before cellphones, when watches were the predominant form of on-person time-telling device in our society, I cannot speak to.) People rarely know the clock-time, minutes and hours floating together, activities happening in a temporality based on feeling, not mechanical exactitude.

There is internet, and it is frequently utilized. Email is a well-established mode of communication here. Yet, despite this, there is also plenty of letter writing, the kind that happens with pen and paper. There is time enough for slow communication; it is okay if a message takes a week to reach its recipient. Letter writing, a rather private activity, the content of which is usually only meant to be shared by the writer and the recipient, at Bucky's often takes the shape of a social event, with letter-writing get-togethers in the dining room. While people usually do not share the content of the letters they are writing with one another, they share pens, markers, and other supplies.

The letter writing, while part of the pace of queer rurality, is also one of the modes by which Bucky's is connected to a certain queer culture, one influenced by punk traveler culture: predominantly young, white people hitchhiking and train-hopping their way around North America, occasionally landing at places like Bucky's. Correspondences help locate Bucky's on a queer circuit, one that also includes urban locations. Letters travel to Denver, Oakland, and Philadelphia, sometime via the postal system, and sometimes being carried by visitors, who deliver them to friends and acquaintances. This circuit becomes a primary means of circulation of knowledge about Bucky's; more than via internet or formal publications, knowledge of this space travels via word-of-mouth, letters, and handwritten, photocopied materials. It is a circuit that is not easily intercepted; indeed,

boundaries of traveler culture are often actively guarded.<sup>131</sup>

This communicative slowness is the result of forces and circumstances both material and social. The hills surrounding the hollow block cell phone signal reception – a material circumstance. On the other hand, this could be overcome by extending the cell phone network, but there is not much interest from an economic or social perspective to do so.

Things are changing at Bucky's. Smartphones are blurring the lines between internet and telephone, making some cellphone contact possible. The wireless reception on the land was extended in 2013, so that now many residents have internet in their residences, too, not just in common areas. Residents both appreciate and lament this change: they enjoy being able to watch movies or write emails in the privacy of their own homes, but they also miss the time previously spent in communal spaces, as the extended internet connection means that people are spending more time in their own houses and trailers. Was this increased connection to the outside world from one's private residence part of what led to the minimizing of communal life that took place at Bucky's in 2014? Is changes in communicative time changing community time?

Ironically, the speeding-up of communication with the outside world through increased internet and hence increased material-space isolation, is slowing down communication between people at Bucky's. The rarer random wanderings into the kitchen are, the longer it takes to convey a message. Sometimes it can take a couple of days to figure out where someone is, to know what is going on, what is happening. The time of the hollow refuses speed; gain velocity online, and it will be taken away from the material

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<sup>131</sup> For example, when photographer Mike Brodie published *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity*, a book of images of train hoppers, he received ample criticism from the train hopping community for this exposure. <http://mikebrodie.net/projects/gallery/>. Personal communication with visitors at Bucky's, spring 2013.



dispersal of knowledge. Life happens at the speed of the hollow, (post)modern communication be damned.

### ***Chapter conclusion***

I am left with questions. This chapter has been in the works for four years, and still it seems incomplete. So many trips to Bucky's, so many writing group meetings, so many 5am mornings writing this, because it seems to require that special time-space of sunrise. And, still, after so much time spent on this – gayborhood time, academic time, puttering-around-a-Brooklyn-kitchen time – I am not sure about it, doubt that this is theory. Time is felt, and so the temporality I explore here is about *feeling* its specificity. Can we ground theory in feelings? If we take seriously Elizabeth Freeman's notion that temporality is felt, then maybe we *need* to ground theory in feelings, or at least let feelings play a central role in our theorizing.

Is it the slowness of communication with other living humans that leaves time for other communication? With plants, ghosts, and tarot cards? I have argued in this chapter that materiality slows down time for the humans at Bucky's, but perhaps it is a two-way process, where slowing down also increases an awareness of materiality. Further, this materiality is brought into what is so often referred to as the "supernatural," what at Bucky's is called "magic." This magic is not above nature, but part of material life, intertwined with humans, the land, this location in space-time.

But maybe these questions are okay. There is time. We can find answers sooner or later. And, sure, new questions will crop up along the way, but we will have time for those, too. No matter the questions, the sun still settles at six; the beets still sprout; the compost still turns left-overs into soil. While the garlic is getting ready to be picked, the

carrots are just being planted. Pea time is trickier, with generations overlapping each other. Death births life in a constant process of revitalization. So here we are, on a land that belongs to multiple layers of history, with microbes flying through the air and crawling through the ground. We eat and are eaten, live through deaths, move through multiple temporalities. A teleological model fails to explain rural queer time. This is not a pot roast you put in the oven that eventually gets done. It is a jar of pickled beans, breathing in the salt, the water, the earth, the air, the bacteria on the human fingers stuck into the brine for a taste. We cannot rely on a model of gay liberation, nor explain rural queer temporality in pure opposition to straight existence. Instead, we need to look at the many starters coming together in our pickle jar: post-War industrialism, AIDS, Faerie spirituality, gardening, sunset... The result is pungent, at moments even repulsive, yet oh so delicious.

## Conclusion: Homemaking

*So a question that arises here, regarding the epistemic violence inherent in matrices of dispossession and disposability, could be articulated thus: How might claims for the recognition of rights to land and resources, necessarily inscribed as they are in colonially embedded epistemologies of sovereignty, territory, and property ownership, simultaneously work to decolonize the apparatus of property and to unsettle the colonial conceit of proper and propertied human subjectivity?*

– Athena Athanasiou, in Butler and Athanasiou, p 27

“Ready to go home?” Malin asks as she drives her beat-up old car into the parking lot in Nashville where the Megabus has dropped me off. “Yes,” I answer, and we are off to the hollow, where the familiar yellow and purple sign on the barn will, indeed, “Welcome [us] homo.”<sup>132</sup>

It feels like home, Bucky's. More than Rutgers, more than the string of rooms and apartments I have rented during my years in graduate school. Summer after summer, I return to the hollow, and sometimes winter or spring, too. I prefer winter, the quietude, the familiar faces, the small crowd that huddles around the fire in the kitchen. What does it mean, feeling at home? What kinds of investments does it create, and how do we navigate these? Where do our allegiances lie? I ask myself these questions over and over again, as I write, as I do “fieldwork,” as I hang out at Bucky's. According to Valli Kalei Kanuha, “[t]he phrase 'going native' is often attributed to Bronislaw Malinowski in his reflections on the relationship between the anthropologist and the objects of study in ethnographic fieldwork” (439). The phrase, now often considered a failure of maintaining proper boundaries, was used by Malinowski in a positive sense: a striving for the kind of participation necessary for gathering deep ethnographic data.

Bucky's is a home or retreat for so many people, who often do not have other

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<sup>132</sup> See also prelude and chapter one for more about this sign.

places that feel truly safe and welcoming. It is a home built around an ongoing labor of belonging. Bodies are read and registered into the matrix of the community, first as a visitor, and perhaps eventually as something more: a person who is understood as being at home here. There are no criteria for this at-home-ness; it does not require being a resident, let alone being on the deed for the land. Yet the sense that this is indeed a long-term home, a place where one can return, where houses can be built without risk of demolition, is intimately tied up to official ownership, to the community holding a deed that is recognized by the state. To give a clear example: only a couple of years after Bucky's, as an incorporated entity, bought the land, a yearly work-party was instituted. Every fall, about a hundred people come to the hollow to engage in infrastructural improvements and skill sharing. This event is much smaller than the annual music festival earlier in the summer, and largely draws people with previous involvement with Bucky's. It has been described to me as a family reunion of sorts. Without holding the deed, and hence feeling a sense of stability, making it worthwhile to invest in structural repairs and new projects, it is doubtful if this "family reunion" would be taking place.

But what is this home that forms at Bucky's? During an interview, one of the "subjects" of this research project, Sacha, owner and primary caretaker of Fancyland, a queer land project in northern California, takes a lull in the conversation as an opportunity to break the interview script. Sacha: "I wanna ask a question! Can owning land, can you be an anti-colonialist owning land in this day and age?"<sup>133</sup> At the time, neither of us had an answer. We live in a colonial society, and whatever actions we take happen within that

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Sacha, Arcata, CA, July 2011.

framework. Now, concluding the writing of this dissertation, my answer to Sacha's question is that owning land within the structure of the US nation-state, especially as a group of predominantly white people, cannot be anti-colonial, as all landownership legitimated by the state in turn ends up legitimating the existence of this settler-colonial state. Within the hegemonic regime of colonialist land tenure, however, there are cracks and crevices where moving toward other models is possible. Whether it is possible to actually reach those other models, I do not know, but functioning within a white supremacist, heteronormative, settler-colonial society does not have to foreclose all possibilities for living differently.

As Chandan Reddy asks at the end of *Freedom with Violence*: “What are our responsibilities? What formations of struggle and knowledge must we build when our sexuality mediates the global and racial violence that is part of the nation's constitutive conditions of possibility?” (246). At the time that I interviewed Sacha, I had found very little conversation about racism, and virtually none about of settler colonialism, within the queer land movement. Today, these conversations are happening much more frequently. Reddy's questions are being asked, though in less “academish” language, to quote the Eggplant Faerie Players. In this conclusion, I consider how claims to land by queer land projects and the Occupy movement simultaneously re-inscribe colonial and capitalist practices, destabilize these practices, and create alternative relations to the land.

I engage with a discourse that is frequently used among practitioners and theorizers of recent social movements, including Occupy: the idea of commons and enclosures, and consider how this discursive framework has opened up space for questioning capitalist

land tenure, but has done so in a way that naturalizes settler colonialism. The concept of the commons, which has been taken up by theorists and activists on the left in the past decade, is an appealing model for imagining ways out of privatized models of land tenure. We are, as Saskia Sassen documents, living in an era of intense trade in land, moving land further and further into the hands of large corporations, away from people living or working on it (Sassen, chapter 2).<sup>134</sup> For projects such as Bucky's, that are attempting to form a relationship to the land outside of the model of capitalist enclosure, there is a need to understand the dominant system and the capitalist and colonial history it grows out of, and also to create models for moving forward. In thinking about queer land as a project of possibilities for non-corporate modes of land tenure, the concept of the commons originally held potential to me, for three reasons: 1) it provides a model for communal land tenure; 2) it is grounded in an activist framework; and 3) it has proven useful for the activists that have engaged with it. Further, the particular case study of the gayborhood posed interesting questions about the relation between commons and enclosures. What I saw at Bucky's was a complicated commons, one built out of enclosure. The land was available to a "people" because the caretakers felt secure in the project's long-term viability. This security was grounded in ownership, which led to a sense that the land would not be taken away. It was thus by being entrenched in a system of land enclosure that the space could be opened up into a form of commons.

Now, I am less convinced about the potential of the idea of the commons than I was when I started my research. The concept of the commons comes out of a specific historical context, that of Medieval Europe. Can it address the conundrum around anti-

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<sup>134</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the global politics of land privatization, see Alexander Reid Ross, ed. *Grabbing Back: Essays Against the Global Land Grab*. Oakland, CA, 2014: AK Press.

colonial landownership that Sacha raised? Several scholars, notably J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Walter D. Mignolo, have critiqued the recent turn to the commons for ignoring questions of Eurocentrism and (settler) colonialism. Can the concept of the commons be rescued? Should it be? In the epigraph to this chapter, Athena Athanasiou asks how and whether “claims for the recognition of rights to land and resources [can] simultaneously work to decolonize the apparatus of property and to unsettle the colonial conceit of proper and propertied human subjectivity” even when they are “necessarily inscribed...in colonially embedded epistemologies of sovereignty, territory, and property ownership” (27). Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that queer land projects are simultaneously embedded within these epistemologies, and challenging them. So how do we theorize these projects – from a praxis-oriented standpoint – in a manner that strengthens the challenge rather than reinforces the embeddedness?

In this conclusion, I draw on the cases of land-based queer intentional communities and Occupy Wall Street to consider the usefulness and pitfalls of a commons-centered framework for thinking about communal land tenure, and to complicate the binary of commons and enclosures. Rather than positing the two terms as opposites, I argue that queer land and Occupy, in different ways, are engaged in processes that can be read as simultaneously commoning and enclosing. The purity that the commons-enclosures binary implies is not the most useful framework for considering the work of these projects. Groups that oppose private ownership might still engage with an ownership regime, as such a regime is hegemonic to the current world system. Instead of posing opposites of communal and private land tenure, I suggest the concepts of hybridity and incubators as more useful analytics.

### ***Defining commons and enclosures***

The idea of the commons has gained increasing popularity in recent years, and is being widely used by both activists and scholars. This section presents a brief overview of recent debates on the commons, and give a definition of the concept for the purposes of this chapter.

Silvia Federici, an autonomous Marxist feminist and one of the foremost activist-scholars of the commons, describes the commons as “social goods – lands, territories, forests, meadows and streams, or communicative spaces – which a community, not the state or any individual, collectively owns, manages, and controls” (2011, 41). This ownership differs from private ownership, in that, in the words of Rutherford Platt,

no individual has exclusive or permanent control (*proprietary rights*) over any particular land or resource. Instead, rights of usage (*usufructory rights*) are shared or exercised in common among members of a defined socioeconomic group such as a village or tribe while members exercise exclusive control over a particular area of land (68).

While Federici’s and Platt’s definitions focus on the material, Stephen Gudeman, in his book *The Anthropology of Economy*, focuses more on shared values and culture: “The commons is a shared interest or value. It is the patrimony or legacy of a community and refers to anything that contributes to the material and social sustenance of a people with a shared identity: land, buildings, seed stock, knowledge of practices, a transportation network, an educational system, or rituals” (27). The wording of Gudeman’s definition deserves further attention: the commons is a “patrimony”; that is, an inheritance passed down from the father. While Gudeman might not have intended a gendered meaning, his definition relies on a patriarchal notion of community, one where family and male authority are central to how the commons are structured. Arguably, less explicitly



gendered definitions of the commons also rely on a notion of peoplehood based on “blood” and family-of-origin, in their taking for granted what is meant by a “people.” Gudeman's work is thus just an especially clear example of the patriarchal and family-centric tendencies that are often found in conceptualizations of the commons. Further, Gudeman refers to the commons as held by “a people with a shared identity.” Here, he makes explicit something that many current-day advocates of the commons gloss over: a sense of having a common interest is often based on a shared identity. Invoking the commons thus often risks reaffirming the existing structure of the group, and does not necessarily create space for others to join, a conundrum we see at both Bucky's and Occupy.

“Common” is distinct from “public,” something that the Occupy movement has brought attention to. Guio Jacinto writes: “The meaning or essence of the OWS movement is the re-appropriation of public and private forms of property and its transformation into common property which is fundamentally what provides the basis for the expression of the multiplicity of contradictions and the multitude of different positions.” A public park operated by a city government is not a commons; a field that is collectively managed by nearby residents is. The commons require a sense of collectivity, a social body bigger than the individual, and one not narrowly identified with the state. This sense of collectivity is arguably one of the biggest challenges for (re)establishing commons in the United States: a widespread sense of individualism, honed both through the history of the settler nation of the US and through neoliberal capitalism, make claims for collectivity very difficult. Still, collective practices exist throughout society, even if they are not recognized as such. Carpooling, inviting neighbors over for dinner, or lending

a friend a sweater on a chilly evening are all practices that assert collectivity. In chapter four, I argued that what made the Black Panther breakfast program and Occupy so threatening to the US government was the reaffirming of food and other basic resources as universal entitlements, not charity. Furthering this argument, Occupy affirmed a sense of collectivity, speaking in a language of a nebulous “we,” and putting the group ahead of the individual.<sup>135</sup>

Commons are usually described as being in a dichotomous relationship with enclosures. Enclosure is a process that “privatizes and commodifies what was once freely shared, cutting people off from the life-giving relationships offered by the commons” (Martusewicz et al, 213). Most commonly, a discussion of the enclosing of the commons refers to the privatization of land in Western Europe in the transition from the medieval feudal system to capitalist modernity. In this transition, land that had been available for grazing or collection of materials by those without access to other land was transferred into private ownership, severely limiting the livelihood of those who did not own land.

European settlers brought ideologies of commons and enclosures with them in their colonizing projects. On the one hand, commons were part of European colonial expansion. Allan Greer argues that “common property was a central feature of both native and settler forms of land tenure in the early colonial period and that dispossession came about largely through the clash of an indigenous commons and a colonial commons” (366). On the other hand, the enclosure process spread outside of Europe, and was one of

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<sup>135</sup> The most commonly referenced example of the “we” of Occupy is the slogan “We are the 99%.” This phrase has rightly been criticized for its elision of difference and its universalizing claim to speak for the masses. Beyond sloganeering, however, Occupy encampments and groups worked concretely to build a notion of “we” not rooted in either individualism nor universalizing of experience.

the fundamental aspects of colonialism. This had severe consequences in the Americas. In *Caliban and the Witch*, Silvia Federici writes that

The most massive process of land privatization and enclosure occurred in the Americas where, by the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one-third of the communal indigenous land had been appropriated by the Spaniards under the system of *encomienda*. Loss of land was also one of the consequences of slave-raiding in Africa, which deprived many communities of the best among their youth (2004, 68).

Considering this colonial history – and its present – requires thinking commons not as inherently good: collective control does preclude oppressive structures.

Enclosures are, in the literature I draw on in this chapter, understood as the opposite of commons, the bad thing that happens to good commons. They are for private profit, not for use by the community. Queer land complicates this view of enclosures, as well as the border between commons and enclosures. Within the commons/enclosures framework, queer land is best considered not as one or the other, but as a mode of commoning dependent on the continuing enclosing of land. It is important to note that the hollow was not a commons before Bucky's bought the land; the process of enclosing this land was begun several centuries ago. The purchase of the land by Bucky's is thus the latest stage in an ongoing process of private ownership.

### ***Commons as settler-colonialism?***

As I mentioned in the previous section, the notion of the commons relies on a collectivity of commoners. In activist scholarship on the commons, this collectivity is rarely clearly defined, and in the US context is usually implicitly portrayed as being made up of settler subjects. Further, this collectivity is often tied to the nation-state. We can see this

nationalist, settler-colonialist bent of much activism and writing around the commons in a 2013 publication by the organization On the Commons:

American society has been grounded in commons since the beginning. “Nature’s gifts are the common property of the human race,” declared Thomas Paine. The Land Ordinance of 1785, drafted by a committee of the Continental Congress that included Thomas Jefferson, established a cooperative model for settlement of the West (and removal of Indian nations) by setting aside one square-mile section of every township as common property to be used to support a public school (32).

The passage calls on two leaders of the American Revolution to justify the commons. The “removal of Indian nations” is literally put in parentheses, a minor inconvenience in the great project of creating commons in the towns of the settlers. The statement goes on to refer to the GI Bill as an example of the spirit of the commons, of “the belief that we’re all in this together” (32). But who is this “we”? Can it ever extend past the boundaries of the nation-state? In this passage, the US nation is implicitly equated with “the human race” (quoting Paine), and hence the “we” is bounded to the nation state. Further, this is a “we” that is tied up to military activity in the name of a nation-state. The tendencies highlighted in this passage, though exceptionally clear here, are not unique to On the Commons, but rather central to much thinking and praxis on the subject of the commons.

Further, commons can enforce settler colonialism, a concern that is currently being raised by indigenous scholars Glen Coulthard and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. Coulthard points to the ways that advocates for the commons in North America frequently ignore indigenous land tenure practices on the continent:

what must be recognized by those inclined to advocate a blanket “return of the commons” as a redistributive counterstrategy to the neoliberal state’s new round of enclosures, is that, in liberal settler states such as Canada, the “commons” not only belong to somebody – *the First Peoples of this land* – they also deeply inform and sustain Indigenous modes of thought and behavior that harbor profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and

respectful coexistence. By ignoring or downplaying the injustice of colonial dispossession, critical theory and left political strategy not only risks becoming complicit in the very structures and processes of domination that it ought to oppose, but it also risks overlooking what could prove to be invaluable glimpses into the ethical practices and preconditions required for the construction of a more just and sustainable world order (12).

Uncritically accepting commons as the model for communal land tenure thus limits our vision. It draws on *one* history – Western European, primarily British – and often forecloses other modes of relating to the land.<sup>136</sup> In the North American context, a return to the commons, as advocated by activists, is simply not possible, as most of these activists are of settler heritage, and they land never belonged to the vague “us” that is invoked in commons discourse.

It is too easy, however, to simply dismiss the commons as Euro-centric and/or settler-colonialist. Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright argue that the exact opposite is the case, and that it is through reclaiming the commons that we can best dismantle colonial structures. They write that “The global system of capitalism and nation-states are deeply intertwined since both arose from the bloody violence of expropriating the commons and exploiting the commoners” (131). They draw the conclusion that “decolonization projects must challenge capitalist social relations and those organized around the national state, such as sovereignty. Crucially, their goal must be the gaining of a global *commons*” (131).

The question becomes, then: considering the colonial *and* decolonial implications of the commons in certain times and places, can the concept be reclaimed? Does it travel? Some scholars, notably Walter Mignolo (2009), have argued that “the commons” is a concept specific to pre-capitalist Europe, and that using it in other context imposes a

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<sup>136</sup> This critique was presented, in much further detail, by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui at the “Anarchism, Decolonization, and Radical Democracy” conference at Haverford College, March 27, 2015.

Euro-centric perspective on the rest of the world. Others, such as Vandana Shiva, and Allan Greer (372), insist that the concept of the commons does travel, and that it is possible to use it to describe varying context without conflating these. One could say that, before white settlers arrived, middle Tennessee was a commons, as the land was not owned by any specific entity, but rather used by the people living in the region, according to rules and customs around hunting. Does claiming this as an example of commoning risk invisibilizing indigenous structures, by using a concept imported from Europe, or does it highlight that private capitalist ownership is not inevitable? This is one of the tensions that settler-dominated projects have to grapple with.

### ***Questioning the concept of property***

Enclosures and commons alike are most often defined as property, though of different kinds. As present-day theorists of the commons frequently point out, we live in a highly privatized world, where objects, land, and water are increasingly owned by individuals. But what does it mean to own something? What is property? At Bucky's, the idea of property is not frequently talked about. Rent at Bucky's is a fluid concept. Residents pay a set amount, though this is negotiable, a balancing of financial resources, labor contributions, and time spent away from the land. Visitors put cash or a check in an old coffee can on the kitchen windowsill. Do we all own this space, through these contributions toward the mortgage? But "owning," I don't hear that word used much on the land. Yes, this "property" is "owned," but that is not how it is talked about, imagined. It is resolutely communal. This is the contradiction at the heart of queer land: ownership as a tool for the communalization and decommodification of land. Enclosing (or, rather, re-enclosing) as a path toward communing.

By destabilizing the idea of property, we can complicate the relationship between commons and enclosures, seeing these two terms not as opposites, but as interwoven. As David Bollier notes, “Property is a kind of social fiction – an agreed-upon system for allocating people’s rights to use a resource or exclude access to it” (99). It is not a given, and only becomes real when we treat it as such. Property as it is conceptualized in modern Western thought was first formally formulated by John Locke, who defined property as material that a human had mixed with his [sic] labor (cf. Hammond, 105). A tree is not my property, but by cutting it down, sawing it to pieces, and putting the pieces together to make a chair, I have created property, something that is mine and that it would be wrong for other people to take away from me. Trees can be property, too, if I tend to the ground where they grow, their growth thus partly the result of my labor.

The concept of property has been questioned from multiple directions; here, I focus on anarchist critiques of property. At the core of anarchism is a rejection of the concept of private property, summed up in the words of nineteenth-century anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: “Ownership/property is theft” (13). An anarchist methodology, then, will not take the rightfulness of property as a given, and will take into consideration the possibilities of other models for accessing resources.<sup>137</sup>

Viewing property as theft does not mean that anarchists always reject owning property. In the spirit of impurity so central to anarchism, there is an acknowledgment that sometimes ownership is the best option, considering the current system. The long-term anarchist view is certainly to dismantle ownership altogether<sup>138</sup>, but the road there

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While anarchist theories question the notion of property, they do not necessarily question the concept of “resources.” Classical anarchism is decidedly anthropocentric, and often talks of the more-than-human world as something to be used for the benefits of humans. This is an oversight that anarchist thinkers are still grappling with.

<sup>138</sup>

might not be straight-forward. As David Harvey (not an anarchist, but this speaks to the anarchist view on property) writes, “Radical groups can also procure spaces (sometimes through the exercise of private property rights, as when they collectively buy a building to be used for some progressive purpose) from which they can reach out to further a politics of common action” (2012, 71).<sup>139</sup> As this dissertation has argued, access to space is a crucial component of community formation. It is worth reading Harvey’s quote closely; he states that “radical” groups can buy a building for “some progressive purpose.” Does Harvey equate radical and progressive, or is he suggesting that the activities in a bought building are necessarily progressive, not radical?

An anarchist approach to property lends itself to a reexamining of John Locke's theory of private property. Locke was right in stating that private ownership leads to a more productive use of resources. Certainly, privatized capitalism has proven to be by far the most production-intensive economical model the world has experienced. But does that have to be desirable? At Bucky's, the unproductive is often more desirable than the productive. People aim to work for pay as little as possible, to have as much free time as possible. There is more complaining about having to work for pay two or three days a week than there is about poverty or lack of benefits. Time and independence are more highly valued than money; more money is not always better, doing more not always desired.

Neither does Bucky’s strive for the more-than-human world to be productive. A large part of Bucky's property – 99 percent, according to the deed – is forested, and the

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Within this dismantling of ownership, there is an acknowledgment that certain objects – toothbrushes being a frequently used example – will still best be utilized individually, not communally. The desire for a toothbrush of one's own does not, however, negate a deprivatization of land, housing, or large machinery.

<sup>139</sup> Others would argue that non-owning options, such as squatting, are preferable.



residents have intentionally decided to keep it that way, because they see land unused by humans as something positive. Writing about this, I stumble over words. My first formulation is that the forest, too, is seen as having worth, then I replace that with saying it is valuable, then get stuck, finding no alternatives to these terms that keep us in an economistic, rather than ecological, framework. The forest does not have to have value, does not need to be worth anything. It just is.

### **Tragedy of the commons revisited (again)**

The touchstone text for criticisms of the commons is Garret Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons," written in 1968. While many critiques of Hardin's work have been put forth, the fear of the scenario he proposes is still widespread, so further engagement with this text is needed. Locke, in addition to his theory of property, is also an important theorist of enclosures. He argued that privately owned land was more productive (and hence better) than public land, because private owners would be more willing to improve their land (Fields, 142). More recently, enclosure has been advocated for Hardin's canonical article, and a plethora of work following in its wake. While the principles he espouses have been interpreted broadly, Hardin's article addresses a very specific issue: overpopulation. Hardin makes his case by using as an example a pasture held as a commons. He argues that on such a pasture, each herder will attempt to keep as many heads of cattle as possible. Even though the pasture is harmed by this practice, and the amount of food available for each individual animal lowered, it is more beneficial for the individual to add as many animals as possible. As each person adds animals, the collective is hurt, in the long run also hurting the individual. As Hardin puts it, "Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all." This case is then applied to a variety of present-day commodities, such as

national parks and fresh air, which Hardin argues people will use in a selfish manner, leading to their deterioration. He concludes that access to common resources in combination with a lack of restrictions on the number of children people have, inevitably leads to the overuse of resources.

The model presented by Hardin is not altogether unfamiliar to people at Bucky's; in fact, I have even heard “the tragedy of the commons” referenced in relation to the rapid disappearance of delicacies in the kitchen, in this particular case bananas. This case deserves closer investigation, however. Bananas for the Bucky's kitchen are rarely purchased on the free market; far more often, they are free in the sense of costing no money, found in dumpsters visited on trips to town. Bananas are frequently discarded by grocery stores, often for minor blemishes, while still being perfectly good for human consumption. In this case, then, the financial constraint model that Hardin presented as a possible solution to the tragedy of the commons leads to enormous amounts of waste, not a prudent use of resources.

Dumpstered food makes up a significant portion of the nourishment at Bucky's. Because it is reused waste, and because it is arbitrary – one week bananas, the next banana-flavored yogurt – it is treated with a certain amount of irreverence. It is okay to use it all at once, to not ever use it other than for compost, or to have a cupcake fight with faces and clothes smeared in bright blue frosting. Sometimes the goodies brought home disappear immediately, devoured by the people who happen to be in the kitchen at the moment, but more often everyone gets a share. Inventive dishes are created to utilize whatever happens to be available on any given day, and pudding made with stale bread is paired with greens from the garden.

There might, however, be a “reverse tragedy of the commons” happening at Bucky’s: the labor that can be avoided, since this avoidance can be hidden in the collective. A prime example is washing the dishes. Even though each individual is supposed to wash their own dishes (other than dishes used for communal meals), there is a constant piling up: a plate here, a spoon there. Every now and then, somebody will give in and wash the whole pile, and the process can start anew.

The complications of the common-enclosure binary that I have laid out above, and the troubling of theories of private property and the “tragedy of the commons,” calls for concepts to navigate the commons/enclosure conundrums. I draw on the lived experiences and conceptual framework of the Gayborhood, and present incubation and hybridity as useful concepts for rethinking relations to land.

### ***Incubators and hybridity***

“Enclosure” has two related but distinct meanings: it is the concept of privatizing common lands that is described above, but also the sense of closing off from the surrounding world. Queer land can be said to function as an enclosure in the second sense of this term: it is a space in ways separate from its surroundings. Another way to talk about this is as an incubator: a temporary safe space to help something grow. Prematurely born babies are incubated, as is yogurt: a relatively safe, warm environment provides an opportunity to gather strength. The way we can create unnaturally perfect conditions, so that something will thrive. We can make sure the growing entity has the right temperature, the right amount of nourishment. The plan is not to keep the baby in there forever, just until it is strong enough to thrive out in the atmosphere. This is, I argue, a useful engagement with enclosure: it allows us to nurture resistant social justice projects in an

often hostile world.

But what happens after the period of incubation? Do we go out into the world? What if that world is no safer than before? And who and what is kept out from the incubator? In 2011, Bucky's instituted a rule that straight people can stay on the land for a maximum of three days, after which the residents will decide whether they can stay longer. The decision to create this rule was a contentious one: some found it necessary, based on recent events, while others found that it reinforces a simplistic identity politics that does not keep anyone truly safe.<sup>140</sup> It was a rule that decided who could be incubated – who was properly in need of queer land – as well as who those already in the incubator needed to be in regular contact with.

By setting up prescriptive rules, such as that mentioned in the above paragraph, a rigidly held-to incubator can thus end up being uncritically exclusive. The concept can be made more flexible, however, if combined with the notion of hybridity. Let us turn to Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism to think through the politics of incubation. Haraway writes: "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (68). Bucky's is an offspring of a patriarchal capitalism that forced queer people out of the "mainstream" while at the same time providing gay males with enough of a sense of entitlement to claim a home for themselves. Cyborg illegitimacy is not a get-out-of-jail card, not a way of saying "we're queer so even though we come from oppressive traditions, it's okay, we're cool." What cyborg feminism can do for us is provide a framework within which to

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<sup>140</sup> After I completed my fieldwork, a new rule was instituted: during the winter month, when visitors stay indoors rather than in tents, white visitors can only stay for two weeks. This is an attempt to shift who has access to the space, and to address, in to use Saldanha's concept, the viscosity of whiteness on the land.

ask questions about gentrification and displacement. Haraway's cyborg refuses the categories of good and bad, pointing instead to our messy origins and equally messy futures. Cyborg life is a process of wild fermentation, gaining strength from multiple strands of bacteria, some sweet and some sour.

### ***Chapter conclusion***

As this chapter has shown, “commons” is not an easily delineated term. I have suggested that we need to think of commons as not always outside of private and public ownership, but rather as engaging creatively with these ownership regimes. A broader understanding of the term leads us to new possibilities for thinking about common space and community. This should not, however, lead to an “everything goes” approach to the commons. Privately-owned land, even when it has some property of a commons, is still privately owned, still within a framework where land is something that humans can own, that belongs to us, rather than us belonging to the land (or throwing out the concept of belonging altogether).

Whether or not to utilize the concepts of commons and enclosures is, to a large extent, a question of strategy, goals, and visions. The movements and theories I have analyzed in this dissertation call for a political and social practice where visions, strategies, and tactics line up. At the same time, they are not purist. Queer land is messy, both figuratively and literally, as was Occupy Wall Street. Ownership and enclosures are drawn on to move away from an ownership society. Taking a cue from prison-abolitionist thinking, the question is: do the strategies and tactics reinforce the system we wish to abolish, or move toward dislodging it? Invoking the commons, if done without a careful decolonial perspective, risks reinforcing settler-colonial capitalism. Hybrids and

incubators are concepts that can help us rethink some of the conundrums of the idea of commons and enclosures. Employing these ideas, commons and enclosures can be seen not as permanent concepts, but as temporary tactics in a long-term movement for a decommodified, decolonial approach to human-land relations.

## Postlude: Decembers 2013 and 2014

*If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and excrement.*

– James Agee, 10

I return to visit Bucky's twice after the end of my fieldwork, in December of 2013 and 2014, the darkest, quietest time of the year. Things are changing in the gayborhood. More and more private residences are popping up. Subdivisions are happening within the community: the winding road down to the hollow holds one sub-community, the next county over holds another. Three roommates are even renting a house in town. Folks want to be part of the community, and be part of it in a way that is more permanent than annual visits, but they do not necessarily want to live on the communal lands. They still visit frequently: if you are bored, you can count on there being people to hang out with at Bucky's or Hickory Knoll; if you do not like tap water, you can make a trip to Bucky's and fill up containers with spring water.

But something else is happening, too: a new process of collectivization. In 2013, one of the peripheral land projects – with less visitors than Bucky's and Hickory Knoll, and with a less well-defined identity – which has been privately owned since the 1970s, is undergoing the process of being turned over to a collective. Lilac Grove was purchased by its current owner, Richard, in the seventies. It has served as a community space, but Richard has maintained ownership and gotten to make all final decisions about the land. Now, he has come to the conclusion that Lilac Grove would grow in more useful directions if it were owned and operated by a collective. At this point, two visioning meetings have been held, and there are two groups of people interested in forming

collectives. The groupings reflect the generational tensions in the gayborhood: an older group, consisting of white Radical Faeries; and a younger group, consisting of queers with an anarchist bent.

I talk to two participants in the visioning meetings, who both express excitement and joy at the process. There is a visceral feel to their excitement: they speak slower, gesture to their bodies to explain how they are feeling. Maybe there is room for growth and development in a community that sometimes feels stuck in old patterns that no longer serve. Many of those involved in the visioning process are transient, with few material resources, and now they are being offered the possibility of a land base. What's more, there is an intentional process, a chance to shape what this land project will be.

In the spring of 2014, when the lilacs bloom, a gathering will be held at Lilac Grove, and the process of turning the land over to collective ownership will be discussed and planned in more detail. The timing of the event is based on nature, not the calendar. There is no convenient way for overbooked city-folks to make plans for getting there; we will just have to take it as it comes.

As we continue our conversation, it turns out that one of the people interested in being part of the collective (the anarchist queer version of it) was active in the facilitation working group of Occupy Wall Street. They tell me that they think the skills they acquired there could be useful in a collective. Once again, Occupy and queer land overlap, the skills transferring back and forth between rural land and urban park. We talk about the sense of hope and possibility that Occupy Wall Street gave us, and I think to myself that queer land furthers that sense. Here, again, is a project to be started, a way to disrupt power relations. The scale is smaller, the temporality slower. Our work here is not always



very noticeable. There are no mass marches, no police evictions. Most days, the labor is dishes and wood chopping. When we cook, we do not feed hundreds of people, just a dozen or two. It is hard to ascribe meaning to this work, the kind of work that is not widely recognized, the communal (non-gender-specific) housewife labor that sustains this place. But when I hear the dreams of Lilac Grove, I think that this is meaningful, this is the painstakingly slow work of world-making.

When I return at the end of 2014, I am first met with sighs and quiet words, hints that “so much has happened....trauma....” A communication at the pace this space communicates at. Bits and pieces are told over the next few days, by weary voices, yet with a sense of hope beneath the tiredness. People have left, voluntarily or thrown out. Part of the land has been designated as a Queer and Trans People of Color (QTPOC) autonomous zone. A kitchen is being built on this land, money from the Bucky’s budget designated toward supporting this space. Some people in the gayborhood are upset by this new development, think Bucky’s is taking things too far. Schisms in the broader community have become more visible, a division between two somewhat geographically distinct parts of the gayborhood turning into a social division. It is a division along lines of age, spirituality, politics.

This land is still enclosed, still privatized. It is far, far from accessible to all who want access. There is hope and frustration, burnout and new visions. But within these enclosures, something is happening. There is continuity and change, that slow fermentation of the gayborhood: wood chopping, alone-time, and rambling kitchen conversations. Commons are created, slowly.

The goals of land projects are bigger than the everyday captures at first glance. HOWL, a

women's land trust in Vermont, in 1993 lists as item j on their summary of purposes: “actively encourage and create global ecofeminism and world peace.”<sup>141</sup> Does living together and sharing resources really lead to such grand results? Some days, the labor that goes into merely surviving is so big that anything other than this seems impossible. As I work on chopping one single piece of wood for close to an hour, the skills to be learned to even keep the house above freezing on a cold winter night seem such a distant goal.

But this is the wrong way of looking at land projects, I have come to think. It is okay if it takes all day to chop wood for the evening's fire. Those hours are not wasted; they are more than time traded for payment for labor. Much happens in that time of wood chopping: when done collectively, it is a form of socializing; when done alone, it can be a way to clear the mind. But regardless of whether anything comes out of the activity, it *is*.

“This is no utopia,” Kathleen Stewart writes about the ordinary. “Not a challenge to be achieved or an ideal to be realized, but a mode of attunement, a continuous responding to something not quite already given and yet something happening” (2014, 127). The ordinary of queer land is Agee's “fragments of cloth,...lumps of earth [and] phials of odor.” It is the broken, the partial, the smelly, the surprising – those fragments that make life. There are enough slow moments for attunement to take place, for a slow responding to that “not quite already given and...yet happening.” There is space, and there is relative silence. And then it is interrupted. A conch is blown, a dog barks, a cell phone somehow manages to pick up a text message. You forget what was happening, and the processes of responding get lost, perhaps to be picked up at a later date and time. They are frustrating, these interruptions and this slowness, but then eventually they open up

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<sup>141</sup> HOWL Herstory collection, Huntington, VT.

space. The processes of change at queer land projects – addressing racism and settler colonialism – that I left my fieldwork sure would never happen – are now, two years later, slowly being talked about, and addressed. This is the time of queer land: not the shouting of three-hour marches through the city, but the whispering of three years – or three decades – of conversation and cooperation. Maybe that is not enough. In the face of everything that is wrong with the world, maybe years of talking and gradual shifting of material resources is not going to achieve the “global ecofeminism and world peace” that HOWL sets as its mission. But this slowness does, I believe, show a way of living (and dying) that challenges the sped-up desperation of late capitalism. And next December something else will have happened, another step in some direction, even if that direction is a circle. And there will be another evening in front of the wood stove, another evening of warm soup and dumpstered cupcakes, of Scrabble and moldy leftovers, of peeing outside and keeping rattlesnakes at bay with flashlights and big boots. And maybe some words. No utopia, but a different form of world-making.

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## **Archives**

Justin Potter Library, DeKalb County Library System, Smithville, TN.  
 Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, NY.

### ***Performances, talks, and conferences***

- Daniels, Lin, Angela Jimenez, Shoshana Rothaizer, and Katherine Schweighofer. 2010. "Women's Communities and Women's Lands," panel at "In Amerika The Call Us Dykes": Lesbian Lives in the 1970s Conference. New York City, October 8.
- Eggplant Faerie Players, "Welcome to Homo Hollow." (Bloomington, IN, November 6, 2010; Dowelltown, TN, June 2011; Dowelltown, TN, August 2011 [dress rehearsal]; New York, NY, October 12, 2012)
- Fernandez, Luis. 2009. Talk on the panel "What Is Anarchist Studies," Inaugural North American Anarchist Studies Network Conference. November 21, Hartford, CT.
- Gilmore, Ruth. 2012. Talk on the panel "How Do We De-Carcerate?," Removing the Bars Conference, Columbia University. March 24, New York, NY.
- Kauanui, J. Kēhaulani. 2015. "Nothing Common about 'the Commons': Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Difference," Anarchism, Decolonization, and Radical Democracy: 2015 Mellon Symposium. March 27, Haverford College, Haverford, PA.
- Meiners, Erica. 2012. Panel talk at "Universities, Prisons and Civic Engagement: Making Connections between Rhetoric and Reality," a meeting at the New School. April 4, New York, NY.
- Smith, Andrea. 2007. Talk at the "Liberating Gender & Sexuality" plenary, US Social Forum. June 30, Atlanta, GA. Available on DVD from Z Video, Woods Hole, MA.
- Wise, Marlisa. 2012. Talk at the Brooklyn Food Conference. May 12, Brooklyn, NY.