

Island Life by Queer Ecologies Network

Elin Már Øyen Vister

There was never a beginning
just an irresistible pressing sensation
coming from a sensual accumulation
of

I would love to's
permeating our skins
transcending the personal moving
into the political of national states,
climate change, systemic violence,
oppression, imperialism, colonialism,
ecocides, neoliberal-capitalism-con-
sumerism, racism, transphobia and
misogyny

Stand up and be counted bursts
through
we are sky, ocean, earth
we who make love to the earth
ultimately find each other

We who acknowledge that we are a we
we of the deep space time
millions of years of coming into being
and to coexist with everything alive

Earth seeds
born of the earth, not onto it
earth kin to our mother's wombs

We who kiss the ground beneath
our feet
We who get raunchy with seaweed

Our seeds had been preparing for years,
waiting to gather enough energy to burst
through the soil and reach up through our
flesh and consciousness. There it would
taste, smell and feel the sun, the salty air,
the waves, the wind, intimacy, the person-
al is political, trauma, wounds, joy, laughter
and tears.

The seed got a nutritious boost during sev-
en glorious days in July 2014. Røst AiR host-
ed a FRANK gathering, words were spoken
and bodies met. Ester Fleckner told Elin
Már Øyen Vister about Mo Maja Moesgaard.
Then this guy called Cal Harben up in
Romssa/Tromsø heard rumours of a queer
island close to Røst in Nordland/Sápmi and
went on a mission to find it. They sure did.
In the autumn of 2014, Cal and Elin Már got
in touch with Mo and so the story began, of
queer and trans people with a love of ecol-
ogy and deep solidarity finding each other,
bonding and beginning to cook and stir...

Our first love is 'the Norwegian island of
Skomvær', 67 degrees north and above the
Arctic Circle ('Skomvær' most likely comes
from the old Sámi word *skubme*, describing
a shallow funnel-shaped valley ending in a
wall of rock.) Skomvær, at first a seemingly
small island, situated a stone's throw from
Nykan nature reserve, home to Northern
Europe's most populous seabird colony
(which is in a crisis). The area is the seasonal
breeding ground and home of pelagic birds
such as black-backed gulls, eiders, puffins,
razorbills, murre, black guillemots, shags,
Leach's petrels and storm petrels, as well as
ravens, crows and other smaller birds, for as
long as anyone knows; far into the deep past.
One hundred and thirty years ago, when the
Norwegian artist Theodor Kittelsen stayed
at the lighthouse visiting his sister in 1887-
89, even sea otters frolicked around the
island. Skomvær also neighbours a harbour
seal colony, and whale creatures such as
orcas and harbour porpoise regularly swim
and fish around and about in the Røst archi-
pelago that surrounds Skomvær Island.

We who together form the Røst AiR work-
ing group, Elin Már Øyen Vister, Jason
Rosenberg and Marie Kaada Hovden, arrive
here as humble nomads around the first of
June and stay till about that time when the
northern lights can be seen again as the
skies darken towards the end of August.
Then the storms come and we leave swiftly
for our autumn and winter homes. Our sum-
mer home is the island and we sleep and
work in the refurbished buildings of the old
lighthouse complex from 1887. Every sum-
mer since 2013, Røst AiR working group has
volunteered to facilitate a space for artists
and other creative souls to coexist, create,
meet, exchange, think, walk, lie in the grass,
stare at the sea, process, rest, write, for-
age, garden, feed chickens, harvest, fish,
eat, hug and share. Our bodies tune into the
rhythm of the Atlantic Arctic summer and
the mood of the island. We wake up and fall
asleep to the rhythm of island life.



The Chicken and the Barn.
Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.

Mermaid Emergence. Photo by Hilary Jeffery.

To begin a collective dreaming up
of our first Queer Ecologies gather-
ing that was to take place in August
2015 (the year of the goat) we made
a collective 'I would love to...' list:

Mo Maja Moesgaard



I would really love if could invite
thoughts, people, stories, knowl-
edge from nonwestern and indig-
enous voices, as you both write. I
don't know any artists/thinkers/
doers living in northern Norway
with Sámi knowledge, but I think
it would make a lot of sense invit-
ing such a person/book/story to
participate.

I would also truly love to be very
bodily present during the week,
and not just participating as a
head, bringing in yoga, meditation,
walks, smells, relaxation...

I would also love to share and bring
forward yoga philosophy, practice,
experience and thought.

I also would love to think of every-
body bringing what they have on
equal terms, being careful not to
repeat hierarchies from the art
world/academia, and treating dif-
ferences in knowledge as produc-
tive and shame-free.

I would love to share potential
shame as a collectively produced
feeling and affect that needs to be
handled with care.

I would love to read aloud together.

Jaya Ramchandani

I transport myself back to Skomvær Fyr,
67° 22' 5" N, 15° 56' 35" E, 8m above sea
level.

The air is crisp, like none I've experi-
enced before. The sun is present. It
doesn't set. It doesn't rise. It just rico-
chets over the horizon. It's August.

It's a safe space — for six humans like
us. Starkly alike in essence. Breathing
in each other. Altogether somehow. It's
a transformative space.

The mood of the week is melancholic. I
first heard the term 'Eco-melancholia' on
the island. Rather different from 'Ego-
melancholia', it captures the incognito
despair felt watching and participating
in the slow death of the natural envi-
ronment, its abundance and diversity,
and our connection with it. The puffins
are disappearing. They are not the only
ones. The vulnerable human is disap-
pearing. Eco-melancholia. I'm happy
when a word can capture a range of
unspoken feelings, thoughts and emo-
tions. I've been spreading the word.

We read, among others, Anna Tsing,
Thich Nhat Hanh, Judith Butler and
Sacha Kagan. Their words stitching
the unformed neural connections in
our own minds. The words seemed to
melt together as we spent time in the
garden, by the rocks, within the wind,
in the ice cold waters of the Arctic, in
collective spirit, in silence. Each of us
presented a part of what guides us. I
shared the essence of what I've come
to realize about the nature of reali-
ty, through the language of physics: a
mental image of non-duality. In physics
we learn about 'wave-particle duality'
— it's a terrible phrase, because what
Young's double-slit experiment, which
demonstrates light behaving both as a

particle and a wave, really represents is non-duality. And co-emergence is the modus operandi of all the particles and interactions we use to describe reality today, through the lens of physics. Buddhist philosophy presents a similar picture:

“Form is the wave. And emptiness is the water. Form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form.”
—Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding*

The seed is both the same and different from the tree.

My time on the island played a big role in defining the manifesto of The Story Of, a series of interdisciplinary, informal learning projects designed with the wider benefit of making interdependencies visible.

Both ‘queer’ and ‘ecology’ somehow exemplify non-dual spaces. The seminar seemed moulded to my sensibilities and Røst AiR was magic—living, breathing best practices of an ecologically sustainable life. Food foraging, rainwater harvesting, compost toilets, buying in sacks, sourdough bread, meditation ground and collaborative decision-making to work/play it all out. If I look into the future (and by looking into it, I participate in its creation, yes?), the network will serve to touch a number of lives slowly and significantly.

I’m humbled. I brought with me a realization. I took back a sea change.



The Sky. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.



Deep listening with Elin in the greenhouse. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.



Twisted ankle crawl back to the residency space. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.

Crab UFO 3. Photo by Hilary Jeffery.

Elin Már Øyen Vister
♥
I would love to do some communal listening meditations outside, listening together without sounding.

I would love for us to do some playing and singing/sounding. I would love for us to coexist peacefully with the non-human, and cherish and appreciate the existence of all organic material we are made of, dependent on and surrounded by.

I would love to discuss melancholia, desperation and depression in relation to being and person/artist/communities in the times of the ecological transition/

I would love to discuss how to deal with a feeling of not belonging to violence.

I would love for us to make some food reflecting the ‘I would love to’ list.

I would love for us to make a collective reading performance to the island’s non-human inhabitants/organic material.

I would love to share putting hands and fingers in the earth, in the garden.

Cal Harben
♥
I want to find a way to build a shared language, to develop some kind of text expressing our desires and differences.

I would like to think seriously about how to work with decolonial strategies. Acknowledging there is a history within environmental movements, ecofeminism, academic ecological criticism, queer theory, that very directly ignores, appropriates and refutes a responsibility towards building solidarity with indigenous struggles, land rights claims, self-governance and continued colonial violence.

I want to laugh a lot, I want to cry, I want to express care. I want to have fun, to love, to feel excited, to feel overwhelmed, to hold each other up and re-energize ourselves, and to fight apathy.

I want to produce a gift from the week. I want to ask what we share from this seminar experience, what do we give forward from all we’ve learned, discussed, unlearned, questioned? (a manifesto? a poem? a text? a video? an action? a publication? a website? an email network?) I want to question ‘productivity’ and look at ‘gift’ culture.

I would like to spend time with the birds, the plants, the tides, the seaweed, the fish, the slugs, the weather, the wind, the sky, the rocks, the death, the harvest, the sounds, the temperature, the people. However this may look like.

Malin Arnell

How did we became part?

Not (Understanding)

Not being able to Not Not.

What did we touch? How did we touch?

The porosity of our bodies’ togetherness through (with-in)

The rainwater we collected
The cliffs of the island
The seaweed on our tongue
The surfaces of the texts
The ocean beyond our reach
The sky inside our breath

Under the spell of the lighthouse (the presence of Virginia Woolf)
Following a schedule
Unfollowing it

What did we care (with)? How did we care?

With the shovel in our hands.

Digging
Moving the soil
Gathering the sun
Carrying stones
Making fires

inside
the Russian tent sauna
whipping each other with seaweed whips
Making marks.
Outside
the ice cold water around our bodies

What did we share? How did we share?

Our rage.
Our fear.
Our commitments through (with-in)

the cooking of the food
the baking of the bread
the making of our desires
the touching of our dependencies

Tejal Shah presents her work in the shed. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.



Tejal Shah presents her work in the shed. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.



Camilla Renate Nicolaisen

♥

I would love to do collective saunas and bring short poems/texts/manifestos to read during the sauna.

I would love to share what each of us works with in terms of questions, uncertainties, critiques, desires, anxieties or whatever our collective space allows for.

I would love to have small lectures on themes some of us find particularly interesting – like the one Jaya did on space and everything in it!

I would love for us to draw, make or write something together (plantbook dreams...).

I would love to experiment with languages (I believe that some of us speak different ‘native’ languages), use different languages/sounds/words in our poetry readings/lectures/creative projects.

Hilary Jeffery

A Mermaid’s Dream

I came to Skomvær for the Queer Ecology Seminar 2016 from the typically stressful conditions of modern city life. It took me a few days to decompress and really arrive on the island. My fellow residents were clearly experiencing a similar process of letting go and releasing into the tidal island rhythms, a three step sequence: recover-arrive-reset. Our reset mode meant slowing down and creating counterbalances to the rampant speed of computerized virtual realities. Slowing down, and then questioning the constant need to ‘upgrade’, pausing the unceasing life of commerce which even the most insensitive person cannot withstand. Skomvær became for me an arrival port into a possible and realizable non-Romantic utopia. I could finally

breathe at a sustainable rate as we openly discussed new models in personal conversations, presentations, through the texts we studied and the people we met online.

Since 2005 I have had a musical ensemble called Lysn, which plays music for the ‘inner-space age’. My work with Lysn is to compose situations in which musicians and audience alike are enabled to enter into independent meditative states with the aid of music. Once in this state they can then travel inside, finding spaces to freely associate, visualize and dream in, lysning to their individual perceptions. In November 2015 I created a Lysn project called ‘Murmansk Spaceport’, together with musicians from Murmansk and Bodø, as part of Dark Ecology 2015. We embarked on a musical expedition with the destination ‘Jupiter’. Many people reported having intense personal inner experiences during this event, including Elin Már Øyen Vister. As a result she invited me for the Røst Artist in Residence programme, giving me the wonderful opportunity to ‘land’ on Skomvær in time for the Queer Ecology seminar.

In Murmansk the idea was that people departing from the spaceport would arrive on a personally relevant distant planet, with utopian conditions. My arrival on Skomvær felt really like landing on such a planet, located in the middle of the ocean, and I documented this process with a series of short videos and photos from which I will create a new film. The film stars Anuj Vaidya and is entitled ‘A Mermaid’s Dream’. In a half-asleep state, a mermaid is resting on a rock by the sea, listening to the sound of the waves and drifting in her mind as one might do at a Lysn concert. Suddenly he is roused by the vision of a UFO landing on the island. She experiences an abduction and is transported to Jupiter with other Røst artists in residence, arriving just in time – synchronously with the Dark Ecology travellers coming from Murmansk Spaceport. After experiencing the music of Jupiter, he resolves to bring it to her island and so eventually Jupiter’s music arrives on Earth, which is partly what happened during Queer Ecology 2016! As well as the images I shot during my residency, the film will feature music I recorded on the island and in the lighthouse, as well as music from Murmansk Spaceport.

We are.
We were stretching our bodies
through
(with-in)
Our sensuous practices and figurations
Our feeling-with attentiveness
Our partial responsibility
Walking in silence.
Tracing.
Moving the horizon.
Listening to the sound of silence
through (with-in)
the sound of the thousand birds.
Counting the nestlings
through (with-in)
our tears of feathers.
Reaching out over the Atlantic Ocean when
breathing
through (with-in)
the ability to trust
impermanence and that which has yet to
emerge



Foraging walk with Elin.
Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.

Listening to Jupiter Music. Photo by Hilary Jeffery.



I travelled by train, boat and bus back to Berlin from Skomvær and it felt like re-entering the Matrix. Since then I have not been able to find a moment to work on my film, so I do not know when it will be finished; it remains a utopian dream but one which I am determined to realize. I am indebted to Elin for inviting me and everyone else who inspired me there during my stay. There is no monetary value for such an experience. Skomvær is a priceless jewel on a sick planet desperate to be healed. I had a transformational experience which reminded me again to keep trying to be in tune, and gradually adjust my work with Lysn and other projects towards a more sustaining mode.



Food foraging walk with Elin. Photo by Jaya Ramchandani.

Anuj Vaidya

We gather by the laguna to swim: The water is too cold, and I ricochet back onto land; I have not become mermaid yet! The island spirals out from here — gathering the sea, the docks, little Skomvær, the lighthouse, the black mould, the diesel spill, the ghosts and us, gathering time itself into her teeming dreamtime. The minerals, and lichens, and rocks, they are sticky with stories from deep time; these winds still whisper Sápmi whispers after all. We gather by the old dock to wait, to listen. What are the pleasures of waiting if not to experience time itself! And here we do not wait alone, we listen with/for puffins, and guillemots, and kittiwakes, and cormorants, and sea eagles, and seals, and the dildoscape that only reveals herself for that particular pulsing of the moon. We gather in the kitchen to eat, consuming and being consumed by each other, by the nettle and nasturtium, the potatoes and chard, a bounty that is generated under the orchestration of the island. We pick sorrel and watercress from her crevices, seaweed from his skirt, salt from the air! I sneak away to seek mushrooms, trying to tune into their mycelial memories underfoot: These memories are of future forestations, future constellations, no luck today! We gather in the sauna to sweat. We gather by the fire at night, to watch the moon rise. We howl at them. We have become companions.

We sleep by the lightness of night. On that sliver of sun that separates the land from the sea, time pivots: night into day, past into presence, light into 4 a.m.: time to empty this 41-year-old bladder! I walk out of the house and onto the hillock to piss in the billowing wind, with a flock of chickens underfoot. I will defer the pungent pleasures of the

Jupiter Screens 2. Photo by Hilary Jeffery.

Jupiter Door. Photo by Hilary Jeffery.

Main Annell & Ginger Brooks Takahashi, untitled (dildoscape) 2015.



compost toilet until tomorrow. Perhaps one of the sky whales will have come down to the water, perhaps a storm petrel will kiss me tonight. I return to my bed to dream. One day the wind whips up the grasses into a dancing frenzy, and we stay indoors and play games. One day we speak of moss, and become plant, and think with a matsutake spore, and immerse ourselves in the cavernous sounds of becoming-whale. One day we get a call from the Cree outback, another day a scientist/shaman calls us from down under. One day a pod of orcas circles the island, an eagle owl makes a visit, a kestrel hovers. One day we begin to gather the sunlight into panels, for future forestations, for future constellations. One day it is time to leave. Back in the city,

time vanishes, leaving me suffocating sometimes, overwhelming me with the living and dying of the world. When the fog rolls in, and land and water disappear, only the lighthouse rises — a beacon across space/time, a portal to an oblique oikos. I take a deep breath and feel the salty island air lapping up my lungs. I remember that the island and I are bound up in the same churning. I slow down.

I promise the island: When I return home, I will sing to the redwoods about you. I do.

Anuj Vaidya, Beacons, 2016.

