

From queer spaces to queerer ecologies

Recasting Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an ecology of mind* to further mobilise & anticipate historically marginal stakeholders in environmental planning for community development

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Abstract

The ideas of Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) spanned anthropology, psychology, ecology, and systems theory but were barely used in the construction of queer theory. Bateson's most influential work was a series of essays compiled in 1972 as *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Today, Bateson's "Steps" have relevance for investigating and theorising queer ecologies that expand on and depart from more static notions of sexual minority identities and spaces in the context of expanding trans theory. This essay focuses on the relevance of the Steps for expanding theories of queer space to queer ecologies through better identification of stakeholders and environmental relationships in the context of decolonisation. Guy Debord's notions of environmental planning dialogues for community development provides a bridge to the theoretical currents that influenced early forms of queer theory especially those of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. Four sets of ideas in Bateson's Steps have relevance for constructing a framework for queer ecologies: re-examination of cultural systems that extend to gender, sexuality, and biological taxonomies especially to better identify vulnerable populations; 'civilizational' health based on acknowledgment of queer ecosystems that include biological exuberance and gender fluidity; regenerative systems of social relationships, culture and governance that could better challenge transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and cultural chauvinism; and transcontextual dynamics based on Bateson's so-called End-linkage Theory for expanded and supple understandings of identity construction and sexuality within increasingly volatile environments and communities. Applications of Bateson's Steps are explored for three contexts, at different scales, around the Salish Sea of Pacific Canada.

Keywords: queer theory, Gregory Bateson, environmental planning, decolonisation

Introduction

How will new social formations, formed by historically marginal groups formed by gender and sexual minorities, engage in new decision-making frameworks for more equitable social development as well as for better environmental management? What new kinds of decision-making frameworks and political economies are possible that could better represent often diffuse, queer minorities? The recent conversations on queer ecologies could have utility for constructing new social and political theory especially when linked to older discourses in human ecology such as the work of Gregory Bateson.

The ideas of Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) grounded inquiries into psychology, culture, and sexuality in social systems nested in ecosystems. Bateson's have been curiously lacking in construction of modern notions of sexual minority rights and goals in the broader framework of queer social and cultural theory. Bateson's years of field studies, extending from the 1920s to the 1970s, were on New Guinea and Bali followed by decades in Northern California. This essay explores both an emerging paradigm for queer ecologies, for better integration of new initiatives to confront gender, sexuality and cultural inequities into locally based decision-making frameworks, and the particular relevance of Bateson to this project. This essay is focused on the celebrated 1972 compilation of his latter work, *Steps to an ecology of mind* (Bateson, 2002).

The underlying argument in this essay is that our notions of sexual minority relations have gone from half-hidden networks relying on “strategic sites” (Ingram, 1997: 123–125) to visible and defended “queer space” (Colomina et al, 1994; Chisholm, 2005: 26–30; Oswin, 2008) to more ubiquitous, queering systems, political economies, and environments; constellations that can be conceived of as ecosystems and overlapping ecologies. Acknowledgement of this expanding and volatile world of intimate relations, gender and sexual cultures, and heightening contests over space and resources simultaneous with rapid global change, that can only be partially assessed by and regulated through Foucault's biopower, is the most pressing factor for expansion of the ambiguous term, ‘queer ecologies’ into a paradigm for investigations and a mode of activism.

In exploring possible relevance of Steps to investigations of queer ecologies, I focus on the interface of erotic and other social relationships with decision-making

frameworks over public space and lands. By expanding and queering the often instrumentalist notion of stakeholder analysis to include sexual minorities, previously neglected forms of agency, that span individual desires and interests to more collective processes of planning, design and implementation, can be explored. Queer ecologies as activist investigations could revisit Guy Debord's Situationist ideal for community transformation through "environmental planning" (Debord, 1994: 119–127) based on "dialogue" (Debord, 1994: 127). Underlying this utopian project are new forms of territorialisation and reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 112, 133) extending to sexual minorities. Articulated in the early 1960s as France's colonial period was ending badly, Debordian environmental planning is worth revisiting because it expands the *détournement*, as a way to know and enjoy communities, to more indefinite forms of decolonisation. Fluid relationships between political economies, decision-making, infrastructure, knowledge production and transformation of the biophysical and built environments, directly relevant to sexual minorities, can be considered more squarely as part of community development and the building of social infrastructure extending to communities of sexual minorities at risk. But in contrast to Debord's arena, urban public space, I explore a broader theatre for conceiving of activism and development of civil society, that is based, instead, on Bateson's various conceptions of ecosystems.

This essay explores how Bateson's Steps can be adapted to build queer ecologies as a more robust framework to understand sexual minority communities, and respective disparities and potentials for activism, in this period of indefinite decolonisation. Bateson's Steps could be used to better identify vulnerable queer groups and environmental relationships than research methods based on both more conservative and heteronormative forms of biology and ecology, on one hand, and the first two decades of queer theory focused on uncovering previously obscured narratives of homoerotic desire as in Kosofsky's celebrated 1991 *Epistemology of the closet*, on the other hand. Today, needs for theory for sexual minority community-formation, activism and programme-development is driven less for asserting formerly suppressed, identities and desires and more in response to pressures for more knowledge to devise new strategies for improved 'infrastructure' development, service delivery, and equity of access to benefits and programmes in increasingly multicultural communities. And this relatively recent queer infrastructure, based on well over three decades of sexual health activism, is

increasingly vulnerable to neoliberal policies, global change and multiple environmental crises.

This essay is structured around both exploring diversifying uses of theories of and methods for investigating queer ecologies, more generally, and the relevance of Bateson to such undertakings in particular. The following problem statement explores a general shift in thinking about sexual minority communities and politics mapped in terms of static, heavily defended queered spaces to more dynamic and queerer ecologies far less defined by historic urban neighbourhoods. The subsequent section is on the latent queerness of Bateson's *Steps to an ecology of mind* and how it was informed by his early field work described in the 1936, *Naven*. The core of this essay is a review of some of the possible lessons from Bateson's Steps for such a notion of ecosystems as a framework for new insights about queer communities. I then explore the relationship of Bateson's human ecology concepts to contemporary decolonisation. With a few of the more obviously relevant Steps, I apply such interdisciplinary, ecological approaches to three communities, at different scales, around the Salish Sea of Pacific Canada. I conclude with a further appreciation of the importance of Bateson's pioneering effort, especially the breadth of his interdisciplinarity spanning systems theory to sexuality studies, while reflecting on the new modes of research necessary to create queerly ecological models of volatile communities.

For the sake of brevity, this essay has not touched three other bodies of thought that have been and continue to be crucial to the development and decolonisation of queer theory and related investigations of space and ecologies. The deep roots of feminism and lesbian feminism, especially theory based on the activism of women of colour, to both queer and environmental politics warrants a separate essay. Second, discussion of the growing literature on sexualities in native or 'aboriginal' [the preferred usage in Canada] communities in North America, and new theoretical work on indigeneity in the context of globalisation, is postponed though it has direct relevance for the three case studies. And the tremendous implications for queer ecologies of various alternative taxonomies of genders, species, and ecosystems, extending to various historic and contemporary, anthropomorphic cultural movements, are for another essay.

Problem statement: From queered space to queerer ecologies

Two decades of notions of queer space, linked to early queer theory, have often framed conversations around communities, defence of strategic locations, environmental and economic benefits and costs, and the distribution of services. But most notions of queer space, even in the context of creative and outrageous forms of constructed visibility, were linked to simplistic and static notions of gay ghettos and suburbs and not the spectrum of communities and policy engagements that we see today. Queer spaces have been too often described in terms of discrete, three-dimensional and time-specific objects that are identified, defended, bought, sold, rented, and either transformed or fossilized by some kind of social alliance that fosters tolerance and support for gender and sexual difference. Many contemporary conceptions of queer space have remained so limited as to be incapable to provide the theory to contest neoliberal policies and respective globalisation of capital.

Queer ecologies describe more complex, over-lapping, and volatile sets of human-environmental relationships defined less by static locations than by multiple trajectories. Whereas queer space provided the equivalent of a snap-shot and cognitive map, queer ecologies provides the video clip and roving global positioning system (GPS) coordinates. The concept of queer space as a discrete and constructed object, as in a bar as an entertainment establishment with a cultivated clientèle, or as temporary territory, as in a Pride parade route, is an already outmoded means of understanding gender and sexual minorities especially weak at contributing to understandings of how we engage in globalising communalities nested in ecosystems under stress. Instead, queer ecologies as describing dynamic sets of social, cultural, political economic and spatial relationships could hold utility for charting and understanding particular social groups especially where homophobic repression has declined. By coupling “ecologies” with “queer”, we can reclaim the dual and linked meanings of the Greek root *oikos*: both the human world nested in and part of biophysical processes, on one hand, and simply “a community of companionship” and “the specific milieu of social reciprocity” (Robertson, 2012: 80) on the other hand. But with so many relevant social and environmental relationships, how can we construct a better contextualised framework for understanding dynamics of gender, sexuality, and decolonisation that provide new insights and prospects for prediction?

The 2007 colloquium, *Queer ecologies: Sex, nature, politics, desire*, convened in Toronto by York University's Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, effectively inventoried the kinds of theoretical gaps and divergent agendas for framing queer ecologies. One line of thinking was largely rooted in responses to Bagemihl's 1999 survey of homosexuality in animals as part of further construction of a notion "queer animality" (Alaimo, 2010). Another body of research was on the intersection of nature and queer subcultures, disentangling notions of nature and "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980: 631; Azzarello, 2012: 28) later developed as "queer environmentality" as a movement, "that conceptualizes human beings, other life forms, and their environments as disregarding – and, at times, flaunting their disregard for – the ostensibly primary natural law to survive and reproduce" (Azzarello, 2012: 4). So queer ecologies, in this vein of thought, requires a biology driven in part by 'exuberance' and not entirely by heterosexual reproduction.

A third line of thinking was on reworking ecological concepts to better conceptualise and describe aspects of older, so-called "gay ghettos" (Ingram, 2010) in large part to anticipate new kinds of communities and political economies and respective needs for social programmes, infrastructure, and space. A fourth body of thought explored the intersections of queer and ecological activism in confronting heteronormativity in environmental sciences while expanding and applying notions of social equity as part of the project of environmental justice. For example, Giovanna Di Chiro argued that, "Environmental theory and politics in the United States have historically mobilized ideas of the normal" (Di Chiro, 2010: 224), and went on to explore the problems and residues of "eco-normativity" leading to "toxic discourse" that reproduced misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia. The project of confronting this residual toxicity in some corners of environmentalism was linked to longer-term decolonisation and challenges to racial chauvinism and racialised fetishes (Gosine, 2010). A fifth, more philosophical discourse explored how organic corollaries in the work of figures such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) could be adapted for new understandings of queering human communities (Chisholm, 2010). Ironically, none of these five bodies of thought engaged directly with the field of human ecology whose influence waned as queer theory became more influential.

Like a number of queer ecologies initiatives and conversations in recent years, the

2007 Toronto meeting explored needs for new theory and modes of activism without attempting to construct a paradigm. Paradoxically, any expansion of theory around gender and sexuality, through the wider cognisance of context and biophysical relationships, was paradigmatic. The five lines of inquiry in Toronto represented threads of thinking rooted in divergent disciplines of cultural studies, cultural geography, environmental and urban studies and planning, political economy, and philosophy. So an underlying function of the queer ecologies paradigm has been to expand the fulcrum of analysis for minority gender and sexual communities from two decades of over-dependence on analysis of cultural narratives.

While there has been an ongoing conversation on ecosystems since the 2007 Toronto colloquium, I do not recall mention of Bateson or his Steps. I have come to wonder about whether or not Bateson, as probably the most influential Twentieth Century figure who clearly linked philosophy with ecosystems, has relevance to the lines of investigations sketched in Toronto. So at this early phase in exploring some principles for queer ecologies, I have a number of questions that perhaps Bateson's written legacy, and Steps in particular, could further illuminate. Is the core of some paradigm of queer ecologies simply the acknowledgement that animals of the same gender make physical contact that derives in part out of forms of experience somewhat similar to human sexuality? Could a critique result of the residual heteronormativity and outright transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia packed into some remaining corners of biology? Is such recognition of what Bruce Bagemihl termed, "biological exuberance" sufficient to build a new paradigm for human sexual minorities spanning biology, ecosystems, human communities, and contemporary culture? Could a queer ecologies framework free us further from anthropomorphic biases in acknowledging other species? For example, there have been recent achievements in human understanding of animal experience, with one compelling work being the National Film Board interactive work *Bear 71* (Allison & Mendes, 2012). But could a queer ecologies paradigm push our understandings much further?

The latent queerness of Bateson's *Steps to an ecology of mind*

In Bateson's Steps, we have the synthesis of a life of field work spanning the jungles of New Guinea, the villages of Bali, and the mental health clinics of

California. His journey was queer, the route was unorthodox, and the lines of thinking were joyous, interdisciplinary, and radically inclusive. Perhaps more than any other body of thought in the twentieth century, Bateson's writings consistently argued that what we consider human, as in our relationships and cultures, are part and a product of largely, inhuman ecosystems and that all of knowledge is ultimately a trans-species project that inherently leads to challenges, blurs and reconceptions of biological difference and sentience.

While Bateson's ideas were paradigmatic for modern environmentalism, especially in the two decades after both the first Earth Day and the Stonewall Riots, the ecological consciousness and organicism of those times had little influence on the formation of queer theory. Early on, Carolyn Dinshaw (1995: 76–77) challenged the power of conventional biology and its role in normalising obfuscation of minority gender and sexual experiences. Dinshaw committed to an, "inquiry into the ways that 'natural' has been produced by particular discursive matrices of heteronormativity", a line of thinking more recently developed by Jeffrey Cohen (2008). But in a time of intensification of competition for resources and space amidst ecological crises, theorists and activists of gender, sexuality, decolonisation, and community development cannot afford to avoid ecosystems even if previous approaches to seeking better understandings have been marked and partially obscured by what Robert Azzarello termed "compulsory heterosexuality" (Azzarello, 2012: 28).

Donna Haraway recently went so far as to challenge heteronormative conceptions of species that have often defined the limits of inter-breeding populations where, "Queering has the job of undoing 'normal' categories and none is more critical than the human / nonhuman sorting operation" (Haraway, 2008: xxiv). Eva Hayward took Haraway's queer taxonomic reorganization a step further identifying transgender experience more with aspects of nonhuman physiology and linking "trans-formation" as in human experiences to the "re-generation" as in organisms such as starfish (Hayward, 2008: 251). Hayward even recast gender-related surgeries where, "Transexing is an act of healing. This is some kind of mutuality... Trans-morphic as zoomorphic – if we can understand the cut as an act of love" (Hayward, 2008: 262).

Instead of the system theories of Bateson, the philosophical origins of contemporary gender and sexuality activism has been based on figures such as

Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Judith Butler. And Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari engaged in very different conversations about nature seeking likenesses between ecosystems and complex human systems of bodies and thought. The rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 11), as indefinite formations of relationships and points of knowledge largely without reproduced hierarchies, and Foucault's care of the self and "biopower" (Foucault, 1997: 67–71) became central to challenging and transforming heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality. In contrast, Bateson's work, that extended to explorations of sexual cultures well outside of both the West and so-called "civilization" (Bateson, 2000: 432), remained ignored in the formation and initial florescence of queer theory.

Bateson's notions of ecology and ecosystems were dominated by interventions to mediate tensions in human communities and assemblages of organisms. In Bateson's *Steps*, the interventions were for better cognizance, as in knowledge production, and management of respective processes that are only partially manipulated by *Homo sapiens*. A current in today's conversations on queer ecology is a concept of 'community' (as in ecosystem) activism. For example, Gandy outlined intersections of queer and urban ecology to understand and better intervene in unruly interzones such as a cemetery with public sex in North London (Gandy, 2012: 14). While clearly attempting to serve a politic of diversity, tolerance and community-based environmental conservation, Gandy's essay did not engage specifically around particular cultures of public sex and queer activism, on one hand, and decision-making frameworks of design and management of public space, on the other hand. Perhaps Bateson's work could point the way for a short-hand of descriptors and modes of agency for working to steward such spaces. Today's fertile cusp of critical stakeholder analysis and diversifying forms of interventions for environmental conservation, only partially prefigured by Bateson, could be relevant here. But Bateson went only so far, in his last decade, in wading into social movements and public policy with much of his advice poorly understood by policy makers and subsequently co-opted and neutralised.

If some aspects of a queer ecologies paradigm could challenge the utter dominance of *Homo sapiens*, what lessons could Bateson provide us through his own efforts to decolonise modes of research in the last decades of the British Empire? Does Bateson's work provide clues as to how to further decolonise modern science at a time when many localised, indigenous, and tribal cultures are reasserting

traditional and local knowledge that sometimes confirms less heteronormative visions of both non-human life and human ‘nature’. Haraway’s calculus, from several decades ago, remains relevant where:

We also don’t want to theorize the world, much less act within it, in terms of Global Systems, but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different – and power-differentiated-communities (Haraway, 1988: 579–580).

In some ways, Bateson’s ‘steps’ and ‘ecologies’ were his response to the recognition that cultural decolonisation had barely begun. But Bateson’s notions of imperialism were, especially from today’s vantage, naïve. For example, Bateson’s work extended to notions of power notably in Bali (Geertz, 1994) where he shied away from the disparities embodied by feudal, ecosystem-based social systems.

Ecologies of perception & ideas: Possible queer applications for Bateson’s Steps

In exploring the relevance of Bateson’s Steps to an expanding framework for queer ecologies that recognises new kinds of stakeholders and motivators of environmental and community engagement, theoretical work with other relevant twentieth century figures suggests how a few pioneering ideas could be recast for these queerer times. Diane Chisholm’s 2010 discussion of *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* is instructive for how we could learn from Bateson’s Steps. In exploring the relevance of such organic notions, Chisholm identified the following concepts: ‘plan/e of nature’ (Chisholm, 2010: 360) for examining the tensions of ecosystems of mainly non-human species often dominated by human culture; the ‘binary organization of the sexes’, while not avowedly feminist must have had some influence on the work of Judith Butler in the subsequent decade; and “becoming animal” described a form of trans-species consciousness labelled ‘inhumanity’, as in ‘outside of the programmed body’ and not entirely mediated by culture (Chisholm, 2010: 363–364). The reiterations of rhizomes throughout *A thousand plateaus*, as corollaries for non-hierarchical relationships and more sustainable kinds of human organisation, marked the previous generation of critical social theory.

In contrast to the rhizome metaphors that became widespread less than two decades

after the publication of *Steps*, Bateson's notions of ecosystems were more totalising and have, so far, left less of an impact. Generalisation about ecosystems and the implications of certain system structures for recreating political economic and cultural relationships has been a much broader project vulnerable to trite understandings and applications. Today, Bateson's *Steps* can be read more as an outline, a check-list, for new investigations of communities; studies that better recognise gender, sexuality and decolonisation politics within distressed ecosystems increasingly under pressure from global capital. Thus, Bateson's early commitment to interdisciplinary investigations (Bateson, 2000: 153), spanning social, natural, and medical sciences, remain worth visiting for his inclusion of factors in the framing of a wide array of relationships within a given locale or human network.

The broader notions of ecology (Bateson, 1972/2000: xxiii) are combined with critical examinations of "systems of categories" (Bateson, 2000: 61) including fluid constructions around gender, sexual subculture, species, the lines between human and nonhuman, and associated processes and dynamics. Bateson's scrutiny of "cultural structure" (Bateson, 2000: 84) prefigured contemporary understanding around gender construction (Butler, 1990) and performativity (Butler, 1993) extending to related experiences of communality, solidarity, agency, and resistance. In contrast, Bateson laid the basis for a far broader examination of the construction of and material basis for ideas, practices, and identities than the narrower reference points of, for example, Foucault's biopower and Butler's performativity.

As for sexuality and human ecology, Bateson accepted the school of thinking on sexuality of another early European researcher in New Guinea, Bronisław Malinowski, and argued that sexuality within social and economic systems cannot be compartmentalized from the totality of social relations. Bateson went so far as to argue that, "[A]lmost the whole of culture may be seen variously as a mechanism for modifying and satisfying the sexual needs of individuals, or for the enforcement of the norms of behaviour, or to supplying the individuals with food" (Bateson, 2000: 63). While the heteronormativity in these early assertions has not been fully interrogated, Bateson's work around sexuality can be partially applied, today, to contemporary experiences of minority and dissident genders and sexualities. Furthermore, Bateson's speculative re-conceptions of "play" (Bateson,

2000: 182–183), both in terms of gender and erotic performativity and interpersonal gratification linked to shifting ecosystems, are worth revisiting.

Perhaps the most relevant of Bateson's concepts, for constructing a paradigm of queer ecologies, are some of the least developed and enigmatic of his later theoretical work. His notion of "regenerative systems" (Bateson, 2000: 447), while not new, suggested cultural mechanisms far more subtle and resilient than any that he saw applied in the 'New Age' of the 1970s and 1980s. Similarly, Bateson's "deutero-learning" as in "learning to learn" and "the acquiring of information about the contingency patterns of the contexts in which proto-learning occurs" (Bateson, 2000: 364) remains under-explored and could have relevance as queer networks expand, diversify and sometimes recombine.

In his 1969 essay on treating schizophrenia, Bateson used the term "transcontextual" (Bateson, 2000: 272) for a set of explanations and speculations on which could be based a more supple understandings of gender and sexual identities and respective social motivators. Bateson speculated on what today is considered almost impossible and taboo: relating genotype, environment, phenotype and human development, and culture nested within ecosystems (Bateson, 2000: 424) in a manner that skirted the draconian political agendas of the more recent sociobiologists. Bateson argued for the remarkable flexibility and volatility of human social and cultural systems, extending to gender and sexuality, that in turn are partially the result of and subsequently transformed by environmental, social, and cultural processes. Towards the end of Bateson's life, Margaret Mead even went on to explore the long-term importance of these ideas as "End-linkage" Theory (Mead, 1977: 172).

Revisiting Bateson today, we can see three outmoded bodies of his thought that could be sufficiently modernized and queered to warrant exploration within the contemporary ecosystems and globalisation processes. Bateson postulated and advocated forms of ecological and 'civilizational' health (Bateson, 2000: 502–513). Problematically, these sketches were made during, but were effectively outside, the rise of modern feminism and sexual minority rights and were curiously devoid of the anthropological recognition of sexuality, sexual violence, and intolerance that characterized his early work in New Guinea.

Many of Bateson's conceptualizations of ecosystems were sometimes simplistic (Bateson, 2000: 436–437) undermining many of his related ideals for healthy

psychologies and social relations. Since Bateson's field work, there has been a great deal of ecological research and emergence of a sub-field of "ecosystemology" (Schulz, no date). Bateson's notions of relatively predictable ecologies with the same core feedback loops were simplistic and impoverished in comparison to today's knowledge. Bateson's adage that "[t]here is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds" (Bateson, 2000: 492) is quaint. 'Weeds', whether native or non-native, rarely can be fully controlled or eradicated and often provide some ecological services.

Bateson's notion of "steady-state" (Bateson, 2000: 126), that spanned ecosystems and social systems, became popular in early environmentalist politics. Steady state, however theoretical in times of global change, was a pioneering ideal but was largely based on an idealisation of Balinese society (Bateson, 2000: 107–127; Bateson, 1949) as it began its run for modernisation and globalisation. The origins of Balinese irrigated rice agriculture are not so ancient but rather go back six or seven centuries and social relations have been maintained through an often repressive caste system and residual feudalism. But some of Bateson's associated concepts could be reworked into a notion of social durability, as in resilient and adaptive social contracts and systems for the transmission of knowledge.

Indefinite decolonisation: Genders, sexualities, migrations and ecosystems

Bateson's essays ended just before his death in 1980 with the simultaneous rise of globalisation of capital and nascent neoliberalism (Acheraiou, 2011: 171–178) and as the national liberation, decolonisation projects, which imbued his work, were sputtering, failing, or being deferred. For example, Bateson's analysis of the legacies of imperialism were premature and incomplete as in his comments at the 1968 London Conference on the Dialectics of Liberation where he noted:

Our civilization... has its roots in three main ancient civilizations: the Roman, the Hebrew, and the Greek; and it would seem that many of our problems are related to the fact that we have an imperialist civilization leavened or yeasted by a downtrodden, exploited colony in Palestine (Bateson, 2000: 432).

In his work on critiquing the legacy of empire, Bateson did not, in contrast to his contemporary Jean Genet, provide a critique of Israeli expansionism.

Queer ecologies are part of a further decolonisation of the social and natural sciences, a critique than was barely conceived in Bateson's time. Today, Bateson's interdisciplinarity could inform the reconsideration of the material basis of social production spanning the biophysical world, human genotypes and phenotypic responses, demographics, culture, and political economic frameworks, under globalisation, that is overdue. So Bateson's work, squarely confronting empire and particularly the British imperial and then American hegemonies of his time, has an unexplored relevance to more contemporary movements to both decolonise the reiterations of race and class disparities in gay, lesbian and feminist movements and subsequent "de-privileging" (Ingram, 2000: 220) along with more recent critiques of homonationalism where, "there is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families)" (Puar, 2007: xii). Puar went on to outline the retrogressive side, of this new tying of some queer lives to "life and productivity" to renewed obfuscation of the intensifying disparities across the breadth of queer populations. But the new work in critiquing homonationalism and pinkwashing of persisting imperial projects is well outside of the level of Bateson's engagement in decolonisation.

The relevance of Bateson's engagement with decolonisation in his *Steps* is due to his critiques of anthropology and ethnography. Early on in Bateson's career, he engaged in a profoundly colonial project where he conducted field research on the so-called "problems" of the Iatmul of the Sepik region of north-eastern New Guinea. His seminal monograph, *Naven* (Bateson, 1936/1958), described the construction and performance of gender, ritual homosexuality, and "tranvesticism" (Bateson, 1958: 199), subcultures and behaviours in Iatmul society. While the gender and sexual richness was not specifically stigmatised or de-valued, this work existed and functioned in a neo-colonial anthropology that has continued to problematise such isolated, local cultures. Bateson completed *Naven* concurrently with a marriage to Margaret Mead while she was working in an adjacent part of the Sepik (Mead, 1977: 174) as part of one of the most important single body of research on gender construction completed in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Problematically, Bateson's investigations neglected questions of social equity and the often stark disparities in the distribution of resources in these localised societies. So Bateson's engagement with decolonisation of the Iatmul was

limited to his ideals of describing self-correcting ecosystems and related cultural systems of learning.

Utilities for cognisance of queer ecologies in some examples from Pacific Canada

What can *Steps to an ecology of mind* tell us about the new kinds of research necessary to better know how to determine and mobilise queer stakeholders? How can the Steps help us better imagine ways to intervene for more equitable communities, with expansive expressions of gender and sexuality, in a time of multiple ecological crises? Bateson's Steps reminds us to be aggressively interdisciplinary in virtually all research from natural and social sciences to gender and cultural studies. What are the elements of these new, queer ecologies investigative frameworks for a perilous century with new imperatives for collaboration and community development?

In presenting three sketches from south-western British Columbia, my intent is to illustrate some needs for and uses of queer ecologies investigations, at various scales, that would, in turn, lay the bases for the kinds of dialogues envisioned with Debordian environmental planning. All three examples are from areas with mild climates seeing urbanization, unresolved legacies of indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship, highly productive indigenous and colonial agricultural ecosystems now often being abandoned, a growing set of native habitats and species at risk, large and highly mobile immigrant populations, gender and sexual minorities increasingly asserting rights to spaces, protections, programmes, and other entitlements, and "gentrification" (Schulman, 2012) linked to vulnerability to global capital which in turn is undermining the security and health of less affluent populations.

The first case is a small, suburban district with several towns and villages. The second case is a smaller unit of landscape spanning the side of a small mountain and inlet that is part of a large network of protected areas, and the third sketch is of a more site-specific, urban locale comprised of a green roof on the top of a converted warehouse. While these illustrations are not within Europe, they highlight colonial British and more broadly, neo-colonial Canadian legacies in the context of contemporary multiculturalism. Within the global context, these examples represent relatively favourable conditions for three demographics: sexual

minorities, recent migrants, and indigenous communities. Neocolonial legacies extended until after recent decades. More than a half century of a residential school system partially destroyed indigenous languages, cultures, sexual and gender diversity, and extended families well into the 1960s. Racist laws disenfranchising and exploiting east and South Asians extended until World War II. Spatial, legal and institutional barriers to aboriginal communities have lingered well beyond the initial 1982–85 implementation of Canada’s constitution. Most of the country’s rights and protections for sexual minorities were constructed in the courts subsequent Canada’s *Charter of rights and freedoms* with legal statutes for protection of trans people still lagging. Even with today’s relatively high levels of legislative protection of sexual and ethnic minorities in a resilient economy, inequities persist and are being exacerbated by the vagaries of capital, climate change, and recurrent bouts of cultural chauvinism.

I provide these sketches because they are the locales into which I was born and continue to live as a mixed-race person of relatively anglocentric, Métis heritage. Métis now comprise the largest indigenous demographic in Canada and are centred east of the Rockies. Even on the Pacific Coast, Métis have had alliances and shared spaces with more established, Northwest Coast First Nations communities and governments. Contemporary conversations on hybridity, respective interstitial and heterotopic spaces, have relevance to local experiences of “métissage” (Acheraiou, 2011: 13) . And in my lifetime, I have seen and experienced the end of a period of almost apartheid-like segregation obstructing indigenous communities to far more egalitarian multiculturalism and current efforts to reconstruct sovereignties and land stewardship. But in the ecologies described below, hybridity and interstitial subcultures, processes and spaces comprise only small parts of the political economies.

1. Central Saanich

A suburban municipality north of Victoria, British Columbia, there are two small towns that grew around Salish communities with the Tsartlip (WJOLELP) Nation on the west of the peninsula and the Tsawout Nation on the east. In contrast to much of British Columbia, treaties were negotiated in the early 1850s as part of the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island and with the insistence of Whitehall. While most Indian Reserves in British Columbia were imposed on communities in

subsequent decades, those of the Tsartlip and Tsawout were negotiated to include significant food gathering areas; sites of continued importance to indigenous populations and for the ecological health of the region. In the subsequent century and a half, some provisions of the treaties have not been respected by municipal and provincial governments. Today, there are scores of dryland and shore plant species at risk and a marked decline of the oak woodland ecosystem. Large mammals such as elk and wolf have been extirpated. Traditional Tsartlip and Tsawout food gathering areas, supposedly protected under the treaties, have more often been degraded or destroyed. Over the twentieth century, thriving agricultural parcels have been replaced by suburbs.

Today, the local language, SENĆOTEN, is only spoken regularly by less than one hundred people and the Tsartlip Nation hosts Canada's First Peoples' Cultural Council that recently partnered with digital behemoth Google to protect indigenous languages. As they have for a century and a half, aboriginal communities continue to have the lowest average incomes of any social group in the area. There are numerous initiatives to acquire and protect open space and to work with private land owners to better steward habitat, initiatives that have largely excluded the Tsartlip and Tsawout even those these First Nations governments increasingly assert themselves legally over traditional territories.

The municipality has seen a dynamic demographic of immigrant groups with some past groups largely forgotten including a African Canadian community established in the mid-nineteenth century that scattered after a half century. There was at least one Chinese work-camp. Today while attracting a growing diversity of immigrant populations, Central Saanich has become particularly attractive for upper-middle class households still more often of north-western European heritages. Central Saanich was formerly conservative in its voting patterns, with successive municipal governments that worked to ravage woodlands, wetlands and farmlands. Since the end of the period of police repression that extended well into the 1960s, networks of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people have created private and social spaces in the area while relying on services and organization in Vancouver and Victoria. Central Saanich has remained under-served in programmes for aboriginal and 'LGBT' populations though the level of health care, extending to sexual health and HIV treatment, has often been relatively high by global and national standards. Individuals whose first language is not English continue to be

under-served and have limited aspects to social spaces, organizations and programmes.

Today, the communities in the municipality suffer from exceptional and internationalised processes of gentrification of housing and lands that are pushing out less affluent groups. Climate change combined with suburbanisation is putting pressure on regional water resources. The east coast of East Saanich is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise including crucial sites for the Tsawout.

A number of sexual minority networks and organisations are now active, visible and engaged in initiatives for expanded service programmes and human rights policy. The district school district enacted a specific policy against homophobia and bullying in 2012 but with a strategy that does not fully address the racialised dimensions of homophobia, transphobia, and biophobia and intolerance nor the historical marginalisation of Tsartlip and Tsawout culture, sensibilities and sexualities. At the same time in British Columbia, queer youth of some other ethnic groups, such as east Asians, continue to be targeted disproportionately. As for research into queer ecologies, the patchwork of inequities around minority gender and sexuality experiences and related health impacts, for a range of age and ethnic demographics, could be further explored. And the long-term threats to these communities, from destruction of local ecosystems, watersheds, and food production systems warrants further investigation. Violence against vulnerable groups, a host of related mental health issues, and needs for social spaces for queer youth warrant investigation. The continued role of sacred sites and links to mental health is another area of exploration including for aboriginal and queer youth who are disproportionately vulnerable to suicide. And the impacts of gentrification and the shortage of affordable housing, especially for Tsartlip and Tsawout individuals who, for various legal and family-related factors are denied 'Indian Reserve' housing, warrant further monitoring.

Bateson's Steps could foster critical re-examination, especially in public schools, of the legacies of the historic and neo-colonial, cultural systems and the parallel experiences of the Tsartlip and Tsawout. Investigating such parallel experiences also has relevance to migrant groups who often have divergent and too often marginal positions in respective communities. With some deterioration of environmental quality, Bateson's Step of working towards 'civilizational' health as based on better cognisance of ecological, social, and political economic

relationships is relevant. Bateson's transcontextual, End-linkage Theory, where sets of cultural, sexual, and ecological identities can be seen as having potential for recombination and re-adaption may have considerable relevance as sexual minorities attempt to thrive in areas such as these outside of well-defended queer enclaves.

2. Mount Maxwell, Salt Spring Island

Twenty miles north of Central Saanich, Mount Maxwell is part of an exceptionally wild mosaic of several thousand hectares of ecological reserve, provincial park, protected watershed, and forest lands, shore, and marine areas on the east side of one of the largest of the Gulf Islands. Within the pantheon of Canadian ecosystems, this area has the mildest winters with ancient woodlands and forests and high levels of biodiversity as a northern, insular margin of 'Oregonia'. The protected area network centred on Mount Maxwell continues to support one of the largest and most spectacular remaining mosaics of ancient Douglas fir forest, Garry oak woodland and savannah, shore, and marine ecosystems along with a wide range of rare, threatened and declining species. These islands are relatively dry and sunny and Salt Spring Island, in particular, has become a destination of the privileged especially for building retirement homes and planting vineyards with real estate inflation often driven by the Alberta petroleum economy. Climate change, invasive species and fire susceptibility have put forests, woodlands, and groundwater increasingly at risk.

Salt Spring Island is at a geographical crossroad for historical aboriginal communities and today parts of the island are of legal interest to a number of First Nations with some, such as the Tsartlip and Tsawout to the south, fortunate to have to been able negotiate some treaty lands for themselves. However just a few miles away from the Tsartlip and Tsawout lands on Salt Spring Island is historical territory of Cowichan tribes, including the west side of Mount Maxwell, whose lands were taken forcefully, without treaties, by the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island in the 1850s and 1860s. Traditional Cowichan land use, including traditional burning, continued on Mount Maxwell into the early twentieth century with today's supposedly natural mosaic actually a legacy of indigenous food production and other stewardship. Fire suppression began relatively late, well into the twentieth century, and provincial conservation initiatives began in the mid-twentieth century.

Proposals to begin to re-establish traditional aboriginal land use practices on Mount Maxwell, such as some controlled burning, began in 1980 but have yet to be implemented. A series of federal legal decisions in the 1990s have expanded the basis of First Nations governments for intervening in traditional territories largely through 'consultation'. In 2001, nongovernmental conservation organizations became involved in buying remaining private lands with strategic habitat. A 2008 management plan, by the provincial government, did not acknowledge the full legacy of First Nations, their traditional burning, food gathering and conservation practices. And even with legal precedents allowing the Cowichan to reassert traditional use, there has been little formal re-engagement around Mount Maxwell other than ceremonial removal of ancestral bones from sacred caves.

Over the last four decades, there have been influxes of gay men and lesbians on to Salt Spring Island especially for farming, business, recreation, and retirement. Mount Maxwell has become a destination for hiking, nudism, socialising and sometimes sex. The communities on this relatively tolerant and affluent island has been increasingly welcoming of sexual minorities and respective consumer dollars. But without full acknowledgement of and public engagement around Mount Maxwell being unceded Cowichan lands where the Tsartlip and Tsawout and other First Nations government still maintain legal rights for intervention, a kind of exclusion is being maintained on Mount Maxwell. Aside from those with access to the few tiny Indian Reserve lands there, Salt Spring Island is unaffordable and less than welcoming to low-income, aboriginal stakeholders. In this context, elite sets of queer bodies can still function as part of erasure especially as several thousand members of the Cowichan Tribes live, just miles away across a strait, in often crowded conditions increasingly disconnected to natural ecosystems. Cowichan access to Mount Maxwell requires an increasingly expensive ferry travel with little public, ground transportation available. And in a time of disproportionately higher suicide and HIV rates in aboriginal communities, of which queer youth are particularly vulnerable, tranquil ancestral sites for healing are increasingly important and can be difficult to find. And with resurgence of native spiritual and sexual subcultures, the lack of effective access to and queer aboriginal presence on Mount Maxwell remains a troubling bell-weather.

A queer ecologies framework for new investigations could better identify stakeholders, relationships, and processes across this cultural landscape that might

appear deceptively ‘natural’. Bateson’s Step for re-examination of cultural systems and ecological relationships would lead to recognition of the uninterrupted though currently obstructed Salish legacies and continued engagements of groups such as the Cowichan, Tsartlip and Tsawout. In such a postcolonial context, new research would be beneficial on the history of Mount Maxwell and on both queer and Salish stakeholders. From a biophysical standpoint, ecological data on human and nonhuman relations could confirm the vulnerability of these landscapes to apocalyptic wildfire after over half a century of suppression of burning and expanding patches of exotic species – and risks for adjacent communities.

3. The roof garden of Railtown Studios, Vancouver

A third scale for investigating queer ecologies is that for small sites that are increasingly built and partially regulated through design and maintenance decisions. A communal roof top on a warehouse converted to rental live work studios above Vancouver Harbour highlights needs to investigate relationships between social groups, diverse cultures and aesthetic, and hybrid ecosystems combining food production, native species, and ornamentals in the context of rising food and input costs. The Railtown Studios roof garden is the result of a public-private partnership in 1996–1998 where a powerful landlord was effectively given, at a fraction of its market value, a PCB-contaminated warehouse by the City of Vancouver for “sustained tenancy” of “low-income artists”, a covenant that has only been partially honoured.

Tenancy on this parcel of land has been contentious for a century and a half generating uncertainty that continues to destabilise various notions of propriety, ownership and tenancy. This building, as well as all of the City of Vancouver, has been constructed on unceded territory of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. This parcel is on something of a cultural interzone since the city was founded in 1886. On the edge of the former neighbourhood of Nihonmachi, or Japantown, that saw a large portion of the population displaced, interned, and deported from 1942 until as late as 1950, the area subsequently was under-populated and economically depressed until recent gentrification involving arts and design studios, digital technology firms including the headquarters for HootSuite, nongovernmental organization offices, residential redevelopment, and the shift to ownership and management of the adjacent port by multinational,

Dubai Ports.

The roof garden of Railtown Studio, at five stories above the edge of Vancouver Harbour, has embodied this interzone of cultures, classes, economic sectors, political economies, and aesthetics through the formation and management of this modest urban agro-ecosystem. The roof garden reflects a tangle of shifting food production knowledge, culinary desires, household budgets, artistic interventions, aesthetics, cultures, and weather fluctuations. There are shifting corners with well-tended fruit trees and grape vines and fallow spots dominated by an ecology of 'weeds' (Bateson, 2000: 492). Dominant species include ornamental trees, grape vines, apple trees, native and Eurasian roses, raspberry, numerous herb species, and, in the summer, tomatoes and lettuce. Winter crops include heartier Brassica species and sorrel. Significant medicinal crops include the powerful Salish tonic, *Lomatium nudicaule*, mint, anise, garlic, rosemary, and verbena. There are numerous ornamental plants as well. Local efforts to stave the decline of honey bees and other pollinators, including the establishment of networks of urban hives, have benefited these roof ecosystems. As well as producing important items of fresh vegetables, fruit and herbs, the garden is a source of pleasure, wonder, cultural production, and therapy.

With escalating rents, retrogressive leases, and exceptional levels of tenant displacement, this roof garden has become a particularly erratic space from month to month and year to year. Since its establishment in 1998, the irrigation and compost technologies have changed every several years. Water continues to be plentiful and cheap but electricity for pumping is increasingly imported from within the North American power grid that is still dominated by coal burning. Some years see more partying (and police) than others. Volatile social relationships, only partially mediated through the landlord, have influenced the formation of these rooftop ecosystems and kitchen gardens through a kind of miniaturising of domestic political economies into the raised beds.

The garden was originally developed by a gay man, a former Mormon from Los Angeles who was an early queer and arts space activist in Vancouver. Few openly lesbian and transgendered artists have ever been applied live in the building and few Asian and indigenous artists have rented for long. In recent years, the landlord has been attempting to rent at market rates for luxury lofts, with no requirement for cultural production as determined by the City of Vancouver, while being

increasingly tolerant of homophobia and intimidation. Subsequent departures of more vulnerable individuals have provided opportunities for raising the rents on the vacated studios. The landlord, now the largest in the neighbourhood, has become an object for the interventions of the Vancouver Renters Union.

Just off shore, a marked increase in oil tankers is scheduled for shipping Alberta oil sands bitumen to Asia. Cruise ships coming from and going to Alaska generate considerable amounts of air pollution and garbage. Application of Bateson's Steps to fully identify stakeholders, relationships, and processes in a queer ecologies research framework, could better make sense of the physical aspects of these spaces, stakeholders, and aspects of the local political economy. Social and cultural aspects of such interdisciplinary investigations could lay the basis for envisioning regenerative systems of community learning on this pleasant and spectacular green roof extending from urban ecology topics to tenancy and sexual politics. Such fine-scaled ecologies could also be managed as therapeutic as well as cultural and educational spaces.

Within the global pantheon of queer sites, all three of these areas represent relatively successful processes of deghettoization of sexual minorities. But today pressures from global capital and gentrification obstruct efforts to slow and reverse greater social disparities including for sexual minorities. In all three contexts described above, a range of stakeholders, many of whom are sexual minorities or engaged in challenging transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia, are poorly identified with claims for resources and space barely articulated. There is little Debordian "dialogue", in large part because the lack of Batesonian human-ecological understandings, and considerable persistence of historical marginalisation of non-white members of gender and sexual minorities. Outside of earlier formulations of sexual minority enclaves and networks, these examples would not appear significant either to early homophile, gay and lesbian feminist activism nor even to more recent Act up, Queer nation, Two-spirit, and concurrent anti-racism movements. But for a queer ecologies framework to have any utility and intellectual or activist currency, investigations will be under pressure to lay the basis for envisioning new ways to redistribute resources and space at these three scales.

Conclusions: Ecologies for understanding queer communalities in a time of multiple political economic & environmental crises

[T]he ecological ideas implicit in our plans are more important than the plans themselves, and it would be foolish to sacrifice these ideas on the altar of pragmatism (Bateson, 2000: 513).

Social barriers have softened as the nexus of the linked imperial projects of homophobia, often mashed with transphobia and biphobia, and colonialism has begun to recede. Today's empires are more stealth, less territorialised, and defined through less overt social barriers. The unequal distribution of resources, space, and costs and benefits of environmental change and deterioration is increasingly regulated through diversifying forms of gentrification fuelled by global capital. As the strangleholds of homophobia and transphobia have loosened, the grip of global capital has tightened making many communities queerer but few more liveable, communitarian or equitable.

Queer theory provided the descriptors to reclaim over century of suppressed sexual diversity and erotic cultures. Acknowledgement of queer spaces has provided some vocabulary, tentative inventories, and a few road maps. Queer ecologies could provide a framework for further research into the diverse and time and site-specific nature of sexual cultures and social and political movements allowing better anticipation new vulnerabilities and emergent formations. Foucault (2009) described biopower as systems of control and resistance shaped in large part through institutions and with direct relationships to nation states (p. 1). The rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari became a metaphor for the organic and largely non-hierarchical formation queer space. Bateson provided a particularly supple conceptual framework to fathom the breadth of transformations of human relationships, especially as digital networks were becoming established at the time of his death.

By mashing two, half-formed and contentious bodies of thought, the first on the boundaries of and most important processes within ecosystems and the second on social relations within and between minority and dissident gender experiences and networks defined by sexualities, social theorists, activists, psychologists, and even planners could find new ways to view, engage in, and transform various communities, neighbourhoods, and respective infrastructure. Bateson's Steps suggests a multiplicity of new signifiers, icons, and, occasionally, ideals for

understanding the interaction of social formations, movements to confront inequities, and biophysical systems increasingly under stress. Today, the relevance of Steps for creating frameworks for investigating queer ecologies lies mainly through the promises of adapting the following of Bateson's ideas:

1. critical re-examination of *cultural systems of categories that extend to gender, sexuality, and biological taxonomies* to better identify social groups including sexual minorities;
2. 'civilizational' health and *resilient and healthy ecosystems* based on cognisance of ecological, social, and political economic relationships extending to zoology that acknowledges biological exuberance;
3. *regenerative systems of community learning* fostering social relationships, culture and governance frameworks that could better challenge and expunge communities of transphobia, homophobia and biphobia, misogyny, racism, and cultural chauvinism; and
4. *transcontextual dynamics based on End-linkage Theory* that further expand contemporary notions of identity construction and sexuality formation in recognition of the dynamic potential of clusters of genotypes, phenotypic responses, and social and cultural formations to lay the basis for new human adaptations in the context of volatile environments.

The prospects of reviving any sort of totalising narrative, some broad philosophical, psychological, and political framework, "an ecology of mind" extending to sexuality, place, and ecosystems, are low and unnecessary. Environmental planning for community development becomes of set of what were once widely dismissed as 'anarchistic' negotiations. In such conversations, the state becomes highly contingent.

Bateson pointed the way to a radical ecosystemology, a site-specificity that could be deepened by queer theories. And better knowledge of these highly organic and volatile relationships between social groups, cultures and aspects of the biophysical world could inform new community dialogues and decision-making frameworks that transform and sometimes exist outside both the state and previous conceptions of the limits of queer communality and communities more generally. In this way, Debord's concept of an environmental planning based on social dialogue can function as a bridge between the currents of thought on which coalesced queer

theory and more eco-centric movements that have better informed queer ecologies.

Gregory Bateson's career reminds contemporary theorists of gender, sexuality, ecosystems, communities, and environments that all such initiatives to create new paradigms must acknowledge a broader set of contextual factors and intercultural dynamics. The richness of the 'ecologies' of queer research programmes increasingly begin to resemble the scope of Bateson's lifetime of investigations.

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Acknowledgements

Some of this research was funded generously by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. I am grateful to the following individuals who have shared with me ideas, perspectives and manuscripts and who have made comments that have influenced the development of this essay: Gavin Brown, William Leap, Jin Kartawinata, Don Hann, Michael Morris, and Rosemary Spahan of the Tsartlip Nation.

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