Queering Urban Forests as Democratizing Public Space & Community (including LGBTQ2S) Infrastructure
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dedication
This is the 50th anniversary of the short-lived and very queer DIY organization, **Trees for Queens** that resisted homophobia and asserted a queer presence in public space through planting trees for the kinds of urban forests that many of us now enjoy.
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Discussions of urban forests and LGBTQ2S populations have more often been dominated by relatively subjective reports of male public sex even when respective spaces have been unsafe for women, trans and other people with nonconforming genders, individuals with mobility constraints and other vulnerabilities, and persons of colour.
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In contrast to under-surveilled forest depths, other parts of urban forests have been more important to many LGBTQ2S groups: playing fields as historic feminist spaces, public conveniences, particular trees and other landmarks, particular habitat, public art, lawns and forest edges, and cafes and cultural venues.
The range of social reliance on particular sites in urban forests continues to be poorly acknowledged more often with little empirical data to inform social policy and design programming -- and little funding for new field research. And research methods, such as 'participant-observer' have limited utility in understanding ephemeral experiences that at times are highly private with other uses of the forest far more communal.
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Given the vulnerable nature of most urban forests, particularly from climate change and pressures associated with gentrification, the *infrastructure paradigm* can aid activists and landscape architects in developing matrices for better tracking site histories, uses, and ongoing social (including LGBTQ2S) dependencies.
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(as stakeholders), a wider range of queer forest uses and needs (spanning socializing, cultural expression, socializing, and [of course] sex), imperatives and options for ecosystem management and forest protection, and contradictions within design programming and broader municipal and social policy.
2019 March 30 * RISING URBANISTS 2019: REFRAMING THE URBAN FOREST
Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram, KEXMIN field station

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The more fundamental problem for landscape architects, in hoping to contribute to the queering of urban forests, is that activities, demographics, and design-related needs in urban forests, are changing more rapidly than the typical cycles of programming of public sites, public consultation, design, and post-use evaluations.

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Urban forests largely exist because of exceptional episodes of activism. In beginning this discussion, I reflect on the central role of collective 'agency' in queering (and protecting) urban forests reflecting on the fiftieth anniversary of the short-lived and very queer DIY organization, Trees for Queens -- while challenging participants to more carefully research respective legacies embodied in many of the forests that they enjoy. [The Stonewall Riots were the first communal "reterritorialization," {and} raged for well over two nights and did not end abruptly. In the same month, a cruising area in Queens, "Kew Gardens," was badly destroyed, with extensive tree cutting and violent vigilante attacks, to discourage the presence of gay men. Within a week after Stonewall there were public actions using conscious visibility and the formation of the first gay liberationist environmental group, Trees for Queens, to restore the park. Gordon Brent Ingram. 1997. Marginality and the landscapes of erotic alien( n)ations. in Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance. Ingram, G. B., A.-M. Bouthillette and Y. Retter (eds.). Seattle: Bay Press. 27 - 52.]

Discussions of urban forests and LGBTQ2S populations have more often been dominated by relatively subjective reports of male public sex even when respective spaces have been unsafe for women, trans and other people with nonconforming genders, individuals with mobility constraints and other vulnerabilities, and persons of colour. In contrast to under-surveilled forest depths, other parts of urban forests have been more important to many LGBTQ2S groups: playing fields as historic feminist spaces, public conveniences, particular trees and other landmarks, particular habitat, public art, lawns and forest edges, and cafes and cultural venues. The range of social reliance on particular sites in urban forests continues to be poorly acknowledged more often with little empirical data to inform social policy and design programming -- and little funding for new field
research. And research methods, such as 'participant-observer' have limited utility in understanding ephemeral experiences that at times are highly private with other uses of the forest far more communal. This discussion proposes the urban forest as embodying and supporting a complex set of 'queer infrastructure', involving sex and so much more, that is part of ongoing initiatives to democratize public spaces in community development. Given the vulnerable nature of most urban forests, particularly from climate change and pressures associated with gentrification, the 'infrastructure paradigm' can aid activists and landscape architects in developing matrices for better tracking site histories, uses, and ongoing social (including LGBTQ2S) dependencies (as stakeholders), a wider range of queer forest uses and needs (spanning socializing, cultural expression, socializing, and [of course] sex), imperatives and options for ecosystem management and forest protection, and contradictions within design programming and broader municipal and social policy. The more fundamental problem for landscape architects, in hoping to contribute to the queering of urban forests, is that activities, demographics, and design-related needs in urban forests, are changing more rapidly than the typical cycles of programming of public sites, public consultation, design, and post-use evaluations. Examples will be provided from Vancouver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Rome, and Dubai / Abu Dhabi.

select publications & other discussions mentioning queer sexual expression in public parks with forests


