Stories of Queer Enchantment
Attuning to Life's Vibrancy in Service of Joyous Presents and Co-Flourishing Futures

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Through a decolonial, collaborative, participatory research methodology, this paper centres the stories of twelve queer-identifying participants in the UK and Ireland, seeking to ground theoretical exploration in lived empirical worlds. Centring a range of voices, the paper seeks to address exclusionary definitions of enchantment and co-create formulations that amplify the most meaningful potentials of an enchantment queered – its fundamental multitudes of difference, its affinity for questioning and complexity, its practicing humility and fluidity in the unknown, and its disruption of destructive norms – in service of cultivating new ways of living together in times of multiple intersecting crises.

Stories of Queer Enchantment:
Attuning to Life's Vibrancy in Service of
Joyous Presents and Co-Flourishing Futures

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Abstract

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Keywords

queer geographies, enchantment, pleasure activism, decolonial research, queer studies

Introduction

This paper seeks out stories of queer enchantment to unearth and amplify moments of remembering our entanglements with life's vibrancy. "Vibrancy" acknowledges the animacy and agency of the more-than-human world, a long-standing presence in Indigenous cosmologies also explored by contemporary philosophies of new materialism and posthumanism (Abram 1996; Anderson 2020; Belser 2016). Assertions of such animacy and agency resist assumptions of *in*animacy present in dominant culture, offering potential to reshape our relationships with the world around us (Belser 2016). Thus, this paper seeks out those stories that locate us as sensitive beings within worlds of breath-taking beauty, profound questions and critical spaces of knowledge production, even as we witness tremendous amounts of loss, in an age of climate and ecological devastation and immense social injustice. Turning towards the enchanted moments of the everyday, this paper seeks to summon and treasure our experiences with all that is *worth* living for, loving for, and grieving for, within this deeply wounded earth-home (brown 2019). adrienne maree brown's work on pleasure activism has ignited questions about enchantment's potential as an enriching and relational force at this time of polycrisis.

Diving into the etymological roots of enchantment reveals notions of "singing upon" in Latin and magic spells in Old French (Beaman 2021). Contemporary definitions offered by the social sciences reveal the presence of magic, too, and hold enchantment in an understanding of the world as animated and unpredictable, wherein lies a "force in all things" (Cambridge University Press 2023; Frederici 2004, 173). Such definitions summon an initial melody of meanings proposing enchantment as a relational and unpredictable sphere of encounter between human and more-than-human worlds.

So how does queerness weave into this picture of enchantment, and why does it matter? This article explores the queering of enchantment through two uses of the term: the first explores "queer" as a verb and critical lens (Seymour 2020). The second understands "queer" in reference to identity: including those who identify with the term, and those living outside of cis-gender heterosexual normative ways of being that might not necessarily identify with the term "queer" chosen in this paper (Hunt and Holmes 2015). As a verb, "queer" functions to interrogate the cis heteronormative binaries at the core of contemporary Western society's organisation, thus uprooting normative ways of being and knowing, which holds value considering the destructive nature of dominant norms (Sedgwick 1990; Hunt and Holmes 2015). The article explores "queer" as a verb along generative pathways of queer theory and queer ecology, as well as centring a decolonial queer politics guided by the work

of Hunt and Holmes (2015), alongside a range of Indigenous, queer and other marginal voices and perspectives.

As a disrupting force and subverting framework, queering has much to offer to the scholarly study of enchantment in terms of valuing complex multitudes of difference and fresh perspectives, dissolving binaries, and offering an intuitive affinity for challenging established norms. Considering the entangled nature of oppression, a successful queering of enchantment means attending not only to cis heterosexist norms, but to other modes of oppression too, which operate across established racialised, classist, ableist and anthropocentric norms and spaces (Oswin 2008; Bowmani 2021). In this paper, a queering of enchantment oscillates between pleasure and criticality, following on from the work of Eve Sedgwick, who encourages us to explore both intimate and political strategies and tactics within queer critical practices (Sedgwick 2011).

Wishing to illuminate possible innate and emerging affinities between the queer and the enchanted in service of a multiplicity of joyous, vibrant, threatened and grieving worlds, central to this article's methodology is its collaborative nature. This paper explores theoretical, methodological and ethical processes, while centring the generous and diverse sharing which emerged in conversation with twelve queer-identifying research participants in Devon, England, and the Republic of Ireland who have gifted us with their stories and perspectives. Devon is a county of England which is part of the Southwest Peninsula of Great Britain and his known for its beautiful sceneries which include north and south coastal areas, as well as two national parks (Dartmoor and Exmoor).

Rather than mapping solely onto queer experience, this research acknowledges the critical insights that queer experiences offer in interrogating wider destructive and exclusionary norms (O'Malley et al. 2018). Hearing directly from each participant in their own words, in their own geographical contexts, offers the opportunity to learn *through* queer experiences, rather than employing colonial research methods *on* queer identifying people to learn *about* them (Frazer and Yunkaporta 2018). This article acknowledges, too, the many living, dying and composting worlds present across the various locations of researchers and participants as contributing forces in this relational research process.

Where enchantment and queerness meet… glimpses into contemporary research

The Landscape of Enchantment

As noted in the introduction, this article undertakes a broad and open definition of enchantment, spanning multiple theoretical and academic spheres. This breadth mirrors research participants' diverse and personal day-to-day stories and experiences ground theory in empirical worlds.

Jane Bennett understands enchantment as a state of wonder and pure presence, wherein senses are heightened, thoughts are paused, and time feels suspended (Bennett 2001). Bennett is especially attuned to the presence of the surprising, the unexpected and the extraordinary, coupled with the fear such presence can consequently evoke, and refuses the simple binary categorisation of surprises as good or bad, pleasurable, or painful.

As encapsulated in the French greeting "enchanté(e)", Pyyry's and Aiava's (2021) explorations of enchantment intimately revolve around a sense of encounter. They build upon

Bennett's work, situating encounter with the unfamiliar and the unknown at the heart of their understandings of enchantment. Such encounters, rather than defined by any sense of recognition, necessarily emerge in the liminal places that lie between different frequencies. Though such meetings may include the aspects of wonder and love - as glimpsed in the pleasant sentiments of "*enchanté(e)*"- these meetings equally hold the potential for aspects of discomfort too. The notion of a "glitch" is defined by Berlant (2016) as an interruption in infrastructure during troubling, transitional times. Such failure and the breaking of norms opens possibilities for new structures and ways of organising. Perhaps enchantment offers practice in inhabiting transitional moments and "glitches" and allows an exploration of how to be together differently in the discomfort of these troubling transitional times.

For Beaman (2021), historical severances of sacredness from the scientific consequentially produces tendencies to locate enchantment purely within religious contexts which often limits enchantment's perceived accessibility. Addressing this divide and integrating possibilities of enchantment within scientific realms incorporates more generous reformulations of science. "The sciences"- a reformulation offered by Latour - orient themselves around humility, service to human and more-than-human spheres and collaborative knowledge production (Latour 2004; Beaman 2021). Neither positioned in opposition to sacredness or religion, nor purporting access to some absolute truth, "the sciences" position themselves more modestly within *processes* of knowledge production. Interspecies and interdisciplinary collaboration recognise uncertainty as an endemic part of such processes: a characteristic of enchantment that Pyyry and Aiava (2021) identify as valuable, holding the potential to offer new forms of learning to navigate troubling times together.

Facilitated by unfixed, expansive definitions of enchantment, this article seeks to integrate an array of different registers - from the academic to the every-day - different approaches, voices and experiences into knowledge production process, in hopes of holding the door open to those with different perspectives and positions regarding (non)religion, (non)spirituality, secularism and the sciences (Beaman 2021).

Pleasure activism and enchantment in times of entangled crises

Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good, a 2019 publication from social justice and Black queer liberation activist adrienne maree brown, is a core guide in this research. For brown, pleasure encompasses feelings of enjoyment, self-fulfilment and happy satisfaction, and is a vital human need. Facets of enchantment for Bennett (2001) - the wonder, spellbound senses and mood of fullness, abundance and aliveness of some such experiences - find parallels with brown's descriptions of pleasure.

Bennett addresses the common charge of "naïve optimism" that often opposes calls to enchantment when it comes to embracing the joys and wonders of such experiences (Bennett 2001, 10). These charges formulate enchantment as a mindless escape from the world, and a forgetting of all the suffering that exists. Indeed, this article is pursued in the context of polycrises which includes those of extinction, climate collapse, social injustice, solastalgia and the intricately woven colonial devastation of genocide and ecocide (Strand 2022; Shiva 2019).

Prioritising enchantment as an intentional form of pleasure activism is essential in meeting this charge of mindless escape or turning away from suffering (Butler 2004). brown identifies the role of pleasure activism in embracing our fullness and complexity as vibrant, living, sensual beings as *fundamental* to our efforts to disrupt systems of oppression and destruction and to cultivate meaningful change in our world (brown 2019). Prioritising the pleasure of those most marginalised in our societies is key for brown, thus this article is learning from experiences of queer-identifying individuals, paying attention and care to participants experiencing multiple layers of oppression and marginalisation.

According to Macy (2013), the disconnection that currently plagues modern society both instils feelings of lack that the dominant culture convinces us we can fill through consuming more, *and* numbs us to our place within in the world, as well as the impacts of extractive systems and cultures of consumption and individualism on other beings and the earth (Macy 2013; Sepie 2017). For Bennett (2001), enchantment's effects hold the potential to heal such disconnection through sensory, somatic, psychic and intellectual engagement - which land us in fuller participation with the world. This article argues that enchantment's potential as a form of pleasure activism might intimately (re)connect us with the joy, wonder and miraculous-ness of life, as well as that which threatens all this vibrancy. The relational and material connections enchantment may forge call us into defending that which is threatened, cultivating empathy and vital affective ethics (Bennett 2001).

The longstanding thread of interdependent relationality is present within numerous Indigenous worldviews, wherein the notion of self is wider than the bounds of the individual (Sepie, 2017). This notion of expanded self holds value too in explorations of enchantment as an enriching relational experience. Such ancient, ongoing and varied Indigenous perspectives (although we acknowledge that Indigenous thought and practices are not monolithic), which immerse humans in a world that is lively, creative and communicative, offer an expanded formulation of self: both facilitating and necessitating care beyond the bounds of the individual.

Furthermore, enchantment holds additional potential as a tool for imagining and creating vital new ways of living on earth. In tending to the role of uncertainty within enchantment, Pyyry and Aiava (2021) invite us to pay attention to these in-between spaces and liminal moments, where difference, rupture and surprise imbue our encounters with "otherness". Not only do these liminal moments offer practice of being with differences - the embrace of which is so needed in moves towards cooperation and co-flourishing - but the uncertainty of enchantment's encounter has the potential to open new horizons of possibility (Pyyry and Aiava 2021).

Why queer enchantment?

Seeking to expand meaningful formulations of enchantment, this article asks about the potential value of an enchantment that is explicitly queer. Present crises require we craft alternative pathways to those set out before us by harmful norms. It is vital to draw upon thought traditions external to dominant modes of knowledge, if we are to imagine and cultivate just and ecological futures (Bowmani 2021). Queer theory offers potential in this way, through its inherently disruptive qualities (Morton 2010).

According to Timothy Morton, queer theory grounds itself in a non-essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality, challenging cis-heterosexist norms (Morton 2010. The brilliance of queer theory doesn't just enrich formulations of enchantment through its disruption of binary thinking - as well as cis-heterosexist and essentialist assumptions - it is also incredibly expansive via its multiplication of difference. This multiplication of difference mirrors itself beautifully in the elements of enchantment, which offer potential access to a multitude of fresh perspectives and surprising moments of meeting across difference.

Building upon Greta Gaard's (1997) work on queer ecofeminism, queer ecology offers a container within which enchantment can be understood in valuable and re-generative ways. Drawing on queer theory, the interdisciplinary field of queer ecology disrupts essentialist and heterosexist assumptions about nature, biology, gender, sexuality, ecological relations and environmental politics, common assumptions which continuously construct queerness and nature as opposing entities (Bowmani 2021; Seymour 2020).

Patrick Curry's (2019) recent writing explores enchantment from many angles, across many facets of modern life. He unpacks love as a source of enchantment along cis-heteronormative lines, where cis-gender men and women's experiences of enchantment are prioritised. Curry locates enchantment in the places where differences meet, however this cis-gendered, binary exploration sparks questions which seek to understand queer experiences of enchantment too. Curry's work highlights a vital need for a formulation of enchantment that is explicit in its multiplication of difference, beyond binary modes of gender and thought, as well as placing queer voices and experiences at its heart.

Explicitly welcoming queer-identifying individuals and communities into explorations of enchantment holds additional significance considering the consequences of the well-worn queer versus nature binary (Bowmani 2021). Such constructions have seen homosexuality and queerness commonly deemed "unnatural" and even "crimes against nature" (Gaard 1997, 4). Encounters between queer-identifying people and the more-than-human ("nature") through enchantment offer subversive potential, considering the historic exclusion of queerness from "nature."

The queering of enchantment serves to enrich and define itself across multiple spheres. Queering enchantment, in a theoretical sense, endeavours to define enchantment through its multiplicity of difference. This definition is not just across colonial and hierarchical binary oppositions, but across complex, entangled, surprising, multiplicitous, emergent and dissonant relationships and encounters. Challenging cis-heterosexist norms and hierarchies demands a recognition too of their inherent entanglements with other modes of oppression, across racialised, classist, ableist and anthropocentric lines (Bowmani 2021). Therefore, attending to the intersecting nature of oppression within the article is fundamental to a successful queering of enchantment.

Decolonial queer approaches

In the interest of disrupting binary modes of thinking, and to further understand how decolonial theory and practice inform these research efforts in a queering of enchantment, this article is guided by an important decolonial practice introduced by Hunt and Holmes (2015). They describe the project of colonialism as a mission to erase Indigenous people and their culture predicated upon the imposition of a set of binary systems. Such binaries include

the civilised/primitive binary applied by imperialist narratives to deny full humanity to Indigenous and African peoples, thus justifying the violent "civilising" mission pursued by the colonial project (Bowmani 2021). Rigid heterosexual and gender lines were imposed by colonisers, which functioned to punish Indigenous experiences and systems of diverse gender and sexuality (Hunt and Holmes 2015). Additionally, the colonial pursuit of domination weaponised sexual and gender diversity among Indigenous people of America to *prove* their "savagery" and less-than-human inferiority (Bowmani 2021). Emphasising the inextricable links between colonial and queerphobic histories, Hunt and Holmes (2015) reiterate as essential the direct emphasis given by Two Spirit Indigenous peoples: to addressing homophobia and transphobia *alongside* systems of colonial power, within queer communities and decolonial political movements, as well as within wider society (Hunt and Holmes 2015).

While historically, pursuits of domination have used gender and sexual diversity to justify racialised "savagery," the more recent neoliberal co-option of gay and lesbian politics weaponizes gay inclusion to reinforce racial hierarchies (Boulila and Brown 2023). Boulila and Brown (2023) explore the ways that neo-colonial politics in the Global North over the past two decades has constructed increasingly racialised narratives around homophobia. Consequently, any pursuits for LGBTQIA+ liberal rights carried out in a one-dimensional way, risk reinforcing racialised inequalities and harm.

In seeking to attend to these inextricable histories and presents and challenging "single-issue analyses" in favour of an intersectional and decolonial approach, this research prioritises perspectives that address the multi-layered nature of oppression (Crenshaw 2013). Attending to the positionality of researcher as neither objective nor apolitical is central to the integrity of this article. Although the site of this research (Devon, England), is not itself a site of settler colonialism, the history of empire, neoliberalism and globalisation implicates researchers in this violence across borders via profits, accumulation of wealth and the exporting of harm (de Leeuw 2018). It is vital, too, to acknowledge the origins of decoloniality as emerging from the struggles of Indigenous and First Nations peoples subjected to immense violence by colonial powers (Noxolo 2017). Patricia Noxolo (2017) insists that such radical theories and practices risk being appropriated, domesticated and diluted by Western academia. This research is certainly not immune to such risks, but it seeks to mitigate them through confronting colonial histories and presents, prioritising self-determination and interrogating white supremacy at the heart colonial power and settler colonial power through conversations around race and racism (de Leeuw 2018).

Methodology

Queer storytelling for collaborative knowledge production

This enquiry follows a methodology of participatory research practice, integrating qualitative research gathered in conversation with twelve queer-identifying individuals through personal connections. At the time of interviews, eleven of the participants were in the UK and one was in the Republic of Ireland. Naturally, there are limitations to interviewing a small sample of such an expansive and hugely diverse identity group, and subsequently, a limited fraction of queer experiences is represented. Yet this article's goal is not to seek conclusive answers but explore new fields of inquiry. Much like the example offered by

Midgelow's participatory research methodology, this exploration values the "emergence of insight instead of producing conclusive knowledge" (Hanson, 2018, p. 27).

Guided by the decolonial work of Hunt and Holmes (2015), this research prioritises "storytelling" - as significant to Indigenous, decolonial, queer and feminist knowledge production processes and woven into everyday practice and real-lived experiences beyond the bounds of the theoretical and academic. Each conversation was opened consistently with the question: "what does the term 'enchantment' evoke in you?" Another key question integrated within conversations was: "do enchantment and your sense of queerness relate to one another in any way?"

Researchers were in South Devon, in Southwest England, directly between Dartmoor National Park, and the south coast of the United Kingdom. In the context of research in the Global North and the whiteness of researchers requires extra rigour in reducing risks of appropriating radical Indigenous theory and practice. Deconstructing forms of normativity within queer spaces allows us to pay particular attention and care to those living under multiple layers of oppression such as racism and ableism in territorialised heterosexual spaces.

Some participants were not in their countries of origin at the time of our conversation and some participants self-identified with heritages and cultures from elsewhere in the world. Depending on participants' and researchers' locations, conversations took place either via video call or in person. Research ethics protocols were shared with each participant prior to interview to inform them of the scope of the article and to communicate the research's data protection commitments (Data Protection Act 2018). In communication, researchers proactively offered opportunity for participants to take back stories, to change their mind, to refuse their inclusion in the research as well as the option for them to be quoted anonymously.

Researchers shared back with each participant the stories they had gifted in interview. They were asked for consent for this paper to include these stories and information shared, alongside their name.

Principles of pleasure activism were woven into the methodology by explicitly negotiating each conversation according to the needs and desires of participants. Audre Lorde (1978) offers wisdom in *Uses of the Erotic* towards encouraging a sense of *sharing* in our joyful experiences, which was experienced at all stages of the research process, from asking participants to take part in this research to the end of the process. Such invitations to share joy helped avoid more extractive research practices, which might use or take from the other as an object of satisfaction or personal gain. For in-person meetings, participants were invited to choose a time and location of preference, wishing to support comfort, privacy and ease, depending on needs. Delights shared in conversation between participant and researcher ranged from a chat in a cosy house with moon rise at dusk, to sharing food in a sun-soaked garden, or wandering with canine friends in the forest.

The subtle, mysterious, embodied and intuitive aspects of enchantment, as explored earlier on, sit outside the realms of quantitative scientific analysis. These experiences are situational and context dependent and cannot be extracted from their origins.

Queer Enchantment of the Everyday

Illuminating the Empirical

This section is dedicated to grounding inquiries into queer enchantment within the real-life experiences and insights gifted to us by participants. As outlined in methodological explorations, this paper will now explore the questions investigated within this article by way of the everyday stories, experiences and insights of queer-identifying participants.

The breadth of personal experiences shared by participants offers much in nurturing expansive definitions of enchantment even more than we have discussed above. For participants, the pleasure of enchantment holds valuable relational qualities across human and more-than-human spheres. The entanglements of the queer and enchanted find prominence in interviewees' stories, in the shape of disrupting norms, subverting human categories of separation, providing refuge and harnessing natural queer affinities of adaptation in times of crisis. Participants' insights also offer vital insight into the barriers shaping access to queer enchantment and centre the vital need of cultivating collaborative research processes. In the interest of honouring self-determination, wherever possible and wherever consented to, everyone is quoted in their own words and real names and pronouns are requested.

Expanded enchantment…

In times of climate, social and ecological crises, if enchantment is to be a supportive tool, resource and course-corrector for humanity, then useful definitions of the term must surely strive towards including everyone: human and more-than-human. Speaking with participants revealed an ever broader and more generous scope of the potential that enchantment holds within its porous, shape-shifting ecosystem of meaning and value. As Roshni shared in a delightful conversation on the edge of North Woods forest - surrounded by spring snowdrops and enveloped in woven birdsong and distant car engine rumblings…

> …enchantment, in a way, is like the label queer, because it's so big and vast and porous and blob-like. That it's not saying anything but it's saying everything. And actually, that's so important. And saves a lot, because it holds a lot. (Interview 6, Roshni, 10th February 2023, Devon)

Relational stories of pleasure and care

Centring queer individuals' enchantment in a research process guided by principles of pleasure activism, the pleasurable aspects of enchantment are significant, and were identified by all twelve participants in different ways. Themes that arose in this regard include the pleasure of presence, loving existence, being uplifted, a sense of aliveness, sensuality, heart expansion, joy, wonder, peace, meeting the divine, awe and "bearing witness to… the magic of the everyday" (Interview 4, Mike, 9th February 2023, Devon). A wide scope of pleasurable potential is evident here within the realms of enchantment, according to participants.

For Abi, enchantment:

> …brings up a question of, "why bother being alive if there's nothing to be enchanted about?" (Interview 2, Abi, 6th February 2023, online)

This links back to adrienne maree brown's (2019) emphasis on connecting with our pleasure as an assertion that there is something *worth* living for. As brown reminds us, turning together towards that which enlivens us, as living, sensual beings are an essential component within our struggles to reorient towards co-flourishing on earth. Brown says:

> True pleasure- joy, happiness and satisfaction – has been the force that helps us move beyond the constant struggle, that helps us live and generate futures beyond this dystopic present, futures worthy of our miraculous lives. (2019 p. 437)

Participants gave a beautiful insight into the many pleasurable ways that enchantment appears as a source of nourishment and resource in their lives. Speaking about connecting with enchantment as a queer person, Rach expressed that:

> …living in an oppressive system that doesn't allow queerness to happen, it's joyous just to be, and be who you are everyday if you can be that person. (Interview 12, Rach, 20th February 2023, online)

These assertions of joy through the queer marginalised experience uplifts enchantment's potential as a valuable facet of pleasure activism.

The prevalent relational quality embedded within the experiences shared was especially prominent. All twelve participants spoke about enchantment in connection to some aspects of the more-than-human world. Abi and Joe court the sea in their enchanting experiences, while Arran meets enchantment in "taking a sugar snap pea off the plant and eating it right there and tasting the flavour" (Interview 1, Arran, 5th February 2023, Devon). Birdsong, the land, the smell of flowers, the moon, snowdrops, trees, the sky and a feline companion - to name just a handful - featured in people's relational accounts of enchantment.

Human spheres of enchantment were additionally very present in participant's accounts. Sources of such included poetry, city lights at night, experiencing or creating art, ritual, storytelling, music, sharing food, dancing and free queer self-expression. The inter-human and more-than-human relational qualities woven into participants' accounts holds parallels with themes explored earlier with the help of Audre Lorde (1978) who reminds us of the risks of exploitative, one-sided pleasure, and invites us instead to create bridges of connection through our sharing joy; bridges that forge connections across our similarities and our differences. The value of relational experiences, wherein sharing *with* is of fundamental priority offers an important gage into whether we are avoiding the harmful or exploitative forms of enchantment that So and Pinar explore in their critiques of enchantment under extractive systems of oppression (Sinopoulos-Lloyd, 2020).

Expanding self, mending separation

As Rach expressed when sharing about their experiences living in London, enchantment is:

> …an experience of something slightly beyond yourself and so it does feel enriching, it gives you something that you can't give yourself in isolation in some way (Interview 12, Rach, 20th February 2023, online).

This encounter with something that is beyond ourselves offers a wonderful opportunity to expand our sense of self, beyond the bounds of anthropocentric and hierarchical individualism. In addition, Joe spoke of her/their[1] experiences of enchantment as feeling:

> …enveloping… a real present sensual experience. And it feels reciprocal. It feels like there's a relationship being created. (Interview 9, Joe, 16th February 2023, Devon)

These relational and enriching qualities of enchantment, as interwoven experiences with the more-than-human and the human, denote value in times wherein dominant worldviews of separation perpetuate harm.

Challenging notions of individualism and mending our disconnection from one another and the more-than-human is essential in shifting beyond destructive stories of separation and domination and in turning towards interdependent stories of care and reciprocity (Macy 2013; Sepie 2017). This aspect of care emerged in multiple conversations when participants described their relationships with the more-than-human. Joe expressed a deepening intimacy with the sea, and the consequential "want to devote some energy into protecting it" (Interview 9, Joe, 16th February 2023, Devon). This resonates too with the reciprocal nature of Abi's relationship with the beach and the sea:

> I think having a more intimate relationship with something, it's easier for me to feel engaged in the protection of something… this place of magic is giving me so much and I can give something back. (Interview 2, Abi, 6th February 2023, online).

For Abi, the "magic" of intimacy translates into an affective ethics - as introduced earlier through Bennett's (2001) work - in the form of changing her plastic usage and picking up rubbish on the beach. The "place of magic" mentioned by Abi is also an opportunity to acknowledge the multifaceted spaces of power where safer queer spaces of magic can express the subjectivities of life vibrancy.

Tending emotional landscapes

While pleasure is certainly a strong quality in the stories of enchantment shared, themes of the far less pleasurable were also accounted for. Arran drew attention to the biodiversity loss and human destruction of habitats currently unfolding on earth, and the way that enchantment connects them with that loss:

> The owl… and the jackdaws, I find them incredibly enchanting… There's a lot that is enchanting and it's hard not to think about that without a twinge of pain, because of the way that the world is being destroyed and all of the ways that wildlife habitats are being destroyed… every time I see something beautiful, I'm like, 'no… don't go.'" (Interview 1, Arran, 5th February 2023, Devon)

Arran's reflections resonate with the potential of enchantment to not only locate us within the vibrancy of life, but also to bring us face to face with all that threatens such vibrancy (Rose 2017). Rach mirrored this sentiment through their understanding of experiencing

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[1] Resisting rigid categorisation, Joe requested that both of their/her preferred pronouns be included.

enchantment as just one facet of being a "more feelingful being", wherein "queerness, enchantment, joy, beauty… all those things can include things like grief or pain or sadness. Because they are inherent to being a full-feeling expansive being" (Interview 12, Rach, 20th February 2023, online).

The role of expanding our "feelingful" capacities as vital to our movements for change during multiple intersecting crises is well demonstrated by Anabel Khoo (2015). Khoo explores social movement building through the cultural work of Mangoes with Chili – a San Francisco-based queer, trans and Two-Spirit people of colour performance collective. Where activism has historically prioritised hard facts at the *expense* of intuitive knowledge, Khoo gathers many alternative voices to argue for *both* strategies as integral, regarding the intelligence of our feelings as a vital tool in our struggles for change. The expansive "feelingful" qualities of enchantment expressed by many of the participants, from the love to the grief evoked, through relational encounter, suggests enchanting experiences as a way into nurturing our emotional and intuitive intelligence.

Queer enchantment: to disrupt, to dissolve and to include.

For many participants, the queer and the enchanted interlace in resonance with the "both/and" queer decolonial approach explored in chapter two. Andrew phrased this beautifully, understanding enchantment as "permission to fall in love with life again… not the sort of idyllic, perfectionist form of love, but the kind of love that acknowledges the dirtiness and the griminess of things… as essential to living as well," where the uncomfortable and the grotesque "don't detract from the beautiful bits" (Interview 3, Andrew, 9th February 2023, online). This sense of allowing complexity, where seemingly contradictory things can coexist not along oppositional lines, but in a rich multitude of unbounded differences, according to Andrew, defies colonial true/false binary logics:

> When I wake up in the morning and see grass covered in dew, I can simultaneously accept that I understand the scientific reason why it's happened, and remember some story my grandmother told me when I was a kid about dew drops are from fairies running across the grass. I can hold both at the same time. I don't have to imagine one discounts the other. They're not in opposition. I'm not putting male and female on opposite sides. I'm understanding them more as a blend and they support each other. (Interview 3, Andrew, 9th February 2023, online)

Andrew's expression of enchantment curiously welcomes multitudes of difference and complexity and finds value there. While rigid definitions or binary formulations of enchantment might be exclusionary or reinforce oppositional difference, as explored earlier through the work of Patrick Curry (2019), an enchantment queered, according to Andrew's insights, is spacious enough for contradictions to be held with curiosity.

Multiple other participants acknowledged the places where differences collide - the edges, the interstitial and the liminal – as the places where enchantment thrives for them. Rach encounters enchantment along the "fuzzy edges" within the city, where different people, cultures and the more-than-human come together (Interview 12, Rach, 20th February 2023, online). Celebrating the value of queer enchantment's fundamental role of colliding differences presents generative potential in challenging enforced colonial fears around

difference and "otherness," which separate us from one another and the more-than-human world.

Furthermore, enchantment for multiple participants involves noticing beauty and the extraordinary in the little things, often at the *edges* of our awareness. Andrew finds enchantment encourages an appreciation of "weeds as beautiful," highlighting the commonality between "weeds and queerness, of not quite fitting in, of occupying the edges of things…. Learning to love the edges or learning to love the in-between spaces" (Interview 3, Andrew, 9th February 2023, online). From this perspective, the edges where queer enchantment dwells offer the generative potential of different worlds colliding, merging and making unexpected magic. Andrew also highlights the importance of unlearning and relearning with the 'weeds' as a process of co-creating pleasure and interdependence between humans and more-than-humans.

Enchantment as refuge

Multiple participants located enchantment as a space of refuge, be that from traumatic experiences during childhood, to finding a space where often seemingly conflicting identities can coexist. For Roshni:

> There's a lot of conflicting identities that I intersect with that sometimes feel shard-like… Being mixed-race, having to navigate being South Asian and British… Those are shards against each other, but then also, being queer and South Asian is another shard… It's the human labelling that has made those edge-like. Whereas enchantment feels like it goes beyond. Like I've left all of those shards behind. I just am. And that's actually a refuge when I am always being coded and labelled by myself or other people. (Interview 6, Roshni, 10th February 2023, Devon)

Roshni's sharing here denotes a sense of spaciousness within enchantment for humanly-constructed contradictions to co-exist without the sharpness of opposition. For those experiencing the "shards" of being coded and labelled against the "norm," along racialised, cis-heterosexist, ableist, or other hierarchical binary lines, enchantment offers some refuge. Additionally, in conversation with Hesham, he reiterated the value of a "both/and" approach, which he expressed as preferring "to see the world as yes *and* no, rather than yes *or* no." This refusal of the binary holds decolonial power considering the binary categorisation so inherent to the colonial project in order to dominate and subjugate peoples and more-than-human ecologies, as outlined by Bowmani (2021). Hesham shared:

> As I've grown older and come into my queerness… I've sort of had to pick between my queer identity and my cultural identity… that's why I find a lot of comfort in spirituality and alternative practices because it allows me to take this piece of home… in the belief in supernatural things, and allows me to be able to combine my cultural identity and my queer identity in a way that I haven't always been able to…" (Interview 10, Hesham, 16th February 2023, online)

Hesham's reflections suggest the value of queer enchantment's "both/and" making space for multitudes of contradictory identities and experiences to coexist in ways that traditional binary-focused human worlds might not.

While the human world still enforces codes and categories, perhaps queer enchantment, with its spacious, undefined and complexity-welcoming texture, can provide a balm to the sharpness of constructed opposition. This balm was especially pronounced in participants' accounts of experiences with the more-than-human, wherein human constructs of identity are not relevant, as so beautifully expressed by Joe:

> When you're in conversation with the trees or the sea, they're not asking you [about your human-constructed identity]. (Interview 9, Joe, 16th February 2023, Devon).

In many ways, the sense of refuge enchantment offers mirrors elements of pleasure activism, wherein we may access moments of nourishment, whilst having to navigate a deeply wounded world. Perhaps the time spent in enchanting presence with the trees and the sea, temporarily relieved of human codes of separation and labels, we may be gifted a resource that supports us in facing the crises at hand.

Natural affinities to question

Other entanglements of the queer and the enchanted identified by participants lie in themes of questioning norms. For Mike, enchantment and queerness are a way of "questioning… opening to things that are not necessarily what I thought were the "norm" (Interview 4, Mike, 9th February 2023, Devon). Abi expressed her identification with queerness because:

> …[I] want to question… why do we do it like that? Why does my sexuality have to look like this? Why does my relationship have to look like this? Why does my work have to look like this? I want to disrupt a lot of those kind of norms… not accepting what we're told. (Interview 2, Abi, 6th February 2023, online).

This kind of queer questioning, Abi also finds intimately woven into her experience with neurodivergence, wherein her autism and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) aids a questioning of everything. Thus, Abi expressed: "I have a natural affinity to enchantment and wonder and questions and complexity and chaos".

In contexts of multiple intersecting crises and social inequity, research shows that the effects of climate change disproportionately impact disabled people, alongside other intersecting layers of oppression (Jodoin *et al.*, 2023). The limited acknowledgement of these effects means efforts to address climate change often reinforce economic, physical and social inequalities, rather than acknowledging them as socially constructed and dismantling them through a reorganisation of world. Mainstream responses to climate change forget too about "the knowledge and experience to build better, more inclusive, resilient and accessible spaces and worlds" that disabled people bring to many fields, from design to education (Jodoin *et al.*, p. 2). At a time on earth where accepted norms are causing and perpetuating entangled ecological devastation and extreme human inequity, voices, experiences and modes of being which have a "natural affinity" to challenging established norms are so essential in disrupting dominant structures in creative and inclusive ways (Interview 2, Abi, 6th February 2023, online). Exploring queer enchantment as a possible reorienting force for humanity is essential to consider the lived experiences of neurodiverse and disabled people. As individuals and researchers living in white, nondisabled bodies with the privilege of

economic stability, it is vital that we recognise the very real barriers that exist for people experiencing layers of oppression that we do not experience.

In addition to Abi, Rach shared in this sense of a "natural affinity" for enchantment too. In a beautiful expression of their queer experience, Rach expressed a sense of "being ever changing and growing and developing… forever stepping into bits of yourself… and then finding new bits that you want to grow into" (Interview 12, Rach, 20th February 2023, online). This mode of "constantly renegotiating who [we] are" supports a sense of malleability, expansiveness and fluidity in Rach's being, making enchantment easier to access. In both the sense of disrupting norms, and in terms of adapting in precarious times, and expanding into new possibilities, the queer and the enchanted offer real potential value in creatively navigating global intersecting crises. This builds supportively on the revelations of Pyryy and Aiava (2020) into enchantment as a new-horizon-opening force, with the additional malleability and openness of queer perspectives. We can also bring the perspectives of adrienne maree brown (2019), whose formulations of pleasure activism consider experiences which bring us closer to our fulfilled selves as vital in our movements of change towards co-flourishing futures.

Unearthing barriers to queer enchantment

In conversation with Richard, they brought attention to the tactical role of dissatisfaction evoked by consumer capitalism to fuel further consumption within modern society, which enchantment's "deep peace and joy" has the potential to resist (Interview 5, 10th February 2023, Devon). They acknowledged too the emotional and practical challenges of confronting and escaping the intensity of "peer pressure and cultural pressure," and the "certain degree of privilege to sidestep that. Or even have the room to challenge or think about it differently". Arran recognised too the current conditions of economic crisis - stress, pressure, low wages and long working hours - that "prevent so many people from accessing the enchantment and pleasure and delight of the world" (Interview 1, Arran, 5th February 2023, Devon).

Participants shared a multitude of different additional conditions and facets of experience that exist as barriers to accessing enchantment. These include mental health challenges, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, lack of time and living under what Arran named as: "systems that are designed to divert people's attention away from the things that give them pleasure… that are free". Acknowledging these very real barriers and challenges that current economic and social contexts impose upon people to accessing the nourishment of enchanting encounters is fundamental if this article is to avoid fulfilling the common charges of "naïve optimism" that often oppose calls to enchantment (Bennett 2001, 10).

Another significant barrier that came up in conversation with Joe, in relation to her/their experiences of enchantment as intimately woven with the sea, relates to the dominance of white bodies in more-than-human spaces:

> …it really relates to race. Being here in this country… as a mixed-race person, taking up those spaces I find myself like the dandelion. Stubbornly, accidentally taking up predominantly white spaces. Surfing and being in the sea… I don't see me in the sea. And even in nature there's lots of arguments about people of

colour and feeling able to connect with nature and with wild spaces. (Interview 9, Joe, 16th February 2023, Devon)

This has been an ongoing issue and challenge within the UK when it comes to accessing the countryside, natural spaces (Neal and Agyeman 2006) but also water bodies like the Sea or the Ocean (Olive, Roy and Wheaton 2018). As well as economic, cultural and health barriers, in addition to the historic colonial severing of queer people from "nature," Joe's experience brings important emphasis to the racialised inequalities and social barriers that limit access to enchanting encounters between people of colour and the more-than-human world. Prioritising stories and perspectives of those more intensely affected by conditions of white supremacy, consumer capitalism and cis heteropatriarchy is therefore a very necessary core effort within this research. As adrienne maree brown (2019) reminds us, pleasure activism is about prioritising the pleasure of those most marginalised in our societies and communities, and that demands that these racialised barriers that limit access to more-than-human delights and nourishment be addressed. While the joyful and the pleasurable are ways of asserting and remembering all that is worth living for the less pleasurable aspects of enchantment offer different forms of potential insight at times of complex and intersecting crises.

Collective transformations

Just as queer enchantment seeks to challenge the anthropocentric and separating notions of an individual bounded "self," so too must its enactment be a collective process. Though multiple participants acknowledged the role of solitude in their connecting with the subtleties of emerging enchanting encounters, there was also a prominence of shared experience as powerful, encouraging and sustaining. Roshni expressed that although they "do find a lot of enchantment in solitary moments, it's sometimes in collectivity that the courage to do it is born, or the seed is planted" (Interview 6, Roshni, 10th February 2023, Devon). This sense of courage that is engendered in collective experiences feels especially important in the intense process of challenging dominant cultures, as highlighted by Richard (Interview 5, 10th February 2023, Devon).

For Llewyn, preparing and sharing food is such a vital collective process of enchantment for them, and one which they recognise as a ritual that has been happening for as long as human beings have knowledge of ourselves (Interview 11, Llewyn, 17th February 2023, online). Furthermore, Andrew noted that in practicing looking for, or noticing enchantment, "the best element of practice is doing things in community that generate those things" (Interview 3, Andrew, 9th February 2023, online). He expressed:

For me, it's essential to have your experiences validated by other people. That makes those experiences much stronger and more positive" (ibid).

Again, there's a sense of strength and power that is cultivated in collective experiences.

In speaking about their experiences of collective living and community in Newcastle, Australia, Hetty offered in an additional level of insight in this regard. In the community in question, interdependency was integrated at the practical level of creating structures to "support each other to get the space and time to be enchanted" (Interview 8, Hetty, 13th February 2023, Devon). Both at the emotional level - engendering courage, witnessing and sharing ritual experiences - as well as on the practical level of supporting the required spaciousness for one another under exploitative capitalist conditions through shared

childcare, for example) – collectivity emerges as a fundamental element of integrating queer enchantment in empirical worlds.

During our conversation, Jo brought attention to the work of Aboriginal scholar Tyson Yunkaporta's (2019) book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World.* A core element of Yunkaporta's book outlines the role of collective processes, according to an Indigenous worldview. As such, story, ritual and cultural changes must be undertaken by collectives and communities; they cannot be done by individuals. Acknowledging this wisdom and integrating the beautiful experiences of the research participants, a practical inquiry is sparked as to how we might cultivate more shared collective experiences of queer enchantment.

Through the insightful, vibrant and generous stories which participants contributes to this research article, so begins the process of grounding theoretical formulations of queer enchantment into empirical worlds. Conversations with research participants were so fruitful and expansive that unfortunately this paper has not been able to integrate everything in by any means. As we explore very specific and self-directed research questions as researchers, this calls too for a recognition of the limitations to alchemising such a rich array of different experiences and life-worlds.

In the following ecosystem of participation (Figure 1), we acknowledge the importance of more-than-text based representations which offer strategies for thinking with the troubled politics of coloniality (McLean and de Leeuw 2020) and to reflect the queer bricolage adopted by the researchers within this paper (Zebracki 2017).

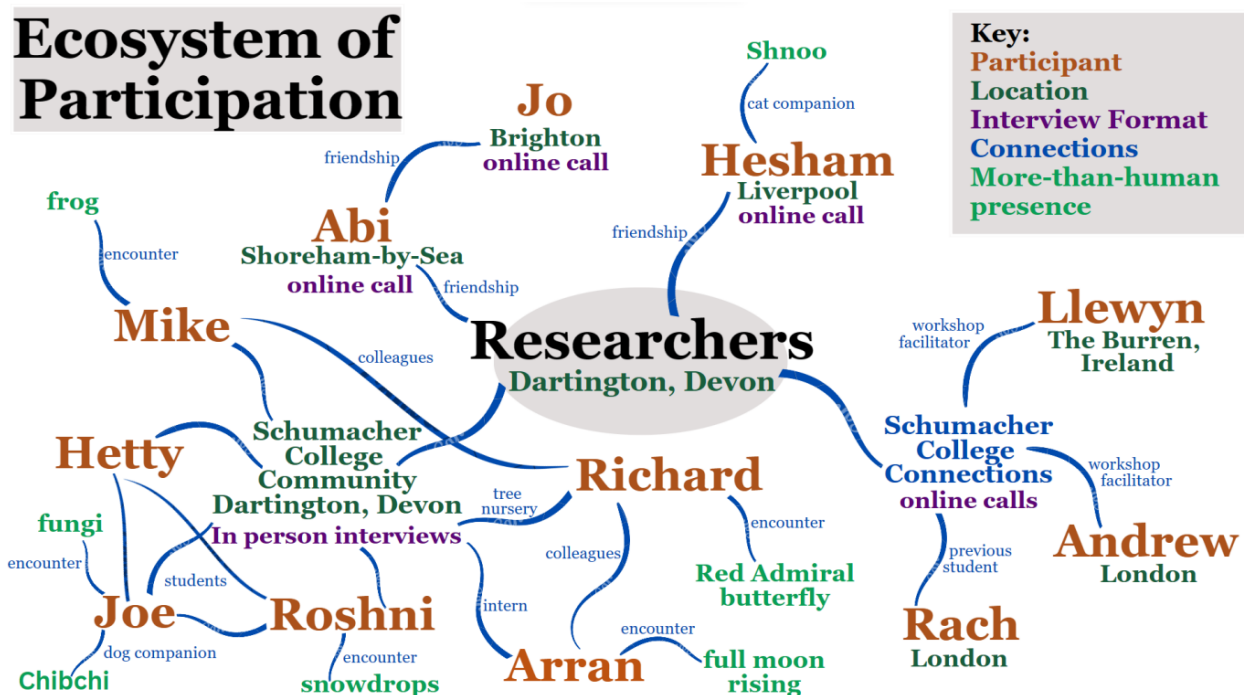**Figure 1:** An ecosystem of participation. Source: Authors

To give a final glimpse into the content of participants' sharing, the following visual assemblage holds all the words (excluding names, common verbs, pronouns etc.) mentioned seven or more times across all interviews, sized according to the frequency of their usage (Figure 2). This presentation of research findings aims to offer a non-linear way of presenting

themes and mapping possible patterns which reflects the constellations of the queer analysis adopted in this paper.

Figure 2: Initial insights in conversation with participants. Source: Authors

The word blobs presented in Figure 2 offer a complementary method of presenting research findings, in a non-linear and interconnected way; with the possibility of revealing patterns and themes (Frazer and Yunkaporta 2019). They also provide alternative modes for transmitting complex and qualitative knowledge that academia can struggle to capture and offer alternative modes for knowledge sharing that might support neuro-diverse and non-linear ways of thinking.

Just as Yunkaporta (2019) emphasises the role of collectivity, this work ultimately demands and deserves a more collaborative and collective process going forward. However, this paper hopes to have given an insightful glance into the fertility of this field of inquiry:

introducing the potential value of queer enchantment as a way into pleasurable process of locating ourselves within entangled human and more-than-human worlds, and as a vital tool in navigating new and creative pathways of living together in times of crises.

Concluding fruitful beginnings

Queer enchantment as pleasure activism locates us within political spheres of exclusion. It also re-member us to entangled collective worlds of vibrancy, joy and pleasure of loss and grief.

Through a collaborative process with existing explorations in the fields of enchantment and queer theory, alongside twelve queer-identifying participants, this article has sought to illuminate the potential values of queer enchantment, in times of polycrisis woven across human and more-than-human spheres. With the help of research participants, the "natural affinity" between the queer and the enchanted has emerged as a propensity to ask questions, to disrupt damaging established norms and to curiously traverse humble and generative spaces of unknowability and fluidity. Many critical barriers to accessing queer enchantment have been unearthed through the storytelling of participants. From economic, health and time-limiting barriers imposed by capitalist consumerist systems of exploitation, to social and racialised barriers upheld by an unjust hierarchical society, these barriers draw attention to the central call to collaboration and collectivity nestled at the heart of queer enchantment. How do we support those most marginalised within our communities to access the time and space required for queer enchantment to arise? How do we cultivate the shared courage to disrupt societal and cultural norms? How might we develop community practices and shared experiences which support and amplify our experiences of queer enchantment?

Incorporating elements of queer ecology that re-establish intimate and sensual encounters between the human and the more-than-human, queer enchantment's potential lies in its desire to (re)establish human connection within the complex vibrancy of life on earth. Not excluding the strange nor the uncomfortable or the inanimate, queer enchantment seeks to remain receptive to the emerging aspects of enchantment that are not easily pinned down, rationalised, or conclusive, but rather curious and questioning. Enchantment queered weaves multiple theoretical lenses, as well as human identity and experience, and more-than-human spheres. It seeks to intentionally expand formulations of enchantment that explicitly include those who identify with queerness and those living outside of patriarchal, colonial and violently enforced norms of sexuality and gender. The queer analysis of enchantment, while attending to the intersecting nature of oppression, serves to enrich and define across multiple constellations the emergent and dissonant relationships of encounters.

This paper hopes to reveal, through its collaborative process, queer enchantment's capacity to inhabit the unknowns and in-betweens of critical spaces and constellations, to be available for fluidity, questioning and porosity and to be expansive enough to hold complexity and difference. In this way, this article suggests that there can be no conclusive answers on the subject; but that very indeterminacy is a gift in precarious and divisive times; times that require our creativity, adaptability and collaboration.

Alongside meeting joyous vibrancy, through enchantment's encounter, so too do we find ourselves faced with the huge threats tearing at the precious fabric of life, in ways and at scales that are hard to even comprehend. In times of crises, as adrienne maree brown (2019)

reminds us again and again, fulfilling our innate capacities to receive pleasure and prioritising that of those most harmed in the current organisation of worlds, is a vital process and resource needed to propel us into such vital, radical reorganisations of worlds.

This paper offers these initial illuminations of queer enchantment as one thread of an ongoing dance into alignment with life's mysterious vibrancy, and as a possible tool for navigating collective turnings towards futures of co-flourishing on earth.

Acknowledgments

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