
Quarter



Hot House



QMatter: Part I

HOT HOUSE/MAISON CHAUDE

In 2020, while the ***Invasive Queer Kudzu*** project grew into a dormant state because of the pandemic, I began thinking more deeply about the possible entanglements of queerness and plant life. Amongst a thicket of post-humanist, intraspecial writings, and personal queer futurist musings, I began building a greenhouse of existing and speculative "oddkin" that could nurture queer sustenance or heal queer traumas old and new. This project has come to be called *Hot House/Maison Chaude*, wherein diverse queer bodies across global human history are enmeshed with plant-life of historic natures and speculative futures. Drawing on fields as diverse as evolutionary biology, queer ecology, science fiction, ethnobotany, eco-feminism, social practice and institutional critique, the project cross-pollinates multiple disciplines.

Hot House/Maison Chaude is both a series of related artworks, as well as a structural and theoretical container for them. The project references the greenhouse, or "hot houses" of the 19th century, projecting "world-building" potential into a structural form built to simultaneously protect and nourish growth of rare species. *Hot House* is of course also a reference to the climate crisis we grow closer to everyday. We must figure out more imaginative, sustainable and reparative ways to liver better with our non-human companions.

. . . . . .

[1] For more information about this storytelling project across the queer US South, visit www.invasivequeerkudzu.com

[2] The Biodome is a mega-structure that was originally constructed for the 1976 World Olympics in Montreal as an indoor track and field. In 1992, it was converted into a nature park divided into 4 different North American ecosystems.

Informed by the **Biodome** [2] here in Montréal, but queering the concept of cultivation and propagation, this *Hot House* is envisioned as a fertile space for initiating new queer dialogues. LGBTQ2+ and botanic archives are two conservation communities that rarely intersect, but imagine the ferment that might percolate between those who tend to the peculiar natures of "hot house flowers." [3] The project aims to travel to archives, botanic gardens, community centers and sites of queer nightlife, which continue to fertilize, cultivate and nurture queer communities.

Hot House/Maison Chaude exists in three acts:

1 - exchange of "queer compost," transformed and dispersed from personal LGBTQ2+ ephemera of contributors across North America

2 - cataloguing companion plants of the natural world that have intertwined histories with human sexual and gender evolutions, along with a series of botanic drawings and lithographic prints of speculative plant "herbals" for healing contemporary queer issues

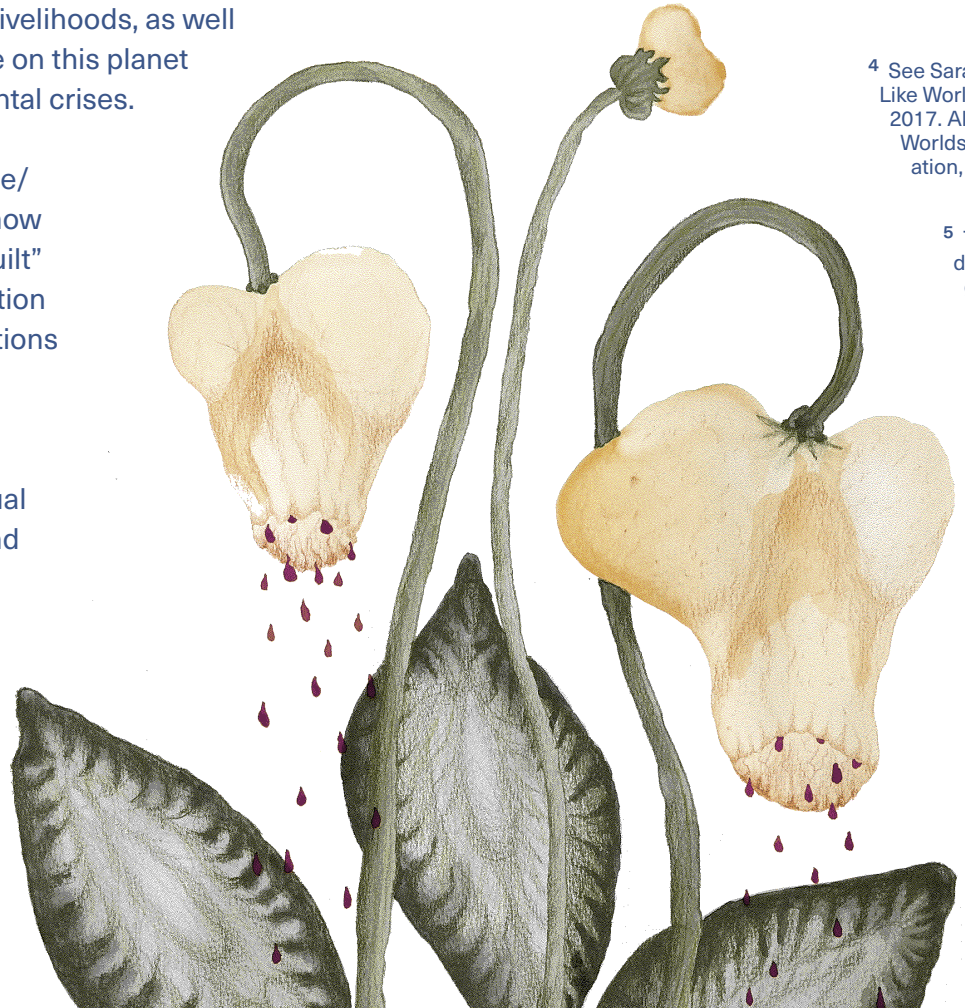
3 - fabrication of a mobile greenhouse structure housing plants both speculative and real, being nourished by the "queer compost" from various contributors

. . . . . .

[3] 20th century gay slang for particularly effeminate gay men. See "Flowers & Birds" (pg 332) by Ed Madden in *Encyclopedia of Gay Histories and Cultures*, edited by George Haggerty.

We are born into a world in which cultural forces are pressed upon our bodies, minds and lived experiences. For individuals and communities who do not fit a society's notions of "normal", such worlds are often structured by oppressive forces such as racism, colonialism, heterosexism, or ableism. In recent years, the concept of "worldmaking", "world building " or simply "worlding has taken root in artistic and academic cultural production as an imaginative, futuristic and activist response to the current international climate of increased violence against minoritarian livelihoods, as well as the faltering tenability of life on this planet facing overlapping environmental crises.

Within this zeitgeist, Hot House/ Maison Chaude interrogates how the natural world has been "built" in terms of knowledge production that centers heterosexual relations and reproduction. How might unjust legacies of biological determinism be dismissed by looking at the queerness, sexual difference, gender variance and pleasure evident across the plant and animal worlds? How can we distort common understandings of the "natural" and articulate queerness using a spectrum of non-normative, non-reproductive sexual a and gender capacities expressed in the plant world? Recognizing the implications for queer "worldmaking" as it encounters the heteronormative, colonialist imperatives of botany , the project is informed by critical readings in eco-feminism, queer ecology and ethnobotany. I hope to build a guide to living plant forms that have co-evolved alongside human sexualities and understandings of gender, and then respond with a series of fantastical, speculative plant forms that project specific nodes of queer "worlding" towards healing.



[4] See Sarah Rose Sharp's "How Art Making Is Like World Building." Hyperallergic. January 30, 2017. Also, Mark JP Wolf's Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation, Routledge, 2014.

[5] The belief that human behaviour is directly controlled by an individual's genes or some component of their physiology, with no regard to the role of the environment. Biologic determinism is responsible for movements in science and society including eugenics, scientific racism, the basis of sexual orientation, and medical assignment of gender to intersex babies upon birth.

[6] See Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan's Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World, UPenn Press, 2007. Also, The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century, edited by Yota Batsaki, Sarah Burke Cahalan & Anatole Tchikine, University Press, 2017.

So where to start building?

I grew up with my hands in the dirt. Foundations, terra firma, our rootings—whatever one calls it, I see worlding as beginning with what supports and what nourishes us. The "below us" is often considered (if it even crosses the threshold of thought for many humans) as a space of mud, earth, stone, dead things and old-time. But the "below us" is actually very well alive, humming with bacterial reproduction alongside the synapse-based communications between trees and plants, crawling with the byzantine tunnels of worms and countless other creatures. Along with the wetness of water, dirt is the origin site of all nutriment in an ecological system. And further below is the composite, petrified, compacted ancestors of all that is living and inert today.

Donna Haraway's recent work, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, offers provocative new ways to reconfigure our relations to the earth and all its inhabitants. Haraway acknowledges the current crises of climate change and ecological devastation, but eschews the current concept of the Anthropocene—that we humans alone have made this mess and are alone in our ability to fix it. She proposes her own neologism for our times, the Chthulucene, from "chthonos", Greek for earth or underworld, and "kainos", a time of beginnings. Interweaving the abbreviation SF as a simultaneous stand-in for science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminisms, and science fact.[7] Haraway looks at ways we make **kinship** with and hold **response-ability** for other species, how we might do things together, or as she puts it, through **sym-poiesis**, making together.

> *Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles....we are compost, not post-human; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities.*
> – Donna Haraway

[7] Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 2016. Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Durham: Duke University Press.

All beings require nourishment. From a physical survival perspective, what one eats, drinks, breathes, touches and lives with all nourish a being. But nourishment is more than the consumption of new matter. Nourishment also comes from our soaking up nutriment from the generational strata below.

The writings of queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz shifted my thinking about time, queerness and legacy. He offers that queerness is something which is "not yet here," a perpetual performance to mark our identities. For him, our queerness is passed down surreptitiously from one generation to the next through temporal acts, performances and material ephemera to evade scrutiny or violence that might accompany more marked visibility. Muñoz referred to these performative ephemera as "traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things," and believed in them as distinctly material.

The materiality of kinship is around me at all times. I sit in a studio where it is folded into neat piles, organized by color, or spills out of overstuffed boxes. Fabrics that have been handed-down to me from several family generations. T-shirts and patches from punk-infused teenage friendships. Letters from friends and family that trace the eras and shifting places I have called home. Underwear that holds stains and memories of so many former boyfriends and lovers.

These beginnings of queer compost, qmatter, are a nod to Muñoz's ephemera, as I have approached the theme of kinship by taking "tracings" and "specks" from LGBTQ+ icons, symbols, protests, moments of intimacy, archives, and other sources across time and place. As pared-down silhouettes, these tracings become intentionally abstract, focusing less on recognition and legibility, and more on chance preponderances of such figures. Pulped from many kinship materials and crumpled together into their packs, they look almost precisely like fall leaf debris heaped into a compost pile.

As you rifle through the qmatter I've sent you, consider the queer archive as a kind of compost pile: complex, inchoate, alimentative, messy, musty, fragmented, scintillating, fragile and fierce.

This project is an invitation to collaborate materially, to build together, remotely, a "hot compost pile" of queer lives, yearnings, dreams and possibilities. I hope you'll consider the following four actions to participate and contribute a special item or two to this compost, helping me spread it out across North America/Turtle Island.

TAKING STOCK

Consider what might be meaningful to contribute to this collective compost pile. A few ideas to consider:

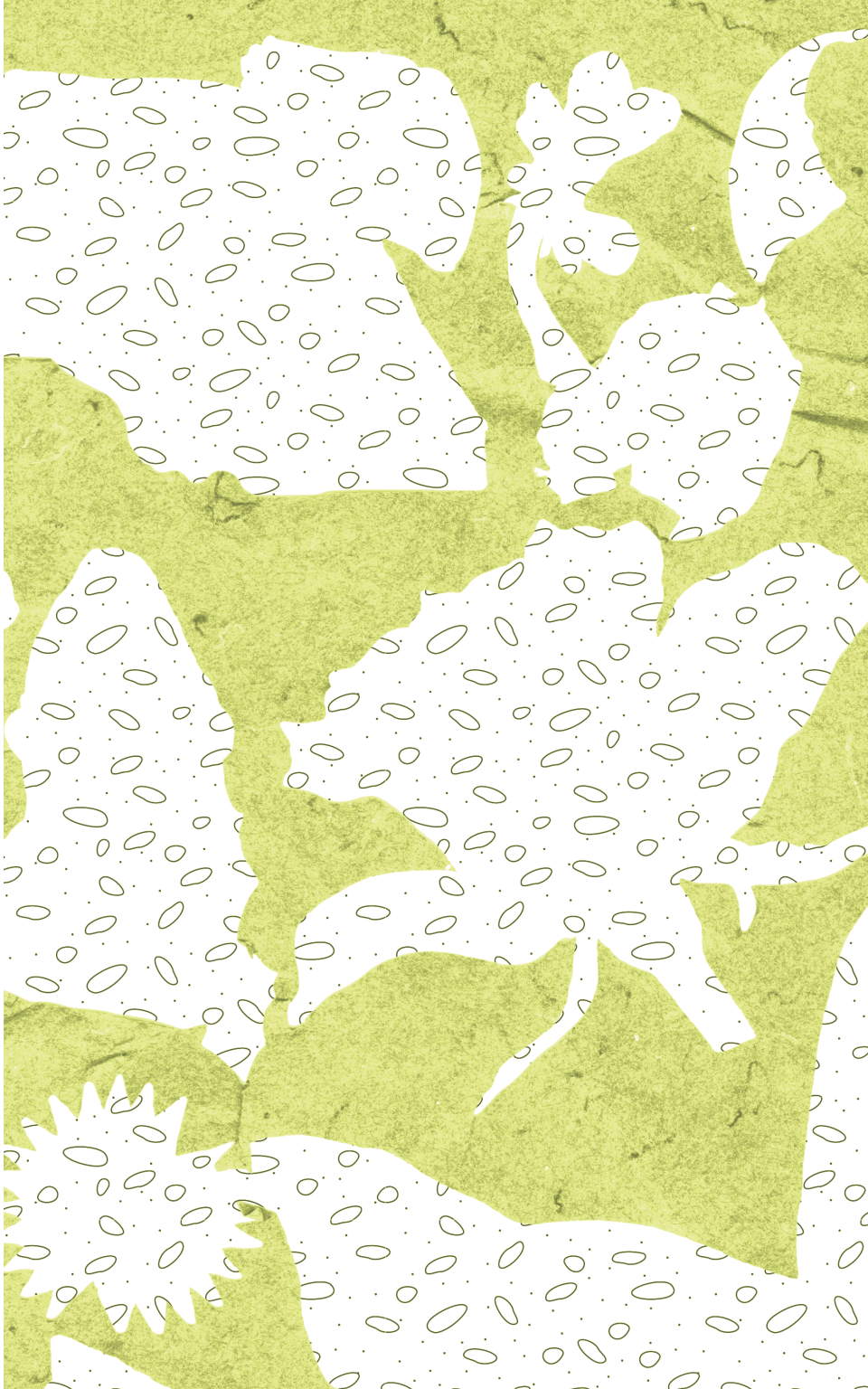
What marks your queerness?

What would you add to a queer intergenerational heap?

When you think about kinship and legacy, what would you want future queer generations to be nourished by?

You are welcome to write, draw or design your contribution, but consider the value in objects, ephemera or matter that has touched you, physically and emotionally.

Keep in mind that your contribution will be chopped up, pulped, macerated and generally rendered into an unrecognizable state.



ADDING MATTER

Gather letters, important novels, posters, band t-shirts, underwear, bandanas/hankies, magazine or newspaper clippings. There is only one tiny “rule” for contributions, which is that they should be something that can actually decompose. This mostly means items that are of “natural” origin – cotton, papers, linen, thin wood, silk, hemp, rayon, wool, dried plants, and I’m sure multitudes of other materials y’all will surprise me with. A good rule of thumb is that if the contribution could be chopped up and processed in a blender, then it will be excellent for our communal pile., important novels, posters, band t-shirts, underwear, bandanas/hankies, magazine or newspaper clippings. There is only one tiny “rule” for contributions, which is that they should be something that can actually decompose. This mostly means items that are of “natural” origin – cotton, papers, linen, thin wood, silk, hemp, rayon, wool, dried plants, and I’m sure multitudes of other materials y’all will surprise me with. A good rule of thumb is that if the contribution could be chopped up and processed in a blender, then it will be excellent for our communal pile.

TURNING OVER

Exchange is at the heart of qmatter. While I am asking you to contribute to the project, I'm also sending you some compostables I've been making. For the past year, I have been contributing my own matter to the beginnings of this compost. Mostly t-shirts from Pride events and leather bars, gay and lesbian comics, queer fiction, a few love letters, underwear of former lovers and a couple of vintage porn mags. Under the tutelage of paper-witch jacqui beaumont, we have pulped these items, pulled them into paper sheets, printed them with earth pigments and critter juice* and cut them into intricate tracings across queer time and space. These are gathered with other scraps along with dazzling biodegradable gelatin sequins from the 1920s, and packaged in a bio-plastic container that doubles as a way to start your own compost pile. Add a bit of soil from a houseplant, toss in a few snippets from the items you will contribute to the project, and stir it up. In compost language, this intermittent mixing of the layers is called "turning over," and with time referred to as "curing." Such a melange of multiple queer generations, herstories, and traces is so necessary in this fragile time for global queer liberation.



SPREADING OUT

Mail me your matter! Cured compost is typically spread out around the garden to disperse nutriment. For this project, I am asking you to “spread out” by mailing your contribution(s) of matter or personal items to me. These will be processed, re-materialized and added to the growing heap of queer compost. As I build this pile, your contributions of matter will get turned over with those of many other North American queers, and brought into the Hot House / Maison Chaude. Eventually, this queer compost will be spread out across gardens in Montreal, Tennessee and elsewhere. If you are interested in receiving some of the final compost, please let me know in your contribution correspondence.



I have provided you with a bio-plastic return envelope and $8 in postage to mail me your contribution to the qmatter heap. Please let me know if you require more support (financial or logistics) to send me what you feel called to contribute.

For Canadian participants, please use the following mailing address:

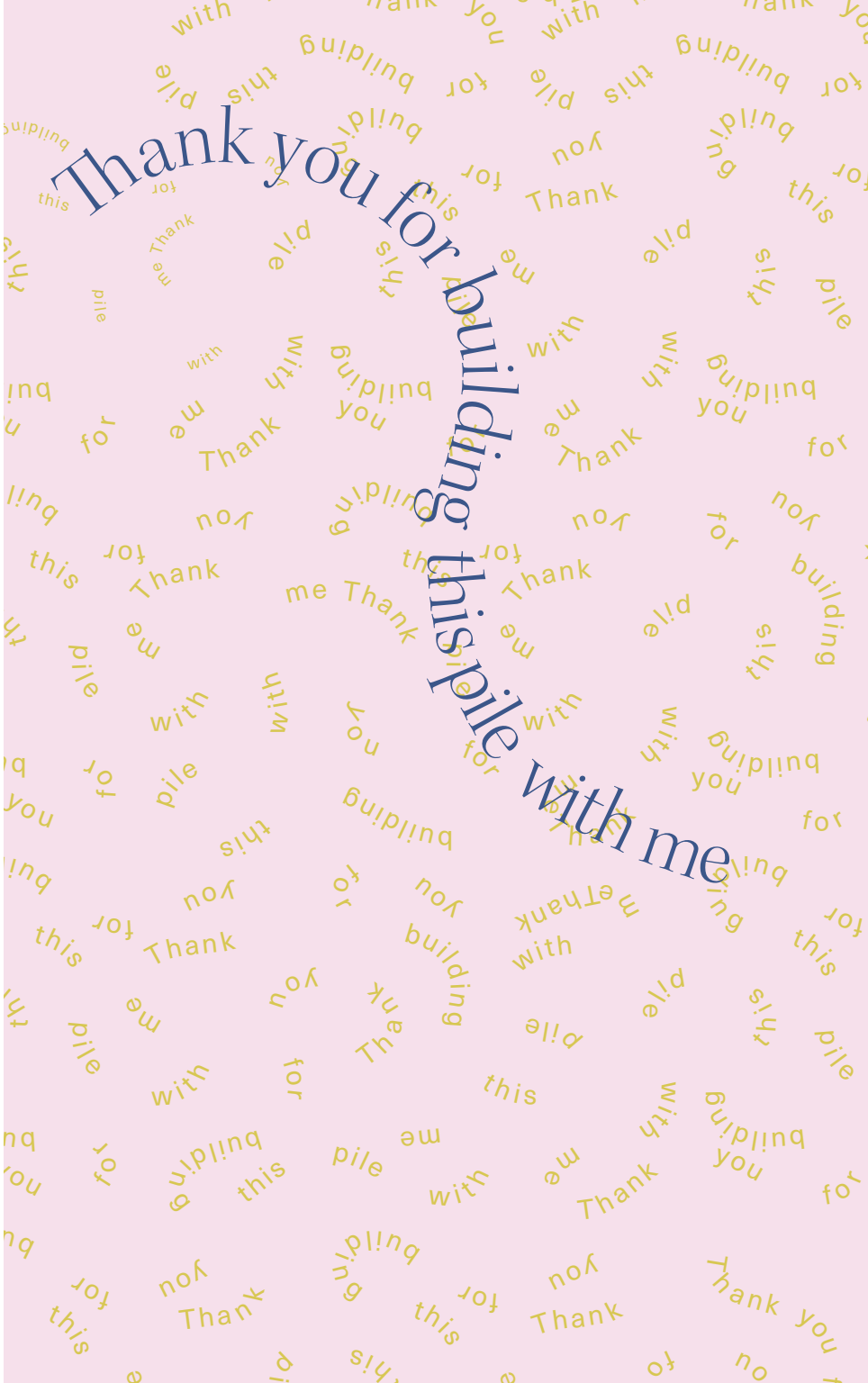
Aaron McIntosh
959 av Laporte
Montréal, QC
H4C 2P6

For US participants, please use the following mailing address:

Aaron McIntosh
168 Dogwood Lane
Kingsport, TN 37663

If you have questions about participation, don't hesitate to reach me at either of the following:

aaron.l.mcintosh@gmail.com
+1 438-525-8464




Artist/Artiste
Aaron McIntosh
Production of the "queer compost", papers and critter juice / Production du « composte queer », de papiers et du jus de bestiole
Jacqueline Beaumont
Book design and French translation / Design du livret et traduction française
Tommy Lecomte