QUEERING SPACE AND TIME: URBAN RADICAL FAERIE
PLACEMAKING IN NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS

James Carl Goebel

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APPROVED:

Mariela Nuñez-Janes, Committee Co-Chair
Jara Carrington, Committee Co-Chair
Andrew Nelson, Committee Member
Nicole Seymour, Committee Member
Lisa Henry, Chair of the Department of Anthropology
Albert Bimper, Executive Dean of the College of Arts of Social Sciences
Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School
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Radical faeries in the city must contend with changing urban policies, social shame and stigma, policing, inaccessibility, materiality, and economic survival; in the face of these discontents, urban faeries still actively choose the city as their identity and as their home. Through placemaking practices which access the imaginative and experimental spatiality and temporality of queer sacredness, this thesis testifies urban radical faeries transform dimensionally discrete spaces within the city to thrive. By delving into the lived experiences and sexo-socio-spiritual placemaking of the radical faeries of Austin and Dallas, this project maps the spatiality of collective faerie utopian imaginaries, generating constellations of ephemeral sacred spaces and their residual effects on the built environment. Further, the recent pandemic saw the first temporary closing of sanctuary land since faeriedom’s inception, and these creative placemaking strategies were further adapted to maintain community and identity during the COVID-19 pandemic through the collapse of spatial and temporal distance in accessing the virtual sacred. Understanding how faerie culture is maintained within the city, across space and time, the mundane and profane, the physical and digital, can provide insight and best practices to support urban faerie communities into the future.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A Rough Faerie Spatiohistory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Queering Ecological Space and Time</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Queering Urban Space and Time</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Construction of Space and Spaces of Construction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Natures of the City Queer</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ethics and Design</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community-based Participatory Research</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Faeing the Research</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Population and Inclusion Criteria</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviews</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Surveys</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Project Deliverables</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research Findings</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participation and Demographics</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviews</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Surveys</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Gathering</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Global Reflections of the Sanctuary</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Placemaking within the Gathering</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Deep-Rooted Ancestry and Tradition</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Distributions of Power and Labor</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faerie Sexospatialities and the Love Lounge ................................................................. 81
Spaces of Sobriety and Healing .................................................................................. 86
The City ............................................................................................................................ 89
To Be An Urban Faerie ................................................................................................. 92
The Sanctity of the City ................................................................................................. 99
Urban Faerie Placemaking .......................................................................................... 103
Sustaining Urban Faerie Community .......................................................................... 117
The Computer ................................................................................................................ 119
COVID and Crisis .......................................................................................................... 125
Virtual Placemaking and Pixelated Paganism .............................................................. 128
The Utopia ....................................................................................................................... 132

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION .......................................................................................... 136
Blessings for Urban Faerie-to-Be ................................................................................ 138
Directions for Future Research .................................................................................... 142

APPENDIX: CULTURAL DOMAIN ANALYSIS GRAPHS ........................................... 144
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................... 149
# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 4.1: Participation by Method ................................................................. 53

Table 4.2: Defining the Cultural Domains Prospected within the Freelisting Methodology ...... 62

Table 4.3: Self-Reported Location* of Survey Participants ............................................. 64

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Figure 4.1: Distribution and median of participant self-reported biological age (n = 45). ........ 54

Figure 4.2: Participation by self-reported sexual orientation (n = 46). .............................. 54

Figure 4.3: Participation by self-reported gender identity (n = 43). ........................................ 55

Figure 4.4: Participation by self-reported racial identity (n = 46). ......................................... 55
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As the world became more globalized, so did Radical Faerie culture and spaces, or faeriedom. Where there was queer urban ennui there seemed to be an urban faerie subculture not far behind, and with increased international development and the exponential growth of cities, faerie sanctuaries, separatist spaces under faerie stewardship, began to dot the maps of various continents. Even with the expansion of sanctuary spaces over decades, they do not have the capacity to sustain the current global Radical Faerie population, and not all contemporary faeries desire to live in separatist societies. Contemporary urban faerie subjectivities are a product of urban life, unable to escape it, and this project explores the variable ways urban environments shape faerie culture and behavior, experiences and memories, hopes and desire, and, in turn, the methods by which the faeries shape, mold, or transform urbanity. Faeries in the city must contend with changing urban policies, social shame and stigma, policing, inaccessibility, materiality, and economic survival; in the face of these discontents, urban faeries still actively choose the city as their identity and as their home. Thus, within large metropoles of millions, faeries need to remain connected to each other and to their shared history. Through placemaking practices which access the imaginative and experimental spatiality and temporality of queer sacredness, this thesis testifies urban radical faeries transform dimensionally discrete spaces within the city to thrive within the seemingly hostile built ecology. This study explores urban Radical Faerie space, an ephemeral zone of radical experimentation and creation, as faeries make intentional space for expression, exploration, collectivism, participatory decision-making, creativity, and imagination, pushing the boundary of property and ownership, but also unintentionally positioning themselves within larger hegemonic systems of colonialism, capitalism, and globalization. By delving into the lived
experiences and placemaking of the radical faeries of North Central Texas, this project adventures into urban faerie space, compare this space to sacred sanctuary land, probe rite and ritual to better understand urban conceptions of the sacred, and map the spatiality of collective faerie identity across the city in an assortment of constellations.

Further, this thesis claims these creative placemaking strategies were further adapted to maintain community and identity during the COVID-19 pandemic through the collapse of spatial and temporal distance in accessing the sacred. This project also provides historical documentation of faerie urban life during and immediately after a pandemic by examining the adaptations of faerie spatial culture to the previous social distancing policies. The recent pandemic saw the first temporary closing of sanctuary land since faeriedom’s inception. Community-building and purposeful social engagement is pivotal in times such as the pandemic when social distancing measures are antithetical to relational and ecospiritual faerie practices. Understanding how faerie culture is maintained within the city, not just in the present circumstance but across generations, can provide insight and best practices to support urban faerie communities into the future.

Generated from this work, a participatory project will foster community-building within Austin and Dallas and this thesis will help to further academic understanding of faeriedom and queer urban spiritual ecologies. Insights could be applied to future work within and outside of faerie culture and space, as the knowledge gained by the experiences, beliefs, and practices of the urban radical faeries could be generalized, with caution, to other queer urban communities or urban ecospiritual groups, as well as inform future metropolitan perspectives and policy. Through failure, hope, discomfort, and refusal, this research demonstrates how the radical faeries provide new ways of understanding and reimagining urban ecology through the transgressive and transformative power of sexo-socio-spiritual placemaking.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This project examines the ecospiritual placemaking process of urban radical faeries through an exploration of their spatial beliefs and behaviors. This review first grounds the reader in an apologetically brief history of the radical faeries, then draws upon the intellectual genealogies and culturally-specific knowledges present within academic research which have informed faerie ontologies and epistemologies, which frame and influence current urban faerie experiences and behavior, or which I believe will generate new insight if welcomed into this conversation. Although this chapter does not—and cannot—provide a complete history of a now global network of radical faeries or an exhaustive review of the extant relevant work, it does provide researchers with sufficient knowledge to better understand Radical Faerie culture and worldviews, identify contemporary knowledge gaps, to ethically and efficiently design a project which could privilege this knowledge, and for readers to make an informed decision on this very claim. The first section discusses the founding of the radical faeries, and some of the spatiocultural changes since. The second section of the review broadly examines the application of high-level, modern queer theory to the dimensions of space and time, as well as the phenomenological examination of the iterative and adaptive relationship involving queer folks and their physical world. This intermediate section also reviews the bulk of previous academic work exploring faeries in the ecologies of their ecospiritual, separatist spaces. The last section applies this knowledge of queer spiritual ecology to the materiality of the city by first examining the spatiocultural contexts of the built environment and then by adding queerness and stirring. This last section ends with the meager extant research exploring the relationship between urban faeries and the city.
A Rough Faerie Spatiohistory

To tell the story of the radical faeries is to begin five years earlier with a periodical called \textit{RFD}. From the imaginaries of the 1974 Midwest Gay Pride Conference, 18 white gay men from across Iowa who attended the conference were inspired to launch a periodical to connect rural gay men across the country (Morgensen 2011). \textit{RFD} is still currently running and touts itself as the “longest-running, reader-written gay quarterly,” focused initially on “country-living and…alternative lifestyles” (RFD 2020). In the beginning, the magazine explored an ideal and idyllic gay lifestyle, real and imagined, which situated queer living more proximately to nature. This representation differed significantly from the “prevailing urban sensibility” of queerness and, as a reader-written magazine, offered a sounding board for isolated gay men to speak on topics such as sexuality, politics, spirituality, and practice (Hennen 2002). Although the magazine explored rural themes, an early survey revealed almost \(\frac{3}{4}\) of their readership were urban gay men; notably, the normatively white nature of the publication was demonstrated by the lack of racial demographics (Mogensen 2011). This spatial distribution—and lack of racial distribution—indicated an appeal in urban queer life for something different.

A collective of gay men within \textit{RFD} readership published a flyer for a Spiritual Conference for Radical Fairies to be held in the summer of 1979 (Kilhefner 2010). Although different people are cited for the founding of the Radical Faeries movement depending on the storyteller’s memory and politic, Harry Hay, Mitch Walker, Don Kilhefner, are named in almost every account. Hay was a ‘movement intellectual’ who founded many social movements centered on gay men, such as the Mattachine Society, and many accounts solely credit Hay with the founding of the faeries (Henner 2002). Walker was a graduate psychology student who aspired to bring Jungian primality to ‘gay shamanism’, blending psychoanalysis, magic, and gay liberatory thought (Ibid). Hay’s
writing on ‘subject-subject consciousness,’ was rejected as ‘gobbledygook’ by RFD but still drew in Kilhefner, an L.A.-based gay activist (Henner 2002). Subject-subject consciousness—responding to the subject-object relationality of patriarchal objectification which Hay perceived pervasive in heteronormative society and relationships, and even some commodified urban gay relationships—was seen as a barrier-free interpersonal relationship between same-sex partners, where self is other, and both meet on equal grounds (Ibid). Although now believed by most to be problematically appropriated and essentialist in nature, Hay, Walker, and Kilhefner believed gay men were the natural reservoirs of these new forms of consciousness, and they desired to discuss these ideas with a larger audience; so, they sent out the call for participation for the first Radical Faerie gathering.

‘Faerie’ was a reclaiming of a pejorative word used against gay men (Bonck 2015). As described by Kilhefner, mythical faeries were seen as “magical and creative beings…that live at the edge of the village” (2010, 19). The combination of these two meanings identified gay men as spiritual kin outcast from society and the qualifier ‘Radical’ summed the countercultural, Marxist, anarchist, anticapitalist, and punk influences (Rodger 1995; Goldthorpe 1992). The call for a Radical Faerie culture was seen to be in response to the transition of the gay liberation movement from a revolutionary endeavor to an assimilationist one within its first decade (Kilhefner 2010) as well as a resistance to the “commodification, sexual objectification, and hypermasculinity that quickly developed in gay male urban enclaves,” like Tom of Finland, bathhouses, and gay leather culture (Henner 2002, 97). The call for participation called to those interested in “exploring breakthroughs in gay consciousness, sharing gay visions, and [discussing] the spiritual dimensions of gayness” (Kilhefner 2010, 18). Beyond exploring the possibilities of a gay earth-based spirituality, the call was also to probe the deeper questions of identity, community, and existence
itself. These questions must have touched a heart string with the RFD readership because many more men responded than the founders had anticipated.

Over 200 gay men attended the first Radical Faerie gathering which was held “out in nature, without the usual urban, heterosexual restraints, a place where gay men could have the maximum opportunity to be themselves” but still provided “creature comforts” such as plumbing and a kitchen (Kilhefner 2010, 18). The gathering was a separatist space “fostering effeminacy and mutual care, in playful and formal rituals celebrating drag, sexuality, pagan spirituality, or emotional communication” (Morgensen 2009, 145). In line with their antiestablishmentarianist politic, there were very few rules or limitations set for the space except mutual respect and safety. It was a space where gay men exchanged “methodologies of healing, massage, gemstones, giggles, fancy lace, history, spirituality, and sacred spaces” which made many men feel as if they were coming home to themselves, to the land, or to the faeries (Kilhefner 2010, 20). Radical Faerie culture was not reinventing the radical wheel, but in fact “borrowing from the separatist feminist sensibility” which removed them as far from mainstream society and “the distortions of the urban environment” as possible to live a spiritually, ecologically, and socially fulfilling rural lifestyle while “wearing dresses in the woods” (Bonck 2015, 1). A long lineage of mostly white queer lesbians and gay men “[rejected] racial, economic, national, or global privilege by relocating to new homes based in democratic socialism, anarchism, or counterculturalism” (Morgensen 2008, 76). With third-wave feminism and a burgeoning environmental movement, there were suddenly new possibilities and desires for a ‘Lesbian Nation’ of ‘Landdykes’ or ‘Land Lesbians’ hoping to create a better ecorelational and socially egalitarian approach than modern capitalist patriarchal systems of power (Sandilands 2001; Whitworth 2019). Other gay communities, some ecologically motivated and others socially, popped up in Tennessee, Washington, Oregon, and North Carolina
(Henner 2002). To escape the hegemonic forces of the state and the assimilationism of urban gay life, faeries’ “rural retreat [was made] necessary for realizing gay nature,” thus the faeries “invented the authenticity they desired and produced their own modern subjectivities” in faraway lands (Morgensen 2009, 144 & 155). These were imaginative sexual and political communities focusing on liberatory thought and practice, experimenting with queer spiritualisms and new forms of organizing people to each other and to the environment. For the first few years, the radical faeries used some of these sites for their annual national gatherings instead of rented private retreat centers.

Local and regional networks of faeries formed after the first gathering—primarily around urban areas where most of them lived—in order to communicate between gatherings and plan future ones (Morgensen 2009). In 1984, west coast faeries wanted to no longer rely on other queer separatist lands for fae gatherings and to purchase land to concentrate faerie culture in one place, and eventually they acquired land in Oregon previously occupied by a failed gay commune, and “by absorbing the form of rural gay collectives and inheriting their legacies,” radical faeries also inherited a queer rooted ancestry from which they could draw upon to legitimize their landownership practices and appeal to future visitors (Morgenson 2008, 75). Similarly, in Tennessee, land owned by a dissolved gay and lesbian North Carolina group was passed through and purchased by the faeries, who—in 1988—also acquired and housed RFD, which then became the official Radical Faerie publication it is today (Ibid). Faeries created formalized sacred fae space on these lands, called sanctuaries, which provided space for the cultivation of faerie culture, the experimentation of new modes of being and doing, provided a stable and free space for annual gatherings, an open-door policy for any faerie who needed help, and provided social and material capital to sustain faerie existence.
When selecting the spaces for these sanctuaries and their supportive networks, they did not follow the lesbian separatist sentiment of total isolationism, but instead chose spaces which benefits the urban network of radical faeries and other RFD readership who desired and benefited from regular retreat (Morgensen 2009). A small group of ‘resident caretakers’ would maintain the land for transient faerie visitors and prepare it for the annual gatherings, holding the memory and promise of faerie culture in place for those many faeries who ‘lived vicariously’ from the cities (Ibid). In his ethnographic work with the faeries, Morgensen saw “…urban gay men in travel along the spatial circuits of gatherings at rural sanctuaries” which “placed gay men in motion from modern to primitive and settler to Indigenous while grounding Radical Faerie culture in a mobile relationship to emplacement” (2008, 26). However, this mobility helped faeries during times of crisis.

The AIDS epidemic, concentrated mostly in urban areas in its first decade, caused a “rapid destabilization of sexual minority institutions, from families and friendship networks to bars, baths, and political groups” which resulted in subsequent “crises of identity, community, or spirituality” (Morgensen 2008, 84). This turmoil brought more radical faeries home to the sanctuary lands for safety and support. By “celebrating drag and social sex,” faeries transgressed mainstream stigmatization and medicalization while still meaningfully pushing “qualities that would appear in primary and secondary HIV prevention education,” such as emotional communication and community building (Ibid). The faeries responded to the medical and religious pathologizing of queerness by “making it the very path gay men could follow to spiritual healing” (Morgenson 2008, 87). In addition, the heart circles practiced within both the sanctuary and urban fae spaces allowed faeries to speak on their emotions, experience the grief of loss or guilt of survival, and share experiences and best practices of illness or caretaking (Ibid). And, over time, memorials for
those lost were created and maintained on faerie sanctuary land, which “focused an otherwise dispersed mobile constituency on its ties to land in ways that assured their future communion” where faeries could return time and again to mourn lost friends and reaffirm their “commitment to faerie survival” (Morgenson 2011, 144-145). While many queer separatist communities did not endure the AIDS epidemic, and many queer urban communities were decimated, the fluid mobility of Radical Faerie culture and people allowed access to two disparate but crucial spaces of connection, resource gathering, information sharing, and healing.

In the past few decades, a handful of Radical Faerie sanctuaries have appeared across the United States which host about a dozen regional or national annual faerie gatherings (Henner 2002). Internationally, Radical Faerie sanctuaries are now present on at least four continents—North America, South America, Europe, and Australia—with an itinerant annual international gathering (Whitworth 2019). RFD reaches a critical mass of urban faeries who have assembled formalized urban communities, and who mostly have private or public social media groups for organizing local or regional events, networking and collaborating, and sharing ideas, thoughts, and practices. Thus, in a globalized age, rural and urban categories are “not as stable locations, but as discursive constructs with porous boundaries that sexual minorities negotiate as conditions of their modernity” (Morgenson 2009, 143). This porosity can be seen when the previously pivotal urban/rural dichotomy is deconstructed.

Morgensen situates radical faerie “rural imaginaries as urban desires, apropos not so much to the rural sites they invoke as the to the urban constituencies from which they arise” and faerie culture “arises precisely in order to incite and address more general desires for rural authenticity among urban sexual minorities” (2009, 143). It is the yearning for something easy, simple, natural, and connected which creates the duality of faerie life. Radical Faerie urban networks were first
formed to maintain faerie culture between rural retreats, but in this undertaking, faerie culture came to be a predominantly urban phenomenon (Morgensen 2011). Faeries became those which they were trying to avoid. As stated previously, urban faeries live vicariously through the resident caretakers, living a realistic life while yearning for an idyllic imaginary, thus—physically and culturally—faeries are “in a state of perpetual transit along the spatial and temporal scales of modern sexuality which seeks lost origins for its own progress” (Morgensen 2011, 164). Thus, purporting urban faerie life is but an ‘echo’ of rural separatism, this retreat is no longer necessary, or was never necessary, for faerie culture to survive and thrive. Furthermore, some newer faeries who have only experienced urban faerie life have no desire to retreat to rural gatherings, especially not to live on sacred sanctuary land, but are instead content with the urban forms of faerie culture and life (Ibid). If Radical Faerie culture is ultimately a product of urban life and is predominantly housed within modern cities, then an exploration of urban faerie life is necessary.

Queering Ecological Space and Time

*If you want a queer monument, look around you.*

—Tim Morton, 2010

*Who are we gay people? Where do we come from, in history and in anthropology, and where have we been? What are we for?*

—Harry Hay
Radical Faeries co-founder, 1987

This section provides a brief summary of the mapping of queer modernities onto mainstream conceptions of space and time and how queer theorists are attempting to expand or reject these hegemonic frameworks. A brief discussion of theoretical engagement with queer separatist ideals and practices frames academic work mapping Radical Faerie positionality in this spatiohistory, as well as the potentialities offered when queering space and time.

Queer ethnoecology is an observation of gendered, sexed, and sexualized bodies within
cultural and physical landscapes, traversing the verdant landscape upon which queer people create worlds while deconstructing the weaponization of nature against queer folks. Queer ecologists aspired to deconstruct human-environment interactions and ethics by exploring the discursive nature of biological environment and queer subjectivities contextualized within sociopolitical and economic structures and environmental justice (Whitworth 2019). Sandilands argued sexuality is a dimension of ecological and biological power, as made clear by “strong connections between the regulation of sexuality and the social organization of nature” (2001, 5). Ecologies can be queered by employing a more sensual epistemology of human-space interactions, both in using sensory methodologies, and in being sensitive to senses of place (Rodaway 1994). The interactions and senses of a place can either result in attachment to place and belonging or a feeling of unrootedness, placelessness, or loneliness (Ibid). A community can be attached to a place which is physical, spiritual, historical, or futuristic, a being-at-home or coming-home feeling from a sense of belonging or a claim to a rooted ancestry (Kyle & Chick 2007). Understanding place not as material and rooted, but as a collection of processes, flows, and affect, a space where things exist and happen rather than fixed categories of space and time, can open of new potential (Thrift 2008). Queerness can be hard to describe, and this ambiguity transgresses grand narratives and universalisms of place and being (Ibid). Everyday environmental experiences, emotions, and interactions influence communities, and shared conditions lead to a ‘public feeling,’ a collective representation which may reveal underlying tensions or aspirations (Stewart 2017). By resisting, transforming, and refusing normative ways of living and perceiving our environments, queered spaces can demonstrate other modes of being and becoming.

Cultures contemplate the mysteries of the outside world through magic, witchcraft, spirituality, and religion. By creating shared meaning and collective representation of this
meaning, such as language, symbology, science, and faith, people connect across space and time and find deeper meaning and purpose (Durkheim 2001). In The Sacred and the Profane, Eliade explored how natural phenomena, ritual, or myth can transform a space (1959). By breaking through the profane, and constructing a divergent space and time, ecospiritual peoples can experience the inherent power of the natural sacred, thereby discovering meaning and orienting shared purpose (Ibid). The sacred is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness and experience and thus a profound aspect of human ecology, as the borders between the physical and metaphysical are perceivedly fluid and porous, shaping perceptions of and ethics for nature (Ibid).

Ritual behavior and formalized rituals define life and meaning, taking us through life stages to death, strengthening community bonds, and localizing the community on the land (Turner 1969). These sacred spaces of liminality allow queer folks to shed normative roles and statuses to connect on more equitable standing in order to foster social connection, relieve social tension, and allow for collective healing (Ibid). Spiritual leaders mediate meaning-making and connect to worlds beyond, and in doing so help people better understand themselves.

Through the exploration of queer ecospiritualities and the sacred natural, queer academics can transcend the profanity of scientific epistemes dominating ecological discourse. Moving beyond the functional role or instrumental value of ritual, Bell argued rituals are not just reflexive instruments but constitutive realities and spaces themselves, as demonstrated in the role of the body in ritual ‘redemptive hegemony,’ exhibiting transformational potential whilst perpetuating historic cultural values and norms (2009). It becomes necessary to understand how the body is gendered or raced or sexualized in the formation of modern natural subjectivities through performative ecospiritual ritualization (Ibid). Queer sacred space is a site for seeking authenticity and spiritual exploration. In detailing the history of Christianity and rise of patriarchal capitalism,
Reuther explains men no longer aligned themselves with the femininity of Pagan nature but the masculinity of the Judeo-Christian God, granting themselves dominion over the natural world and all others within it, providing the papal patriarchal system as a prime example (1975). Queer ecospirituality has attempted to return to a romantic and sublime way of understanding the world, a queer spiritual approach to connecting with their environment while resisting heteronormative religious narratives (Hennen 2004). In *A Queer Spirit Pathway*, Rodgers discussed the ontological framework of queer ecospirituality, “Earth is perceived as part of each and every individual…Only through respect for, and healing of the earth can a sustainable future be envisaged” (1995, 36). A queer reverence for the natural world allows queer folks to attain liberation of self, bridging the temporal and the eternal while finding solace in the haven of nature (Boff 1995). The radical faeries created an original ecospiritual set of beliefs and rituals in pursuit of this liberatory potential.

Savastano claimed the religious exile of queer people creates a ‘spiritual diaspora,’ pushing them to rediscover their sacredness while also granting them creativity and resourcefulness in their spirituality; thus, queer men “forge a diverse array of spiritual practices, reinterpret or invent alternative sacred myths, produce their own mystical writings” (2007, 9). In what he terms ‘the holy art,’ Savastano built on the work of Levi-Strauss in describing the Radical Faerie process of bricolage: marginalized queer folks, in an attempt to find divinity and community while further constrained in their capacity and creativity by systemic inequality, represent themselves not with new ideas and imaginations, but in curating a menagerie from existing and available elements (2007). Put more concisely, “bricolage is the process of accumulating, organizing, and integrating various idioms into a coherent whole as an act of religious devotion” (Savastano 2007). In a moment of crisis or great need, people will pull from the resources or the knowledge that they have and rearrange it to find meaning, purpose, community, belonging. Here faeries are positioned
within systems of cultural appropriation and exploitation and cultural extraction in a neocolonial
and settler colonial context (Morgensen 2011). In jest, these spiritualities are sometimes called
‘cafeteria religions’ because you pick-and-choose as you go (Ibid), but most faeries believe the
process is imbued with more intention and creativity than this implies.

Faeries accesses queer essentialism and spirituality through native-inspired third gendered
ideals (Rodgers 1995). As Kilhefner remembers, “We were not defined as a sexual orientation but
as a ‘third sex’ that played a distinctive social role as shaman or spiritual medium” (2010, 27).
Before these cacophonic cultural elements can be curated into a cohesive ancestry and worldview,
they must first be stripped of their original cultural context to achieve “…a kind of cosmic
cosmopolitanism…not to forsake all religious traditions but rather to draw upon those aspects of
tradition that one finds helpful or meaningful” (Savastano 2007, 12). Cosmic cosmopolitanism is
a transitory state, not conversion but state of in-betweenness or multiplicity, which defines a new
generic queer panspirituality, an ultimate postmodern non-denominationalism which
simultaneously removes itself from the profanity of world cultures and draws inspiration and
practice from them. Whitworth comments on the fluid, adaptive spirituality of the radical faeries
(2019), while Morgensen discussed his shock by the flagrant audacity and efficiency of the faeries
to engulf and adapt various global cultural beliefs and practices, and noted how specific narratives
would change to be ‘racially appropriate’ but all of them share a common panspiritual global
indigenous narrative (2009). Faeries formed their cultural and spiritual beliefs to be able to access
the empowerment and purpose of divinity housed within queer spaces and times.

Theoretical work into the temporality and spatiality of queerness is a dauntless leap into a
the uncharted. Queerness can look to the past to challenge dominant narratives and critique
historical trajectories, demonstrating the past is not an immutable story but can be remade and
reclaimed (Muñoz 2009). In the present, there exists an expansive work for queer folks to claim their space, defying geographic borders, creating a flamboyant landscape redesigned with the porosity, fluidity, and superimpositions of human culture (Rodaway 1994). Investigating queer phenomenology, Ahmed discussed the interaction between space, personhood, and materiality in which queer subjectivities are shaped by experiences of the past, present interactions between body and environment, and desires for the future (2006). Queerness exists in liminal spaces between categorizations, between expectations, and between dominations (Halberstam 2005). This unbelonging challenges normativity, blurring fixed boundaries through demonstrated multiplicity. Liminality is not a space of vague, ambivalent incertitude, but a locus of transmutation and possibility (Ahmed 2006). Queerness emerges from these uncanny spaces with new subjectivities, creating relational potential beyond what can be achieved in the outside world, reaching expanses beyond and behind and between. A queered sense of place introduced “hybridity, mobility, artifice, and performativity” (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010, 66). Places can be understood through flexible and ephemeral experiences and affect, thus can be understood as “passings…always contingent and always in the process of becoming” (Knopp 2004, 129). However, systemic marginalization can lead to a feeling of placelessness (Ibid). A queer sense of place unroots locality by deconstructing its familiarity and normativity, to unlock its potential as a place of resistance by first addressing its ‘place-ness’ in structures of dominance and extraction (Ibid). Queerness thus has an affinity for “placelessness and movement,” finding comfort in displacement for the security of anonymity and the cosmopolitanism of transience (Knopp 2004, 129). For some, queer displacement can be tragic while it can be empowering for others. Hence, queer placelessness exists as both a state of being and as practice, a mode of exerting ‘embodied agency’ (Ibid). It warrants, then, an exploration into an ecological practice and ethic not founded on emplacement
and deep histories, or even a deep reverence for the Earth, but (un)grounded in the complexity of modern queer subjectivities.

The incorporation of heteronormative and cisnormative values and customs into policy, social systems, and the built environment, excluded queer people (Warner 1991). In the face of the violence and power historically weaponized against queer folks, there was a retaliatory turn to the antisocial, calling for the dismissal of shame and the refusal of likeability and challenging the prevailing assumption assimilation was the exclusive or superior path to achieving the good life, going as far as to question the validity of acceptability itself (Jagose 1996). Berlant examined the discontents of attempted attachment, identifying the suffocating nature of normativity which stifles queer potentials (1998). Additionally, the freedom of the antisocial frame encourages queer scholars to theorize the marginal spaces and narratives of queer existence which transgress or ignore cultural norms. Halberstam’s notion of the queer art of failure pushes for failure not as an outcome, but as a practice, and a practice at which queer people are already skilled (2011). Failure can be utilized as a rebellious tool to resist cultural norms and unearth transformative potentials of alternative modes of being and doing (Ibid). Bersani examined the liberating potentiality of detachment and refusal (2010). By examining the edges and limits of queerness, and encouraging nonconformity and provocation in the periphery, queer theory can encompass a more diverse and nuanced kaleidoscope of queer subjectivities, thus potentially disrupting the normative ethics of larger discourses.

Faeriedom was created by simultaneous desires to escape mainstream society and to seek new ways of being. Hennen purported the faeries were attempting to escape the commodification, objectification, and masculinization of 1970’s urban queer culture (2004). Kilhefner described the new post-Stonewall queer urban subjectivities as a replace of the “liberation consciousness, in
which one claims or takes one’s freedom by any means necessary...[with] an emancipation consciousness, in which you petition your oppressor to free you through guilt trips, fundraising, and legal reform” (2010, 17). These demonstrate an early Radical Faerie sentiment against neoliberal cooptation, identity-based activism, and the nonprofit industrial complex, as well as an urban queer purposelessness, which can be seen in their rejection of urban masculinity for ecospiritual third-gender ideals (Ibid). This notion of having to compromise, negotiate, or adapt in order to identify with mainstream religions can leave queer folks in in-between spaces of belonging and identity (Savastano 2007). Put too simply, queers chose faeriedom for a myriad of reasons, ranging from escaping the city and communing with nature, seeking spiritual rebirth and healing, or seeking sex (Hennen 2004). Other gay men were searching for deeper meaning, ancestry, and queer heritage, which was found within the power of myth and totem. ‘Faerie’ was, of course, a reclamation of the derogatory name used for quite some time to harass queer folks, and a connection to being both sacred and exiled (Bonck 2015), while ‘Radical’ was believed to be a hint at countercultural sentiment (Kilhefner 2010). Jean Genet described fairies as “a pale and motley race that flowers in the minds of decent folk. Never will they be entitled to broad daylight, to real sun. But remote in these limbos, they cause curious disasters which are harbingers of new beauty” (qtd. Hennen 2004, 500). The founding faeries felt they needed to remove themselves from the sunlight to find their spiritual, catalytic potential.

By tapping into a long queer history of separatism, the radical faeries were able to create a queer space of liberation and love. Grieve lamented, “The more the world has become disenchanted and institutionalized, the more people seek shelter in shared emotions and camaraderie…often imagined as a return to a traditional cooperative stable community of the past” (1995, 102). Knopp discussed how queer ‘quest for identity’ can occur at the collective level
through withdrawal from mainstream society and reimplantation in a new land, through which the faeries were able to find belonging (2004). Although anti-identitarian, faeries found belonging and identity within the essence of the faerie spirit itself, and affinity with those with whom it is shared. Hennen quipped the “idea of ‘a life in exile’ resonates with faerie essentialism,” by providing legitimization of their speciality through their societal rejection (2004). The faeries realize this belonging through the materiality of sanctuary land achieved by an assertion of autonomy and sovereignty; however, while a separatist space and culture permitted the faeries retreat, it by no means entrapped them on sanctuary land. Morgensen discusses how sanctuaries are spaces of establishment and migration, “…no matter how much those sites resemble settlements, they present not ends of the road but sites of transit…sanctuary lands accrete memories from past gatherings of radical faeries traversing the spatial and temporal scales of gay nature…Sanctuaries thus can be understood to perform an emplaced practice of mobility” (2008, 84). Hasbrouck’s work supported this claim as he was not able to find any clear hierarchy between caretaker and traveler, a “community in a continual state of flux, with permeable borders and many transfused boundaries” (2000, 6). Thus, sanctuaries were nodes on a Radical Faerie network, connecting with surrounding rural and urban faerie communities (Morgensen 2011). Soderling purports the queer separatist space create a ‘presentness’ and cyclical temporality which reject straight time, and argues these spaces are neither an Edelman’s rejection of the future (2004) or a Muñoz’s perpetual yearning (2009), but was rather “a nonlinear temporality, a utopian sensibility in the current moment (2016, 339). The queer space and time of the sanctuary allows faeriedom to simultaneously be and become, mindful presence and hopeful utopianism through radically queer imagination.
The first gathering a faerie attends is usually a transformative and affirming experience. Coming home to faeriedom is a “kind of return to a familiar place from which they had been exiled” (Hennen 2004, 509). Queer folks “reject racial, economic, national, or global privilege by relocating to new homes based in democratic socialism, anarchism, or counterculturalism…spaces coded as communal, anti-authoritarian, or premodern” (Morgensen 2008). This urban queer desire for something different—for belonging—is strong enough to pull hundreds of people out of the city each year to gatherings. These retreats can traditionally be planned by sanctuary caretakers and hosted on sanctuary land, drawing in international crowds, or planned by urban faeries and hosted outside the city, typically at private campgrounds or spiritual centers and drawing from regional or national constituencies (Ibid). Gatherings are hosted closer to the city and shortened to a weekend so urban faeries without access to sanctuaries could still “wear dresses in the woods” (Bonck 2015, n.p.). Gatherings are spaces for the trading of knowledge and networking (Rodgers 1995). ‘Playbor’ (play + labor) is common during gatherings, either to temporarily maintain the rented space and feed the people, or to sustain sanctuaries which depend on urban faeries to maintain the land as much as urban communities depend on the sanctuaries to sustain the culture and faith (Morgensen 2008). While attending a gathering “household chores are interpreted as contributions to the community, and ‘heart circles’ a demonstration of emotional commitment to others in the group” (Hasbrouck 2000, 37). The circle is a neo-pagan formation, symbolizing equity and egalitarianism, and assembling a group into this sacred relational geometry through the practice of heartcircle signifies unity, commitment, and co-creation (Savastano 2007). Heartcircles “center emotional speech, deep listening, and collective conversation” which can last a few hours to a good portion of the day, “so long as speakers carried the group’s attention until an uncontested suggestion to close” (Morgensen 2008). From catharsis and healing to politics and best practices,
the circle provides a multipurpose method for discussing, learning, and decision-making. Kilhefner observed, “It was as if a cone of power had been formed around the gathering, hermetically sealing us together, as we were all gently but powerfully being made anew” (2010, 20). By tapping into a lineage of queer spatiocultural separatism, faeries are able to create new dimensions of modernity and queer subjectivity.

While separatist faerie spaces are astounding, faeries must flatten nature and rurality to achieve distance from modernity, where the modernization of these spaces is ignored to access the power of terra nullius (Morgensen 2009). This reductionism fails to acknowledge the histories of the land upon which the sanctuaries were built and at which the gatherings are hosted. Queer settler colonialism is the appropriation of Native logics and erasure of Native identities and narrative in the formation of queer identities and spaces (Morgensen 2011). Native peoples were dispossessed of their property, their land, their culture, and their lives for European invaders to profit in the Americas. Morgensen purported “radical fairies invite travelers to gatherings and sanctuaries to arrive at home--despite neither originating nor remaining at these sites--by finding in rural spaces and tales of indigeneity as self-acceptance and collective nature” (2008, 69). Whitworth found there existed a faerie consciousness regarding their liminal place within settler society as simultaneous victimizer and victim, as faeries often acknowledge some of their beliefs and rituals are inspired from Native peoples and Amerindian cultures, but it is often in the guise of appreciation, admiration, and love (2019). While they are creating a sacred queer space, faeries accomplish this endeavor through emplacement on stolen Native land and using parcels of stolen culture. Pape observed, “by contributing to colonial logics and actions the fairies contribute to the very forces of the nation state that originally produced the failed queer citizen” (2013, 114). However, these sacred spaces are essential to generating social change and better queer futures.
Moving beyond contemporary prescriptions of cisheteronormativity, queer futurity envisions wide-reaching possibilities which would not have been otherwise possible. Halberstam deconstructed normative beliefs regarding linear, ‘straight’ time in *A Queer Time & Place* and discussed queer transgression of time and space across life stages, as well as in the everyday (2005). In *No Future*, Edelman critiqued the reproductive futurism ubiquitous in world cultures, which beholdens queerness to obligatory systems of procreation and biological ancestry (2004). Edelman yearned for a world not confined by organic perseverance strategies and hollow concerns for unborn children and calls for a wholesale rejection of queer futurity (Ibid). Reclaiming queer futurity in *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz explored the transformative potential of utopianist thinking with queer subjects, where performance and community create futuristic hope and possibility in and for the present (2009). Muñoz discussed queerness as the proverbial carrot hanging from a stick, always something to strive toward but infinitely perpetual and unattainable (Ibid). This examination of conation–or futuristic-oriented affect–is the expressed imagination of the body.

Queering a universal and linear space and time expanses across nonlinear temporalities and infinite timelines, away from predictability or even stability, to refract the full spectrum of queer possibilities. The sanctuary space arose from Radical Faerie utopianist epistemologies and ethics, and daily life is often actively shaped by these ideals through the practice of envisioning, creating a space of utopian imaginary (Hasbrouck 2000). Hasbrouck believed imaginings to be ‘never fully defined,’ always coming ‘into focus’ (Ibid, 24). This parallels Muñoz’s unattainable utopian queerness, but sanctuaries are distinct sites situated in queer separatist space and time devoted to the present materialization of utopia (2009). These are the spaces utopia is believed to exist physically and the site where utopia should exist morally, while simultaneously a laboratory for utopic experimentation to advance ever-nearer to this goal (Hasbrouck 2000). This is to say, faeries
do not believe sanctuary space and society is perfect; however, the caretakers of the sanctuary are tillers of the land and bearers of the ideal manifestation of faerie culture, and urban faeries live vicariously through them (Morgensen 2009). Further, utopia is not believed to be a threshold a community unlocks, it is the direction, the degrees of freedom from constraint, and--as the faeries are quite process driven—utopia is experimentation, itself. For example, Brown (2009) explored the diverse queer ‘economic imaginaries’ reflecting faerie utopian aspirations for egalitarian community which produced alternative economic models challenging dominant capitalist ethic, and Seraphin (2020) examined queer anarchoprimitivist communities, including the faeries, which formed new utopian ideals away from modernism, urbanization, and civilization. However, it can be tricky translating utopian imaginaries into everyday realities, and tensions arise between individual and collective rights (Whitworth 2019). But to be amongst kin who are stiving for a better world, shedding normativity and fervently celebrating life, is the ultimate utopia for some.

Relationally, materially, and spiritually, queer folks have the ability to alter their landscape, carving out space for themselves and pushing back against normative spatiocultures. Through the sanctification of discrete spaces, faeries access the divinity of nature and of humanity to temporarily transform ecological pockets for their survival. Within the separatist sanctuary land and gathering spaces, faeries create utopian imaginaries which generate new forms of being and doing, new potentiality which is diffused across the environment. Past, present, and future are reimagined, reshaping the fabric of existence, allowing pockets of in-betweenness to shape current and forthcoming queer existence. Partly intention and mostly luck, faeries can create new spatiocultural possibilities, leading to better queer ecofutures. As demonstrated in this section, the catalytic promise of faerie separatism has been deeply explored since their inception, but few researchers have explored the translation of this spatial and cultural practice into the urban context.
Wilderness, separatism, and sanctuary are viewed as the ideal setting for faerie space and placemaking; however, most faeries live predominantly within urbanity. This project compares the promise of the separate with the reality of the assimilate, and for the first time during the COVID pandemic, the promise of the virtual. Positioning this ecoqueer menagerie within local and global, human and nonhuman, temporal and spatial contexts, faeriedom is a global mosaic. In order to connect past research on faerie ecological imaginaries to the current project, the next section explores the application of the above foundational work to the materiality of the city and sociality of urban queerness, and also summarizing the sparse work done to explore the process of translating faerie placemaking within this new context.

Queering Urban Space and Time

Before reviewing some of the existing academic work deconstructing the historical and contemporary relationships between queer folks and the city, and the research completed to discover where urban radical faeries fall into this, the nature of city as a material and social landscape is discussed. Firstly, an examination of the special considerations when living within a manufactured environment; then, a review of contemporary political, economic, and social patterns which hold true for most Western cities and shape urban life as much as the physical landscape. Lastly, research regarding modern queer urban subjectivities is conferred, as well as the scant considerations of urban faerie communities.

The Construction of Space and Spaces of Construction

**Relationships occur between places and people, and if we can delve deep enough into our selves and places, we can experience a profound sense not only of the place, and the interactions, and the people, but also of ourselves.**

– Karen Lambert (2017)

Across western histories, cities have been intermittently valued as good for humanity, the
perfect place for the superimposition of the physical and the social, the site of both leisure and specialization, and equally frequently as cysts of moral and environmental degradation (King 2000; Gunn 1998). Fox argued, “the non-rational, non-sentient, non-living, non-self-organizing, non-self-renewing built environment is not generally thought of as being of moral consequence in its own right” (2000, n.p.). The spatial realities of the city are constructed by past intentionality through valuation, planning, and building, and these previous decisions can support or cause tension with current spatial desires and practices, often leading to a feeling of alienation or placelessness shared by current urbanites (Lefebvre 1991). The conception of urban spaces is economically motivated, the lowest standard which met past objectives and constraints (read: cheapest and fastest), or as mediocre but functional solutions to antiquated problems. The built environment is the outcome of countless decisions and valuations, from maintaining household lawns to planning urban parks and recreational spaces, and people collectively demonstrate what deserves consideration and which futures they desire (King 2000). By understanding the directionality and momentum of the exhibitive judgment, we unlock “new relations and new possibilities inherent in it” (Ibid, 119). Furthermore, as technologies advance, a physical landscape is increasingly durable, and these judgements have resounding effects across exponentially increasing lengths of time. The landscape can support future endeavors or constrain them, and building to meet current needs without the proper insight may hinder the ability to meet future needs.

According to Harvey, the built environment has the potential to disconnect humanity from nature and from community, if not managed properly (1975). A person’s environment influences their worldview, and the disconnection of humanity from nature by the built environment may prevent us from forming these deep roots in order to gain a more ecologically-oriented perspective,
potentially leading to a pro-social life which extends beyond humanity (Gunn 1998). The alienating nature of cities from the wild is exacerbated by the pushing of nature ever further away by urban growth and sprawl (Palmer 2003). To distinguish between wilderness and human creation appears an easy task until the gradient of intentional and unintentional human consequences of the built environment is considered; this becomes additionally complicated when physical borders compete with boundaries of the sociocultural, the metaphysical, and the sacred. King pushed for more work to be done in understanding these ‘marginal’ or ‘transitional’ regions between the urban and rural (2000, 128). How the built environment is defined in relation to nature and in relation to normalcy determines life within it.

Within the built environment, spaces exist which lack resonance, which seem inauthentic and ‘could be anywhere’ (Turner & Turner 2006, 215). Physical spaces which seem indifferent to our presence, or are not connected to surrounding space, culture, or people, make it difficult to form a sense of place (Ibid). In 1849, John Ruskin surveyed, “there is not a building that I know of, lately raised, wherein it is not sufficiently evident that neither the architect nor builder has done his best. It is the especial character of modern work” (qtd. in Taylor 2000, n.p.). Although nearly 200 years ago, Ruskin’s sentiment still rings true today. Placelessness subverts identity, strands us between past and present, negating potential for tactile presence and potentially making it harder to create history in places which are not memorable (Ibid). Spaces themselves can be placeless or a ‘non-place,’ as Augé coined, if they are flat, indeterminate, inert, or clinical (Turner & Turner 2006). These homogenized spaces of consumption are becoming increasingly common within the realm of increased local development by international companies, and even pervade into cultural thought, leading to the greyification of design to prevent loss of potential re-sell value (Ujang & Zakariya 2015). Standardization and uniformity affect not only the quality and resilience of the
physical landscape, but the communal sense of place as well (Ibid). Through the loss of community place and identity, built impotent spaces can further alienate people from a sense of belonging and community with the city, the people, and the land, which can be further exacerbated by local culture and policy.

A slow transition into late capitalism within the globalized financescape started a half a century ago, recognized by increased privatization, an emphasis on global free trade, austere tax arrangements, and attrition of social welfare programs (Chatterjee 2014). These pro-capital and pro-business measures destabilized the foundational fiscal systems of cities around the world by reducing their revenue streams while opening up larger global markets of competition (Harvey 1989). Within this new paradigm, municipal governments engage in capitalist exploits to ensure the stability of their revenue, whether through policies which promote profitability, infrastructure which ensures efficiency, financing through public loans or subsidies, or by reducing constraints and regulations on free market processes (Chatterjee 2014). In this new world, cities needed to themselves become entrepreneurs and capitalists, reinventing themselves as niche in a global market to compete for global flows of capital, what Harvey terms civic boosterism (1989).

Economic systems and values shape the built environment, influencing power, resource distribution, and opportunity. For example, the privatization and securitization of land affects mobility and access of the people, and concurrent tax cuts causes attrition of welfare programs limits access to social services and worsens infrastructure (Davis 2006). The accumulation of wealth by a few and dispossession by the populous create starker class disparities which are mapped and constructed onto the physical landscape (Brenner & Theodore 2002). Modern urban policies aligning with market interests over the people, through the relentless pursuit of profit, begin to materialize sociospatial hierarchies within a landscape of power.
Policies decided through the values of market-driven efficiency have led to a reduction in government oversight and consequent privatization of services and spaces. Profit-driven entities controlling vital resources and services can exacerbate inequality by limiting access to essential services and urban spaces (Harvey 2005). Increased privatization, especially by larger corporations, can lead to influx of capital in an area, spurring or accelerating gentrification (Smith 2005). By using the narrative of efficiency and cost-reduction, which cloaks the realities of privilege and access, urban administrators can afford to be more efficient and cost effective by not solving the entire problem or serving all of the people. Despite this rhetoric, privatization of infrastructure, such as toll roads or utilities, has been shown to defer cost directly to marginalized communities and corrode infrastructure and services (Davis 2006). In addition to increased privatization, administrators of both public and private urban spaces are increasingly securitizing them. Masked by concerns of security and desired lifestyle, but insidiously a way to protect social class hierarchies and maintain territorial homogeneity, a cultural desire for more controlled environments and for an exclusive community has led to the severing and surveilling of urbanity (Low 2003). If one can no longer delineate tribe by land or appearance, one can by wall, gate, or barbed wire. Fortification of the urban environment preserves a sense of the good life in this ever-changing, post-modern ecology.

Cities are the physically-manifested landscape of capitalism; thus, they are the sites of continuous construction, destruction, and reconstruction (Harvey 1989). Built environments are one of the predominant generators of environmental degradation (Talbot & Magnoli 2000). Marcus and Detwyler wrote, “Cities are nodes of man’s greatest impact on nature, the places where he has most altered the essential resources of land, air, organisms, and water. The city is the quintessence of man’s capacity to inaugurate and control changes in his habitat” (1972, 3). While rural areas are
not blameless, resource extraction, pollution, and climate change are all exacerbated by the physical and social spaces, poor land use, and the open and linear systems within the built environment. Our cities are not a “pure expression of human values and visions but [are] rather the product of a tangled web of natural, social, and technological dynamics” (Kirkman 2010, 4). Because the built environment “is both the result of human choices and the context of most human activity” the social problems of the city are externalized as environmental problems of the world (Hain 2016, 149). A two-fold ethic of creation and maintenance is required to achieve sustainability. King demonstrated an adaptive ethic when he implored, “the built environment should show respect for its users, both contemporary and future” (2000, 130). Paradoxically, the city is both ‘culprit’ and ‘victim,’ where the most ecological atrocities are forged, but also as the cite of greatest potentiality and possibility for change (Talbot and Magnoli 2000). The method by which cities choose to utilize this possibility is variable and questionable, as ecomodernization and urban greenification initiatives often lead to increased gentrification (Cugurullo 2016).

Gentrification is a mix of contemporary frontier mentalities which dehumanize the marginalized while attempting to exert normative social control on physical space (Smith 2005). Influx of investment in an area, leading to aesthetic and structural improvement, permits elites to raise prices to maximize profit without social outcry, and those who cannot afford these increases are pushed out, while all who can afford it flood in (Ibid). This influx of new residents can change the social fabric of an area, often producing luxury condominiums juxtaposed with urban slums. Thus, a physical change in the landscape is always paired with a proportional social change which could potentially disrupt local place meaning, causing a ‘disintegration’ of community identity (Ujang & Zakariya 2015). Gentrification is ceaseless, thus marginalized communities are periodically displaced to the periphery when their land is newly desirable by the elite (Ibid).
Together, these processes commodify the ever-changing nature of the urban landscape and weaponize this process against disenfranchised communities.

Appadurai described global flows of economics, technology, language, and culture (1996). Global cities are nodes in this network, materializing these flows in the built environment (Sassen 2002). These cities become sites for multinational cooperations, technological and communications networks, diverse populations, and large airports (Ibid). Global forces work on the local urban ecology, as the city is often viewed as the epicenter of cosmopolitan society (Ibid). Tsing discussed the friction present within these global flows, especially at sites of localization, adaptation, negotiation, and resistance (2005). This friction comes from the tensions of glocalization, simultaneous ‘universalizing’ and ‘particularizing’ motivations (Robertson 1995). Entanglements of motivations, interacting with the global flows on various scales concurrently, can lead to an integration of global cultural and economic ideologies and practices within local contexts, or a globalizing of local subjectivities. Local communities wield some agency in reinterpreting or reimagining global trends which produces cultural hybridization and geographic mosaicism (Tsing 2005). However, local resources are often extracted for commodification on the global marketplace, generating economic gain which rarely trickles down (Harvey 1989).

Quick and easy top-down placemaking endeavors created by developers and administrators attempt to create “‘vibrant communities,’ ‘liveable neighborhoods,’ and ‘distinctive precincts’” from unworthy areas stricken by perceived blight (Foth 2017, n.p.). If publicly funded, these efforts are usually targeted at ‘at-risk’ or ‘of-opportunity’ communities, focusing on attracting private investment through purification, beautification, and providing community resources with little focus on community desires or addressing systemic problems (Toolis 2017). While this may generate economic opportunity for communities, it also contributes to increased gentrification in
these areas (Ibid). As Wortham-Galvin notes, place then becomes an institutional method to convey value, (de)valuation of the local communities through directing investment flow and (de)valuation of these spaces by deciding which deserves story (2008). If privately funded, these projects are typically centered around bringing rooted culture, at least those which are tasteful and marketable, to the global tourist marketplace, trading localized exploitation of urban residents through a commodification of their culture for global investment (Harvey 1989). Within the postmodern symbolic economy, authenticity itself is commodified, here the authentic culture of the locally peripheralized people (Zukin 1995). Usually the more marginal, hidden, rare, or rooted the people and culture are, the more niche and valuable they will be on the global marketplace (Ibid). Those in power generate the false scarcity through systemic oppression and historic erasure and then profit on selling the city as a safe space for, only place you’ll find, or authentic home of a culture and people, and the cycle becomes complete as boosterism draws in global investment and tourism, and profit generated from this machine fuels further efforts to revitalize the city for more marketable potential (Ibid). Additionally, co-opting diversity rhetoric can depoliticize and depower marginal struggles, and commodify rather than address injustices (Ibid). Moreover, meritocratic rhetoric ignores durable structural and social barriers encountered by disenfranchised people.

Understanding contemporary social, economic, and political forces which materially shape the built environment is necessary to contextualize modern urban faerie placemaking. Within the built environment, the material landscape is shaped by past, present, and future normative spatiocultural genealogies, and the durability of the concrete landscape ensures the material never truly catches up to the social in the race for progress. Thus, urban faeries must navigate and negotiate the co-constitutive social, physical, and spiritual landscapes of the city. Formal policies
and informal social control mechanisms, cultural trends and political tides all influence the ability and desire of faeries to call the urban home. Spatiocultural and historical context provided in this subsection lays the urban foundation for the review of a ridiculously small portion of the extant queer urban ecological research comparing global cities and local communities, as well as the few academic glimpses into urban faerie life which exist.

Natures of the City Queer

*Can home be portable, accessible wherever comrades assemble, yet still linked profoundly to one particular site? Can that one site be the source of innumerable analogous places and times where future home may be found, all of which may be experienced as home on arrival?*  

Due to discrimination and abandonment queer folks often must migrate to discover affirmation, community, and belonging. Queer diasporas radiate from spaces of devastating policy, political conflict, or violence, journeying to spaces imagined safer, like larger cosmopolitan cities (Knopp 2004). In more positive experiences, queer folks can create regional, national, transnational systems of queer kinship and support through this migration, which may increase resilience, agency, and creativity (Ibid). Also, however, frequently queer folks must grieve the lost attachment to place and people, while potentially forcing new attachment to place and rebuilding of new support networks; thus, cumulative systemic violences can lead to queer ambivalence to place, an unsettling sense of being unmoored, running from something, or always ready to move again (Ibid). Within the placelessness of the built environment, gentrifying and diluting gayborhoods, and co-optation and exploitation of queer culture, place-bound identities have become more rather than less important in a world of ‘diminishing spatial barriers’ (Harvey 1993). Queer folks feel alienation in both the strange and the familiar, and queer desires for connection, belonging, and identity sets folks on a ‘quest for meaning’ and community (Knopp 2004). This
can lead to a queer comfort in mobility and placelessness, hopping around global cities and global queer communities—because they are perceivedly similar—and an ultimate postmodern world of unrootedness, or the opposite effect of motivating a reclamation of space and rootedness, arriving upon niche urban queer subcultural communities based on affinity (Ibid). Queer subcultural groups support nuanced urban queer subjectivities beyond the capacity of the mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces and generalized queer community, reinforcing sense of place through collective expression, exploration, and belonging.

The realization of faerie culture is seen to be, by faerie and researcher alike, in the separatist spaces described thus far. This is why much of the research conducted thus far regarding the faeries, and much of the faerie literature itself, focuses on separatist utopianist spaces and practices. Morgensen noted the radical faeries perform a “relational negotiation of rural and urban emplacement” in which “pastoralist efforts to escape modern life invested the authenticity they desired and produced their own modern subjectivities” (2009, 155). By exploring the significance of nature/unnatural, rural/urban, primitive/modern within faerie ontologies, Morgensen focused on the transitory and mobile nature of faeriedom across these divides in order to find belonging and purpose (Ibid). Sandilands pointed to the prevalence of these dichotomies within most queer subjectivities when she purports “most people would have trouble picturing a rural drag queen” (2001, 2). However, Morgensen argued, while hardly any researchers have examined the urban half of faerie cultural production, imaginaries exist in both rural and urban spaces, co-creating modern faeriedom (2009). Urban faerie subjectivities, although thought to be peripheral and less ideal, are by sheer quantity the normative materialization of faerie culture. The queer separatist spaces offered home, utopia, and transformation, and often faeries come away from a gathering with renewed energies, both spiritually and motivationally, and reintegrate back into the urban
ecology attempting to recreate the power of the gathering within the city, an attempt to sustain the same level of empowerment and transformative potential of separatist spaces (Morgensen 2009). In an ever more globalizing, more urbanizing world, cultural hybridity and plurality are becoming more commonplace (Dear and Flusty 2005). While the urban faeries across the globe may endeavor to translate and transplant the magic of the gathering, they instead curate universal, panspiritual faerie ideals and practices with local queer and non-queer culture and create a mosaic of distinct geographically and culturally contextualized urban communities.

The city has historically been understood as the landscape where queer desires can or should be located. The natural home for queerness is believed to be in the unnatural environment of the city (Sandilands 2001). However, construction of space can shape the formations of urban queerness, as cultural norms, values, and desires are expressed through the built environment, thus, cisnormative, heteronormative, and even homonormative modes of constructing space constrain urban queer possibilities. Additionally, space influences queer norms, morals, and behaviors, creating urban queer subjectivities distinct from their rural counterparts. As discussed, Soderling believes rural queer communities bring futurity to the present, while Edelman’s death drive is a particularly urban phenomenon in response to the oppressive social and physical contexts of modern cities (2016). Formal recognition of queer identities and bodies determines access to securitized spaces and social support systems. While there may be more barriers to urban faerie self-realization, this emplacement within the city provides faerie communities with opportunities and resources they could not otherwise access, such as “diversity, pluralism, vibrancy, complication, and cosmopolitanism” (Gambone 2010, n.p.). Morgensen observed both strengthening of local faerie communities through mutual support and national faerie networks through friendship and travel (2009). According to Hennen, faeries “exist at the margins of the
margins,” ostracized in mainstream American and mainstream queer cultures (2004, 501). Thus, urban faeries must be in constant negotiation of self and community and establish themselves in the landscape through affirming space and symbolic departures rather than physical retreat.

In the 20th century, up until the Stonewall Riot in 1969, cities were sites of discipline and oppression paralleled by resistance (Higgs 1999). Usually hidden due to heavy enforcement, urban queer spaces focused on self-expression and social support (Ibid). Gay ghettos traded social invisibilization and refusal of recognition by urban authority for a refuge for queerness (Ibid). In the later part of the century, during the gay-liberation movement, new forms of urban queer subjectivities and public expressions appeared, incorporating pride, visibility, and political activism into LGBTQ+ spaces (Ibid). New gayborhoods—spaces not quite maintained and resourced by the city as other normative spaces but not spaces of outright blight and neglect—finally created a sense of pride in home and belonging, and often gaps in urban systems were mitigated by collective maintenance (Ibid). In the turn of the millennium a few forms of queerness have slowly been more tolerated within American cultures, and with any social change there was a parallel materialization in the urban landscape. Queerphobia had created an informal rent control mechanism in gayborhoods because due to relatively less demand, thus a lower cost of living was sustained; however, when heteronormative couples were finally willing to live next-door the spaces rapidly gentrified, forcing out queer people who could no longer afford these spaces as costs skyrocketed (Drysdale et al. 2022). Others chose to leave and assimilate into gay-friendly, heteronormative neighborhoods with this newfound suburban acceptance, which dispersed and diluted queer communities across the urban landscape, thus affecting the strength of social bonds, the stability of queer support networks, and a reduced place attachment to the gayborhood itself (Ibid). Meanwhile, gayborhoods were rainbow-washed, coopting LGBTQ+ identities to
demonstrate urban cultures of acceptance and attract the desired forms of LGBTQ+ tourism and migrants, accumulating LGBTQ+ coins in both public and private coffers.

Queerness also reshapes spatiality and the city, through the (de)valuation and (dis)use of spaces. Queerness has traditionally been experienced as part of the cosmopolitan urban cultural identity; thus, queer identity formation itself is an act of materializing and holding built spaces. Placemaking is the intentional “creating and transforming [of] spaces they inhabit with the goal of strengthening the connection between people and the places they share” (Toolis 2017, 184). Placemaking asserts individual or collective agency, transgresses local policy or social norms, and visibilizes queerness, transforming spaces to reflect queer subjectivities, needs, and desires (Knee 2022). Queer folks often create separatist spaces of inclusion and expression, transformation and transmutation, by modifying the material and social to generate spaces of affirmation, belonging, and empowerment (Binnie & Valentine 1999). These more private and forms of placemaking develop space for information and resource sharing, or negotiating community needs and desires (Ibid). Still, even structure and organization have blurred edges, weak spots, and shadows. Crannies and pockets of ‘anti-structure,’ appear within spaces of structure, exposing ambiguity, flux, and unfolding (Turner 1969). Chisholm discussed ‘constellations’ of queer subcultural spaces and underground networks which dynamically reshape the urban environment by challenging heteronormative spatial and cultural values (2005). Further, performing or ‘animating’ queerness in typically heteronormative spaces, in temporary and informal queer ‘pop-ups,’ increase visibility and awareness within surrounding communities (Stillwagon & Ghaziani 2019). Critical placemaking is a “…tool for accessing and transforming public places into spaces of dialogue, inclusion, and democratic participation” (Toolis 2017, 184). Queer informal protest placemaking through everyday lived experiences reimagines placed-based cultural norms and values by
informally but intentionally claiming public space as counter-hegemonic through use and collective representation of queerness (Knee 2022). Through intentional and unintentional actions—movement and staying put, assembly and visibility, embodiment, and presence—queerness within the city makes the everyday strange. Places are “conjunctions of time and space-specific material practices and events at the same time that they are generative (and reflexive) of meaning” (Knopp 2004, 129). This deconstruction and unmaking, and subsequent reshaping and remaking of the city creates a place for queer folks to call their own, a queer home.

The faerie household was the backbone of urban faerie sociality, and frequently faeries share housing, “affirming friendship, collectivism, an extended community and practices of co-residence,” sometimes linking multiple fae ‘households’ to a single property (Morgensen 2009, 151). These faerie houses were accessible and convenient spaces for urban faerie community and could provide temporary or long-term shelter for faeries traveling the national networks (Ibid). Morgensen also noted public events and sex parties were often hosted at these homes, “such invitations became key means through which I met gay men prominent in regional business, electoral politics, and nonprofit organizing who I otherwise might never have known” (Ibid). Creating ephemeral egalitarian spaces in which community members from various backgrounds and privileges can engage in one another can strengthen interpersonal and community perceptions of similarity, leading to more inclusive worldviews (Toolis 2017). Beyond these formal events, faerie homes were spaces of more informal, everyday social connection, as urban faeries would host ritual or formal activities in these homes, inviting fellow non-faerie urbanites, and then casually invite them to hang out more informally afterward (Morgensen 2009). In his observation, “radical faeries often assembled in forms common to urban gay men, but with echoes of faerie culture that might be known only to those ‘in the know’” (Morgensen 2009, 152). Thus, being
‘aloose in the city’ allowed the faeries to flourish in this seemingly antithetical space through mutual support (Gambone 2010). Faerie placemaking within the city can be place-bound, such as the home, or socially constructed and fluid.

Heartcircles were a mobile and accessible practice which can more easily be transplanted into urban life than utopian sanctuary customs. Faeries were able to sustain community away from the sanctuary through these ‘portable gatherings,’ bringing faerie idealism and ethic to the city, if only momentarily, (Morgensen 2009). This echo was enough to sustain most faeries between gatherings and some indefinitely (Ibid). When the possibility of retreat was unfeasible, heartcircles allowed urban faeries ephemeral spaces of intimacy, vulnerability, and healing (Morgensen 2011). Despite this, Morgensen believed “more than any other factor, regular practice of heart circle shifted faerie circles from being rather disassociated sets of friends linked occasionally by activities, to becoming cohesive networks whose shared values grounded collective work to influence society” (2009, 153). This demonstrates the foundational and necessary role of heartcircle practice to sustain urban faerie community. While heartcircles provided a means of realizing a dollop of radically queer space and time in the city, they were also a means by which urban faeries could introduce non-faerie friends to faerie culture as the truncated heartcircle practice was easily understood and accepted by other urbanites (Ibid). Morgensen comments on the availability and value of faerie heartcircles to others:

Among those who attended, some expressed an interest in attending rural gatherings, but others were satisfied to make urban circles the center of their Radical Faerie experience. Thus, while radical faeries cultivated heart circle in order to infuse urban life with the qualities of rural gathering, their very success meant that both they and newcomers could find the heart of Radical Faerie culture alive and well in the city. (Morgensen 2009, 154). Thus, urban faerie life, supported
by regular heartcircles, became a self-supported and autonomous form of faerie existence, no longer requiring retreat from the city but still benefiting from it. Despite this, Morgensen argued separatist and urban faerie communities still deeply rely on each other for survival and, further, urban faerie communities thrive best through their porosity and intentional overlap with urban life (Ibid). However, urban faeries have not always been welcomed by their neighbors.

Systemic inequality and individual circumstance require the sporadic, pragmatic use of essentialist, assimilationist, or endearing tactics to temporarily access systems of power and assert agency in circumstances necessitating intricate negotiations where options are minimal (Spivak 1987). Systemic oppression can have profound tangible influence on queer material lives and bodies; thus, compromises and accommodations may be necessary for socioeconomic wellbeing or survival (Ibid). Additionally, considering the intersectional nature of queer bodies, cultures, and identities, those with intersecting minoritarian statuses, which may further compromise agentive capacity, exist within spaces of increased vulnerability and precarity (Crenshaw 1989). Queer people of color must strategically deploy methods such as disidentification to deliberately reinterpret cultural norms and phenomena while simultaneously conforming to these same standards (Muñoz 1999). Although this form of resistance does not deconstruct the system of power, in both protesting and not protesting, the marginal can assess the rigidity of the system while expressing creative agency (Ibid). However, there are times when refusal is necessary.

Queer urban protest placemaking is the intentional use of city spaces for resistance, visibility, and political action, striving to increase awareness, to demonstrate success or joy, or to mobilize the queer masses (Knee 2022). Protest placemaking creates spaces of symbolism and symbolic action, creativity and creation, and disruption, which communicates to a wider audience the need for societal change or the intention to change it (Ibid). Gambone asserted, “Cities
functioned as the incubators in which gay people have found the permission, the encouragement, indeed the anarchy that could embolden them to violate custom and forge new ways of thinking, living, and constructing worth and meaning in their lives” (2010, n.p.). Critical placemaking endeavors address power structures and inequities, counter dominant narratives, and empower local communities through collective agency to reclaim space (Toolis 2017). During the seemingly chaotic spatial dynamism of political unrest, acute and ephemeral modes of protest placemaking hold space of tension which communicate agitation and collective consciousness (Ibid). In more mundane times, placemaking can signify dissent and contestation, transgression and assertion, or celebration and joy. Queer urban placemaking, can simultaneously be critical and celebratory, and can adapt quite quickly to changing contexts (Knee 2022). Moreover, a physical transformation of space could potentially lead to a parallel transformation of society.

Urban queer life has historically centered on the spatiality of the gayborhood or queer nightlife, and it was not different for the urban faeries (Gambone 2010). However, “going out, coming out and being out…involves a strangely compulsory celebration of queer commodification, and we who attend are all players, and do it by choice and willingly…because the ‘place’ is inclusive and accepting of our individual and collective desires and choices” (Lambert 2017, 1343). Thus, urban faeries have to negotiate traditional anti-capitalist and anti-tokenization sentiment with modern realities of the city, often bemoaningly conforming. Urban faeries historically have been involved in pride parade celebrations and sometimes even had ‘faerie camps’ at pride festivals to promote awareness and presence, while most definitely recruiting (Morgensen 2009). While urban faeries sought shared community within mainstream queer cultural spaces, other non-faerie queers also found community and social capital in engaging at various levels with faeriedom, often not fully understanding the full range of faerie subjectivities nor attempting (Ibid). Faeries also played
performative and political roles within urban queer organizing and the non-profit industrial complex, sometimes chosen as ‘key representatives,’ ambassadors for faeriedom or queerness generally (Morgensen 2009). D. Toolis purported cities are ideal spaces for political expression and assembly (2017), and despite their separatist tradition, faeries were often politically engaged in their communities (Morgensen 2011). Faerie politics was unique in comparison to other LGBTQ+ activisms because it was imbued with a fae ethic, particularly “self-love, mutual care, and a proud public visibility of gay men working for personal and social change,” thus transforming modern democracy through faerie imaginaries (Ibid, 175). On the other hand, there were times when it was not their political acumen being solicited but their spiritual and emotional expertise, as was demonstrated in the consultation of urban faeries in local suicide prevention programming (Ibid). These demonstrate ways in which faeries were called upon by the urbanites to invest their social, political, or spiritual energy into city; unfortunately, this tokenization and commodification of faerie culture was vital to the sustainability of urban faerie communities.

Upon returning to cities from gatherings or other excursions, faeries bring with them their newfound knowledge, realization, and practice (Morgensen 2008). The city is a discursive social space of interaction and conversation, the space for co-constitutive identity formation and collective meaning-making (Toolis 2017). Faerie existence and self-expression within the urban can be a form of transgression, and when done intentionally, a counterhegemonic form of street theater. Urban faeries are “much like other queer primitivists: as conduits for the urban queer constituencies from which they are drawn in which they live to discover a queer indigeneity that—I emphasize now—also projects a global purview for their queer cultures and politics” (Morgensen 2011, 163). Here, Morgensen draws upon Mains’s (1984) theory of queer ‘tribal society of urban Aboriginals,’ where the queerest of the queer, such as leather and kink communities, are perceived
by cis-heteronormative and homonormative urbanites as uncivilized and savage, leading to further peripheralization and invisibilization. Morgensen’s notion of queer primitivism does not position primitivity as uncivilized and lesser, but a performative and substantive servant-leader role in queer modernity, where queer is emissary, granting access to settler colonial cities to the ‘cosmic cosmopolitanism’ (2011). The practice often took form in liberal progressive activism or community healing, also providing material benefit through the commodification and distribution of this presumably-Native culture to make ends meet (Ibid). Faeries, of course, had to interact with the larger city in order to pay their bills, but “a significant number of faeries [remained] committed year-round to simple living, minimal consumption, and as little contact with the capitalist market economy as possible. Some of these fairies [worked] odd jobs to support their simple lifestyles; others work part time” (Hennen 2004, 502). Morgensen positioned Radical Faerie queer primitivity “just far enough ‘outside’ queer modernities (while, obviously, produced inside them) that Radical Faerie culture then can grant queer solace” (Morgensen 2011, 167). Additionally, having urban faeries function as bearers of this faux-Native culture both provides legitimacy to the knowledge or practice and plausible deniability for the urbanites who engage with it (Morgensen 2009). Morgensen concludes “sexually radical gay men act as ‘a bridge between two worlds’ by embodying the liminality of modernity and primitivity indicative of white settlers and modern queers… making white modern primitives both quantitatively and qualitatively more Indigenous than any specific indigenous life could be” (Morgensen 2011, 174). Thus, queering space and time through sociospiritual placemaking can also reify social systems of power, if uncareful.

Historically, queer folks have migrated from rural areas into the city while faeries have attempted to escape the material realities of the city and flee to rural spaces. Paradoxically, the city is viewed as both the zenith of queer potential and thriving, as well as the theater of queer
oppression and entrapment. This queer ambivalence to the city creates networks of movement along which queer people find belonging to place or placelessness. Faeries have created separatist rural and assimilationist urban communities within this global network, and people and information, imagination and potentiality flow between these nodes. Through strategic placemaking practices of refusal, protest, disidentification, and assimilation, faeries negotiate queer urban life. Faeries try to translate the sexo-socio-spiritual powers of the sacred into their urban faerie spatiocultural placemaking, ephemerally and transitionally transforming crannies of the built environment to meet their needs.

Much of the information from this section has been sourced from various works by Morgensen, despite attempting to find additional sources of urban faerie life. This both speaks to the pivotal nature of research—what might seem mundane during the process may end up being the only representation of a community—and it also speaks to the need for further collaborative research with and for urban faerie communities. Although Morgensen has looked at urban faeries specifically in regard to their rural and separatist emplacement, indigeneity and settler colonialism, and their role in bringing queer primitivity into the city, little work has been done to show how faeries use the city as landscape and what constraints or opportunities citylife provides. It has been demonstrated urban Radical Faeries queer space and time by tapping into distant and historical primitive roots and how they use this to and place themselves in the city, but there has been no consideration of the urban faerie ethnoecology, the variability of sexo-socio-spiritual placemaking practices, and the spatial constellations of creating sacred spaces across the urban landscape.

Although this exploration into urban faerie spatiocultures does not close the existing chasm in academia regarding subcultural queer ecologies or ecospiritual urban queer practices, it does add a foundational second brick alongside Morgensen’s myriad works. Additionally, absolutely
no academic research exists investigating the acute and resounding effects of being cut off from the rurality—which academics regard to highly and believe sustains faerie culture-- because it happened for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic since their inception in 1979. Research completed during this time, building upon the work reviewed in this chapter, offers the only insight into faerie immobilization and can be, with care, compared to other crises to gain wisdom for crises to come. Thus, an inquiry is needed into urban faerie utopian imaginaries and their diffuse and residual effects on the built environment, an inquiry which is designed for, in collaboration with, and executed alongside urban faeries.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Ethics and Design

This study was a mixed-methods, participatory ethnography to understand urban Radical Faerie placemaking in North Central Texas. I discuss the process of achieving this goal, the barriers met, as well as the help obtained. Spanning from January 2021 to the present, the collaborative project began with socially-distanced methods, moved through in-person methodologies with masking-required to masking-encouraged as dictated over time by changing state, local, and institutional policies, protocols, and recommendations, and into non-COVID mitigating practices once feasible. As applicable, I describe the COVID-mitigating adaptations and practices used for each research method and how these adapted over time.

Community-based Participatory Research

During this research, local faeries of Austin and Dallas have been able to engage in a relatively less hierarchical project, which aligned with their values of self-determination and agency, artistic self-expression and creation, intentionality and connection. Beginning with the initial Zoom meeting, I met with the four local faerie core collaborators nearly every Sunday for eleven months. First, we discussed goals, research questions, design, and IRB processes. Then we managed data collection and adapted it, as needed. During meetings with less goings-on, we discussed fun and important philosophical topics related to faerie culture and identity. Lastly, we used these meetings to wrap up and also discuss the impact of the collaboration. This regular collaboration and conversation determined the scope, process, and outcomes of the project.

Participatory research can help to balance historical and contemporary power dynamics between institutionalized academia and the surrounding communities if this intention is applied
appropriately and from the start (Blomberg & Karasti 2012). Participatory research has been shown to strengthen community bonds and increase community resilience (Conrad & Campbell 2008). Participation is a spectrum from momentary consent and discrete knowledge sharing to continuous consent and iterative knowledge building. The five ethics of participation which guided this project are collaboration, self-determination, access and ownership, representation, and ongoing consent.

Facing the Research

We wanted to design a project which was not only in the interest of the community, but also in the ways of the community, designing a research model influenced by the faerie worldview and ethic. Although it is an essentialist endeavor to define a collective worldview, especially a faerie one, this desire was the mindset of the collaborators during the research process. By ‘faeing’ the process and outcomes, collaborators and community members identified with the project and were more motivated to support it. By establishing goals which aligned with both my academic requirements and local faerie curiosities, we fostered collaboration toward a mutual objective. The process of faeing, itself allowed for comment or critique on the project, and gave the faerie collaborators a method of achieving self-determination. Also, the use of emic language and worldviews to fae-up the project allowed for a shared and egalitarian understanding of the research process, knowledge formation, and project impact.

Another mode of faeing the research process was not to censor the project for broader audiences and not to stigmatize and delegitimize faerie worldviews and practices. Not to exalt sexuality alone over other faerie modes of placemaking, community-building, and spirituality, but to address it specifically within the context of academic research, where sexuality has become a cultural feature about which you can learn but not with which you may engage. Following the call
of Drydale et al. to not “sidestep the methodological squeamishness of engaging directly with sex” (2022, 2). Seeing the world through a faerie epistemological understanding of sexuality as practice and desire, self-expression and exploration, a connection of the spirit, a relational approach with other people and with the earth, a method of transgression, protest, refusal, and subversion, and as something fun and enjoyable. Thus, an academically-sound participant observation methodology, and a participatory ethic and design, would encourage and necessitate the investigation of faerie placemaking-cum-sexuality process.

Population and Inclusion Criteria

The population of faeries in Dallas and Austin is unknown due to the decentralized nature of the culture and community. Faerie culture has no formal membership or initiation, and a census effort may be antithetical to faerie ontology. There are private Facebook groups for the North Central Texas Region with discrete populations but there are too many unknowns for this to be a viable population count: no oversight exists with these groups and they overlap greatly in geography and in membership, no geographic inclusion criteria is present for membership even though the groups are named by their geography, and there may be members of these groups who do not identify as faeries. Therefore, the sample sizes for the various methods of the study are all unknown. The mixed-method data collected in this study is to elicit generalizable but not statistically significant patterns.

Initial, explicit inclusion criteria for participation were to be at least eighteen years of age, to identify as a radical faerie, and to currently live or have previously lived in the Dallas or Austin metroplex areas. All criteria were enforced by self-reporting. Additional implicit inclusion criteria were to be English-language proficient and technologically-privileged because project materials and communications were only in English and mostly virtual. It was a goal of the research to
deploy intracultural targeted sampling in order to recruit across gender, racial, and ethnic diversity, but historical exclusion from and modern social control mechanisms within the radical faeries may have made this difficult.

No formalization of membership prevails for the radical faeries. Even the term membership can be controversial within faerie epistemologies and their anarchist ideals of decentralization of authority and power. At face value, if you asked them, anyone can be a faerie. Some faeries take part in a ritual of taking on a faerie name when one feels called to do so, but by no means do all faeries have faerie names and even several elders still choose to not take on a name. Furthermore, faeries can change their name at any point in time, sometimes without immediately adopting a new faerie name. In part due to the disdain for categorization and organization, numerous people who interact within faerie culture will not themselves identify as a faerie when asked. Therefore, it became necessary to expand the inclusion criteria from exclusively faerie-identifying people to others who do not use this label but still interact at different levels with the urban faerie communities of Austin and Dallas and had an interest in participating in the project on some capacity, here labeled ‘faerie-adjacent.’ Additionally, because names can and do change over time, I refer to specific faeries, when named individually, by their most current name at the time of drafting this thesis instead of the name they chose to use for the project through elicitation on the consent form. Although they chose the name to use for this project at that time, using their most current name would align with ongoing and iterative consent described above and respect their choice to cast aside the old nomenclature for the new.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were included in research design to provide an opportunity to dive deeply into various facets of urban faerie culture and elicit nuanced understandings, as well
as to freelist data to map urban faerie spatial perceptions and behaviors. The interviews will be adapted into a short oral history documentary to be shown at the gathering and the freelisted data amalgamated into an interactive local faerie map on the website.

Calls for participation through interviews were posted to local and regional faerie Facebook groups for homogenizing, nonrandom purposive sampling of the intended population, as well snowball sampling through sharing of the recruitment materials and word-of-mouth. Sampling was homogenized, treating the local faeries as a single, unweighted population, because the relatively small and decentralized population made more precise and intentional sampling measures, such randomization, stratification or clustering, impractical or impossible. Interviews were conducted at their home or mine and were audio/video recorded. Participants consented before the interview began with a physical consent form which was read to them, and each participant had the choice of consenting to the audio/video recording separately from general participation. The interviews were audio/video recorded to provide material for research transcription and to curate into a short oral history documentary. When completing the interviews, participants knew of the recording ahead of time, so some faeries chose to fae up their garb, others chose to do a series of jewelry or costume changes throughout the interview, and some chose to express themselves by being interviewed while naked. This parallels faerie events, where you see the full spectrum of people who bring decadent clothing and change clothes often, especially dressing extravagantly for dinner time, some faeries using the opportunity to wear more feminine or flowing clothes, and others who empower themselves with partial, intermittent, or full continuous nudity during the gatherings. I did not want to discourage this tradition during the research process, and sometimes I even joined them. I attempted to lean into the semi-structured aspect of the interview process by making it more conversational and less objectifying.
During the interviews, participants were asked to freelist locations in the cities of Dallas and Austin which have cultural or historical significance for radical faeries by recall. Freelisting is a method of cultural domain analysis which elicits cultural knowledge and values shared by the group, here to provide insights into perceptions, uses, and valuation of urban faerie spatiality (Bernard 2006). Geospatial data from interview freelisting was anonymized and amalgamated on a website in the form of an interactive cultural history map, as well as analyzed for spatiocultural themes.

Interview audio was transcribed using Otter.AI software and post-transcription human correction by the researcher. These transcripts were coded via content analysis theory in MaxQDA via grounded theory as outlined by Starks & Trinidad (2007), and this analysis generated broad cultural beliefs and patterns. Following Gustafson’s model for eliciting culturally significant places (2001), freelisted data were extracted and cleaned in excel, binned once for intercity comparison and again for meta-themes. These freelists, at different scales of abstraction, were analyzed using Anthropac, a cultural domain analysis software by Analytic Technologies, to generate salience indices. According to Keddem et al., “Anthropac sorts the lists by item frequency and generates a salience index (Smith’s S) for each item using the formula S ¼ (S (L2Rj þ 1)/ L)/N where L is the length of each list, Rj is the rank of item J in the list, and N is the number of lists in the sample,” thus differentially and proportionally weighing the items listed by their relative position on the list and by the relative length of each list (2015). Data from Anthropac were exported back to excel for visualization.

Surveys

A survey was conducted to tie deep localized knowledge with broader national faerie spatiocultural trends. Through demographic questions, behavior reporting, freelisting, multiple
choice, and Likert scales, the survey explored contemporary faerie identities, individual and collective practices and the lasting post-pandemic effects of the previous social distancing policies, interactions with formalized sacred faerie spaces, urbanity, and spatial desires, and the ethics of faeriedom in the context of modern racial, gendered, and colonial reckonings of inclusion and activism. Non-local faeries could contribute to the gallery and this contribution could, in some small way, help reinforce intercommunity bonds between local faerie groups.

Surveys are, by their essence, often anonymous and dehumanizing. They ask one to think about life in ways which are counterintuitive to everyday experience--quantifying things usually ignored, remembering things forgotten, rating priorities and preferences on scales which may not make sense. Some surveys are much better when they are more local and culturally specific, using emic language and epistemologies to guide them, and discussions were had with faerie collaborators to fae the survey process, like asking more qualitative questions -- does a survey necessarily need to always be so quantitative -- and maybe allowing them to create something or otherwise express their creativity or imagination during the process. The methodological goal of this collaboration was to ask questions which, instead of making them feel frustrated, makes them feel motivated and empowered, or, at minimum, when some methods couldn’t be adapted, to report the findings in a more faerie way than graphs and charts. Research questions and community desires for the survey were generated in collaboration with faerie collaborators, as well as the scope of topics and a final review of the survey questionnaire.

Calls for survey participation were posted to local, regional, and national faerie Facebook groups for homogenizing, nonrandom purposive sampling of the intended population, as well snowball sampling through sharing of the recruitment materials and word-of-mouth. Self-reported inclusion criteria for the survey are to be at least 18 years of age and identify as a faerie or meet
the criteria for faerie-adjacent as described above. Survey construction and collection was conducted via Qualtrics™. Survey data were downloaded into SPSS® and analyzed to elicit summary statistics to paint a snapshot of generalized contemporary faerie-life in the United States, and the results will be provided to faerie collaborators in the form of data visualizations and may be presented at future faerie gatherings. These data were visualized using SPSS® software and exported for reporting.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Project Deliverables

A report of the qualitative textual analysis of the transcribed interviews would not have appealed to or respected the worldview of the local faerie communities; thus, a portion of the results will be delivered in the form of a short (5- to 10- minute) oral history documentary. The video recordings from the interviews are in the process of being edited into the documentary with the help of a local faerie, Tom, who formally retired from—then informally re-entered into—videography. A theme was developed with the help of the faerie collaborators through the curational process, B-roll footage and media is being collected from local faerie communities, and a storyboard was informed by the coded interview transcripts. Because Tom has quite a few projects in the works despite his semi-retirement, the oral history documentary will be finished by the end of this year and shown at the Beltane gathering in 2024.

Faerie culture is decentralized and ephemeral; there exists no National Faerie Museum & Library because no official historical cannon survives, only a scattering of memorializations or commemorations. Scant numbers of formal archives and libraries exist, usually housed on sanctuary land, or informal collections in urban faerie homes. A thousand small archives and collections of cultural knowledge exist rather than a few large ones. On thinking about which kinds of faerie culture persist through time, faerie material culture has been collected and passed down through generations well-enough and websites or social media groups have been fairly-well maintained for the past decade or two. Thus, when considering ways of giving the local and larger faerie communities something meaningful, useful, and relatively durable, a project website seemed to be relatively easy to maintain and accessible.
In order to provide digital storytelling as an instrument for virtual placemaking (Foth 2017), an interactive map of local faerie history and a short oral history documentary will be uploaded. Alongside the documentary are photographs and documents archiving the project itself, taken of the planning meetings and events. A visualization of the survey results, in the form of a culturally-appropriate infographic, and a copy of this thesis will be uploaded to the project website to provide communal access to the knowledge gained from this project. As this process mostly took place during the pandemic, the information provided gives a critical snapshot in time of faerie life and experiences during COVID. Lastly, the material and experiential potential of the project will gain larger scope and new subjectivities, living on past the constraints of physical placemaking potential.

Research Findings

Participation and Demographics

Within interview participation, there was fairly equal participation across the two metroplex areas included in the study – Dallas and Austin. Although 42 faeries consented to the survey, only 33 made it through the demographic questions, which is to be expected due to the traditional refusal within faerie culture of Western labels of self-identification and being catalogued by institutions of power, and 19 surveys were fully completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5, faerie culture is still normatively white cisgender gay men. A lack of recorded local historical demographics to possibly evaluate for significant
change over time generates a limitation for deeper analysis. Ironically for a culture created to provide a haven for sexual and gender minority expression, faerie participation was relatively more racially-diverse than, as Dawne put it, ‘genderly-’ or ‘orientationally-’ diverse. There seemed to be a willingness for people who still identify as gay men to openly signify in faerie spaces as non-binary or queer, but still largely limited women-signifying or trans femme-identifying participation. This would provide foundational data for future research or community work to evaluate potential inclusion and diversity goals.

Figure 4.1: Distribution and median of participant self-reported biological age (n = 45).

Figure 4.2: Participation by self-reported sexual orientation (n = 46).
Interviews

In-depth interviews described the process by which faeries practice placemaking through the creation and sustenance of sacred space, as well as the resulting spatial constellations. The foundational placemaking process is described here so contextual variations and adaptations can be discussed later.

Faerie Sacred Space and Placemaking

In the duration of this project, faeries described two sources of sacredness – nature and
humanity. Nature is sacred but faeries would, of course, delineate the natural realm quite differently. Universal sacredness is common in faerie ideology but less in practice—the planet, all the animals, humanity, and the cosmos are all sacred. Bel remarked, “Of course, every place you go is sacred because it’s Mother Earth!” (Interview 2022). However, various spaces within the landscape may be relatively more or less sacred, either due to human intervention, topography, or aesthetics. For example, a cascading waterfall may be more sacred, or at least have more inherent and instrumental value, than a strip of grass next to a highway. While humanity is sacred, specific instances of human existence and behavior, and their spatial effects, would result in spaces which are relatively more or less sacred. Human presence and interference can strip a space of its sacredness, and, paradoxically, human existence, behavior, and intention in a space can also make it sacred. Sacredness comes from a queer, spiritual, or fae essence. For Dawne, within faeries lies “a little bit of subconscious sacredness that goes on” above and before everything else (Interview 2022).

For some faeries, an individual can create sacred space through ritual, habitual behavior, creating an intention for the space, or simply by defining it as such. “They might not see that as a sacred space at all, but it’s where I can go. So, the sacred space is defined by me,” realized Mercury (Interview 2022). One faerie described sacred spaces in relation to safety within his sobriety, noticing the spaces he labeled as sacred were all spaces he felt comfortable and untriggered, “I can take off the clothes of the world, figuratively and literally” (Mercury Interview 2022). For other faeries, sacredness is relational in origin, and the communing of two or more creates a sacred space. Sacredness is the migration of faeries across great distances to one spot to commune, or the seeing of a friend or community which you haven’t seen in quite a while. Angel shared, “Sacredness means anytime I connect with another person…every encounter with that person is
sacred...there are faerie friends that I may not have talked to in a couple years, but the minute we get together, instant best friends again, you know. There are no gaps” (Interview 2022).

There are two variations of placemaking, formal and informal, encountered during this project. Both methods generate sacred space, albeit through slightly different processes, with different intentions, and disparate outcomes. The formal placemaking process has three stages: creating or opening a space, sustaining the space, and closing the space and re-integrating into the larger world. This closely follows—but is distinct from—more general neopagan ritual formalities of invocation, will, and closing ‘with a little pomp’ (Grieve 1995). As Earth and the cosmos are already sacred, rather than sanctification, faerie placemaking creates a discrete space with delineated boundaries which has an intentional purpose. Sanctuaries, gatherings, conventional urban events, and rituals are all forms of formalized sacred space resulting from faerie placemaking. Drawing from a lineage of separation, a faerie group or individual withdraws—physically, spiritually, and socially—and delineates the spatial and cognitive boundaries of their intention. Cleansing is more common for built environments or places with deep-historical significance. Attunement to space and beauty helps ground the process. Bel described the process as, “The land was already sacred. The ritual, the opening, brought in the focus. And the focus permeated out amongst everyone” (Interview 2022). This can be done by calling in and connecting to faerie ancestry, to the natural realm, or to a specific deity, depending on the purpose of the space. Rituals, old and new, can achieve momentary consonance, as can shared practices such as anointment, smudging, breathing. While ritual is used for the most formal of placemaking endeavors, sacred space can be opened by gathering and setting up a shared understanding of intention, expectation, and purpose, as would be done for a heartcircle or workshop.

Sacred space can be created individually, but it is strengthened by cooperation, and with
community comes complexity. As Steve recognized, life is convoluted and sometimes difficult, so it aids the placemaking process “to allow people first to unpack everything and to become present and acknowledge where they are at” (Interview 2022). Additionally, permitting oneself to be open-minded, creative, and free lends to an ability to receive radical experiences, while authenticity and vulnerability supports self-discovery. A general feeling of safety and belonging is necessary for vulnerability to surface, sometimes in the form of a trustworthy and non-exploitative group, clear expectations, consent, vulnerability, and self-respect. Also helpful is motivational convergence, or as Bel jovially put it, “a singular point” of agreement, which might sometimes just be “to get together in group of faeries to scream in the woods” (Interview 2022). Faeries believe the group needs only to overlap enough in their vision for the space to be created. Those forming the space can be present and express a desire to connect, or as Steve observed, to “be a part of something” (Interview 2022). Sharing collective feelings, such as pain or joy can attune the group creating the space, “not just open-minded, but open-hearted, and open-souled” (Draco Interview 2022). Which of these factors are necessary or simply helpful is conditional upon the intention of the sacred space, where it is being formed, the composition of the group, and the intended lifespan of the space.

Sacredness is cumulative, over time, across space, and within people. Draco discussed a place sacred to him, “it’s just it’s very, very powerful because it’s just absorbed years and years and years of history and energy.” Angel discusses this deep-rooted historicism on a larger scale: “It’s the planet as a whole. It’s just very sacred, you know, because you never know where you’re standing. What happened in that spot, you know, I believe that has the frequency and the energy of that event is still in that spot” (Interview 2022). Every parcel of land, and much of the sea, has provided space for the story of humanity, and this history can be tapped into for modern faerie
placemaking. Draco believes this past “has left an imprint, and you’re going to feel that. You may not realize what it is, but you can truly feel the history and you know, you get connected to that, and then you’re leaving your own imprint. And so that does make it sacred” (Interview 2022). This heritage of sacredness traced back to the beginnings of the cosmos can bring legitimacy and sacred power to faeriedom and can continue to be passed along to future faerie generations.

Withal, once the space is created, it must be sustained for the duration of its utility. Traditionally, sacred spaces are longer-lasting and are kept across generations, although no sacred spaces are truly permanent. DeLight observed, “There’s a certain posture of holding a space to keep it sacred” (Interview 2022). This posturing considers positionality, strategy, and performativity, both a common-sense embodiment and a thoughtful, earnest sensitivity. Cultivating the space with intention, as Dawne wisely said, “You know, it’s a simple answer but it’s not simple to do” (Interview 2022). Especially if the space was created through spiritual habit, a sacredness of action, diligence, commitment, loyalty, and faithfulness to the routine and trust it will bring the desired outcome of preserving the space. Protecting the physical space from external agitators can mitigate the risk of corruption and disruption. Additionally, sometimes the physical space must be maintained while this work persists to sustain the sacredness, like sanctuary land and other faerie dwellings. On the other hand, memory can also sustain sacred spaces, as Draco practices “holding it in your mind or in your heart…I still think about how magical they are” (Interview 2022). These spaces can be sustained individually or socially depending on their communal or personal use values, either relationally through love and cooperation, “surrounding yourself with positive energy” as KJ hopes for (Interview 2022), or through imagination, freedom of expression, creation, and even dance, which is René’s favorite.

Sacred spaces exist for disparate time periods. For select few faeries sacredness is eternal,
as Angel believes “…anytime you exchange, you know, extending and receiving within a love space, that love is eternal. And so, to me, it’s sacred forever” (Interview 2022). But the majority of faeries who participated in this project believed sacred spaces are finite, as Steve concisely said, “nothing is forever.” Sacred spaces are deliberately ephemeral and transient, a space is held as long as the intention remains, or until its purpose is fulfilled. Sacredness is sustained until “no one believes it anymore, or until the people who maintain the site are no longer there to maintain it” (Mimosa Interview 2022). Once the space is no longer needed or can no longer be sustained, it is dissolved, either formally or passively, and the faeries reassimilate into the larger environment once more. However, the dissolution of the formal space is not the end of its story. Faeries often return to the same place to see if it has maintained its sacredness in their absence. The ephemerality of sacred space forces faeries to be present and mindful, as “you should just enjoy it for however long it lasts” (KJ Interview 2022).

Informal placemaking, any creation of sacred faerie space without the process described above, adapts the space for myriad faerie needs while simultaneously respecting the desires and needs of others. As Sunrise mentions, “If I need a sacred space to decompress, I can create one wherever I am…I can put my headphones in and do a meditation and set myself in the right” (Interview 2022). This mobility and accessibility of informal placemaking allows it to be more freely practiced individually and collectively. Creating it is simply “to communicate some kind of impression or feeling that this space is different from the outside world” (Peter). As Dawne had declared, anywhere faeries gather can be a sacred space. In this sense, the very act of gathering creates new potential.

After the intention is gone, the space is dissolved, the faeries have left, sacredness lingers in the space and people. When discussing spaces historically sacred to faeriedom, Bel proclaimed,
“They are forever. Some of them are neglected, but it doesn’t mean they aren’t sacred” (Interview 2022). Even after the intention and maintenance is gone, something may remain. “Spaces definitely do hold energies for a long time, though, don’t they?” asked Sunrise rhetorically before he continued to answer his own question, the energy is still there, “just hanging in the air in the same space” (Interview 2022). Following Frazer’s contagious magic (1890), this energetic residue can cling to and affect life in this space until it dissipates, creating new potentialities. As Bel avouched, “It’s a quantum thing…when you cut the tree down and its dead, honey, it doesn’t mean that it’s gone. It doesn’t mean that the sacredness of that place it gone, it has just been transformed into something else.” (Interview 2022). This sacred residuality queers physical space and linear temporalities. In this practice, there are “lingering legacies and myriad untold future consequences,” leaving one’s spiritual footprint etched on landscape (Knopp 2004, 127). DeLight distinguished between spaces in the built environment which were erected specifically to be durably sacred spaces and more temporary sacred spaces where you “set up an environment…because you maybe rent it out. Then it can be moved away and used for something else” (Interview 2022). In responding to the placelessness of modernity, this multipurpose, mobile, and multiplex faerie placemaking allows for rapid reactivity, adaptability, and accessibility.

Cultural Domain Analysis of Urban Faerie Placemaking

The sample of interview participants consisted of a total of 14 faeries living in an urban setting, although a married couple in Dallas wanted to be interviewed together so their data was not analyzed separately (n = 13). A majority of the sample live in Austin (54%) while a smaller portion lived in Dallas (46%). Although a sample of 20 participants is recommended to reach data saturation (CDC 2021), I believe the 13 interviews were satisfactory to reach sufficient data saturation in order to extrapolate analytical, albeit not statistical, generalizations. Results were not
stratified over demographic information due to the smaller sample size, and the goal of the study was not an intragroup comparison but to elicit regional commonalities.

Table 4.2: Defining the Cultural Domains Prospected within the Freelisting Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain Name</th>
<th>Placemaking Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Expressive</td>
<td>Spaces of self-expression &amp; self-exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Spaces of connection with other faeries socially</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Spiritual | • Space of feeling spiritually connected or energized  
• Connection with other faeries spiritually  
• Connection with non-faeries spiritually |
| Ancestral | Spaces of connection with Faerie ancestry |
| Historical | Spaces where faeries have met in the past |
| Economic | Faerie-friendly or faerie-owned businesses |
| Natural | Spaces of connection with nature |
| Sexual | • Spaces of connection with other faeries sexually  
• Connection with non-faeries sexually |
| Futuristic | Spaces where their ideal faerie future might happen |

The cultural domain categories of the freelist are enumerated and defined within Table 4.1. These categories were co-constructed within extensive collaborative frames of the project, labeling faerie understandings and epistemologies, practice and ritual, goals and desires. By requesting faerie participants to freelist significant spaces and places which they associate with these categories, domain analysis could map the intricacies of local faerie spatiocultural subjectivities. Spatial categories were created through the binning of freelisted important spaces through similarity and proximity of places mentioned, which were then reviewed by faerie collaborators for efficacy. Although these etic categories did not align with common faerie ontological placemaking frameworks, they were understood and deemed sufficient for this project by collaborators. Because of this misalignment, salience graphs were not used as arbiters of truth but to help contextualize the placemaking patterns of urban faeries while also follow Low’s ethic of spatializing culture: to remain attuned to the cultural significance of spaces, to not disregard or
breach local custom and beliefs, and to work toward collaboration and sustained engagement (2016). Furthermore, attempting to queer academic understandings of space and place by “celebrating the richness, diversity, partiality, and incompleteness of human experience, rather than focusing on accessing ‘truth’...appreciating a place for the unknowable,” these quantitative modes were created to visualize trends, not generate grand narratives (Knopp 2004, 124). Thankfully, this ethic easily fits into faerie epistemologies and spatial practices. Faerie collaborators did not view the following spatial categories as discreet, but overlapping and mutually influential, and faeries did not often categorize placemaking based on its physicality, emplacement along an urban/rural dichotomy, or who owned or managed the space, but did consider spaces and strategies in relation to the above variables and their ability to produce an intention and result. However, to follow Gustafson’s methodology detailed above, these spatial categories were treated as mutually exclusive. Parameters of cultural domains and visualizations of these findings can be found in the appendix.

Surveys

Due to the relatively small sample size (17 < N < 25), statistical significance was not achievable for most measures; however, the survey provided quantitative markers which were triangulated in the discussion with spatiocultural domain and interview results to yield more reliable patterns. As previously discussed, faeries rarely collectively agree on anything, even the most fundamental ideas and practices of faeriedom. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, survey data was seen as ‘moderately polarizing’ if there was two-thirds consensus within the measure, and ‘greatly polarizing’ with three-fourths consensus. Also, a two-thirds consensus was also the threshold for a ‘high level of agreement’ (think: bell curve) or a ‘high level of disagreement’ (think: bimodal) within the measure.
Table 4.3: Self-Reported Location* of Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
<th>Cum %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active refusal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*According to regional census definitions (USCB 2021).

Advertised as a national survey, the geographic breakdown of the respondents is necessary to contextualize the results. While there were no geographic regions without representation, the regions were not equally represented, and, according to 2023 census data, were not proportionately represented either, as the Pacific region was significantly over-represented, and the Midwest was grossly under-represented (USCB 2021). Thus, interregional comparison can only be made with utmost caution.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This discussion serves as a comparative analysis of urban faerie placemaking, adapted to four quite distinct ethnoecologies. First, a discussion of land-based sexo-socio-spiritual placemaking practices within the separate space of the gathering and other periurban wildernesses. Faeries leave the metroplex to temporarily recreate the utopianist imaginaries of the sanctuary within the mobile and networked gatherings. Then, diverse faerie placemaking practices within the built environment and their spatial constellations across the landscape are mapped. The adaptations to uneven access and urban flux demonstrate increasingly multipurpose and mobile urban placemaking with diffuse and residual effects on the built environment. Thirdly, an examination into faerie virtual placemaking practices during and immediately after the COVID pandemic. The acute and durable effects of this rapid digitization of faerie culture is contextualized specifically within virtual ethnoecologies and placemaking adaptations. Lastly, a projection of current utopianist placemaking strategies into the ecofutures of urban faeries, discussing the potential effects of contemporary faerie spatiocultural practices.

The Gathering

Wilderness spaces are inherently sacred in faeriedom, and myriad urban faeries seek these out to reenergize. As KJ expressed, “I just like to go places that are more secluded just because I want unspoiled energy, I want energy that’s from the earth” (Interview 2022). Nature is a divine material realm which amplifies the faerie spirit. René purported, “To be immersed in creation is less effort because just by virtue of being surrounded by the mountains, and the wind, and the trees and the grass… in order to just immerse in a sacred moment, that creation will just pull and invite you into with nothing more than an openness and a willingness to be present to it” (Interview
Most survey respondents believed wilderness was the primary space of fae sacredness (n = 19) and the importance of visiting nature (n = 19). Faeries are able to create a liminal space of belonging and transformation within the wilderness, to abscond from the real world into a queer time and space where perceivedly true connection and growth happens. Morgensen argued faeriedom is “defined by desire for a subjective and collective state that is presumed to originate in and remain tied to distant places and times,” seeking a collective belonging through panspiritual and ancient roots, or individual desires to create their own queer space and time off the in woods (2009, 145). The idolatry for the wild draws faeries out of the controlled ecologies of the city.

Faeries migrate into nature to escape the stressors of urbanity; hence, gatherings are held in mountains, deserts, or forests instead of urban convention centers or community centers. It is easier to access the power and knowledge of the Earth when you are surrounded by it. “There is a reason gatherings happen in nature. There’s a reason why sanctuaries are remote and protected and I think it’s to intentionally prevent the urban sprawl energy from distracting from the sacred... the urban is 100% distracting and prevents faerie connection” (Dawne Interview 2022). Sanctuaries are a refusal of urbanity while gatherings are negotiated and ephemeral liminal spaces between urbanity and rurality. Connecting with nature, especially devoid of normative social and physical constraints, individually or collectively, is the essence of a gathering. In recounting the past two years, urban faeries visited nature on their own more often than they visited other people (n = 23), and they formed groups to explore nature every couple months, on average, with no change in frequency of either since before the pandemic (n = 23). Sunrise articulates a compression of space-time by faerie magic in recounting, “So, you see that person again and you haven’t seen them since the last gathering. The space that you had the gathering in the first place comes into your mind’s eye. Like when I saw you tonight, I was like, I’ve seen you before. Hey, girl, you were at the
gathering last fall! And so immediately, I was transported to that Lotus Ranch where we had the gathering” (Interview 2022). The transportation across time and space, warping from gathering to gathering, the time, the stress, everything which happened in between no longer exists and no longer matters, only the memory montage of faeriedom.

Plenty of faeries, especially in Dallas, commented on the necessity to go outside of city limits to connect with nature or to fully connect with other faeries. Talon remembered, “I guess I lose track of directions, there’s a lot of nice country out there South of Austin and we drive out in the country roads, and we try to find something we haven’t seen yet, and to see the trees in the fields, and it is wonderful” (Interview 2022). Purposefully getting lost in the hopes of experiencing something new is a form of queer failure, by subverting normative expectations and losing oneself temporarily, but gaining underappreciated knowledge and joy. Cultural domain analysis demonstrated urban faeries use periurban spaces to connect with nature, spirituality, and sexuality, and to escape the capitalism of urbanity. Beyond losing oneself within rurality, gatherings are typically hosted at privately-owned land outside of the city, like a campground or event space. Often, it is a priority to choose a place which aligns with faerie values, such as ‘gay-owned’ or ‘clothing-optional.’ While connecting with nature is important, so is intentional placemaking within the gathering space. Sunrise discusses his experience, “So we’re planning this coming fall’s Radical Faerie gathering, and that’s one of the first things I think of is how can we make the space that we’re renting feel like a faerie space. But it doesn’t need objects, it can just be this feeling of a safe environment. If it’s outdoors, maybe there are some trees that buffer you from the rest of the world” (Interview 2022). Knee discusses the compulsion to imprint oneself onto the material space in the process of queer placemaking, to use symbols and behavior which code and ‘territorialize’ the space as queer in its social production (2022). These rituals help to transform a
private campsite into a temporary impression of faerie utopianist space sans sanctuary land.

Global Reflections of the Sanctuary

The sanctuary was created in opposition to urbanity and its discontents; thus, these nookeries were typically established away from urban sprawls in seemingly wild and remote spaces. Faerie ethic shaped the sanctuary, so these sacred and perceivedly ancestral spaces are sites of communal labor and shared resources, and havens open for people who travel to stay temporarily and possibly even establish their livelihoods. Sanctuaries create stable, seemingly permanent faerie space in the world, the backbone of faeriedom, within which exist faerie laboratories attempting new means of achieving utopia, the successes of which can then be generalized to the mainstream culture. Sanctuaries are sacred land maintained by the stewards who live there. In his interview, Peter contrasts the sustenance of temporary sacred spaces through ritual and guideline with more permanent sacred spaces, the sanctity of which is “maintained by people taking responsibility and that can be done in any one of a number of different ways.” Mimosa provides examples of these myriad methods, “They do it by having regular heart circles, they choose a communal way of life by taking care of the land, by opening up the sanctuary to visitors at appropriate times and particularly for celebrations” (Interview 2022). These practices materially maintain the land, property, and resources, physically and socially nurture the resident community, and spiritually sustain the sacredness of the space. Dawne believes sanctuaries are ‘infinitely sacred’ because of the collective intention which has ‘carved’ fae sacredness out of the land (Interview 2022). Another component of sanctuary stewardship is guardianship. For the radical faeries, while it is commonly believed the ecorelational practice benefits from and should be informed by evidence-based environmental discourses, their ethic is perceivedly more aligned with sociospiritual ecorelational epistemologies. Survey respondents regarded a specifically fae
environmentalism is necessary to the wellbeing of the community (n = 19), moving beyond the
domination of nature, time, and space to more queered relational epistemes. Whitworth described
queer environmental stewards as “storytellers, rite preservers, ceremonial leaders, soul healers,
community builders” (2019, 489). Historically, these separatist spaces were able to exist with little
interference from mainstream society or state regulation through isolation and social control
mechanisms of secrecy and knowledge suppression. As the sanctuary is just that—a sanctuary for
lost or exploring faeries, it is only loosely guarded from those who need it most.

Sanctuaries are considered havens in providing shelter and resources to faeriedom and in
preserving faerie culture. Faeries often describe a sense of homecoming when recounting their first
time on sanctuary land. “I’ve never really felt any ownership in an urban space but the one time I
felt a kinship and an ownership and being part of a community was the first time I visited Short
Mountain Sanctuary for Beltane... As soon as I stepped foot on the ground, I felt it flow out from
the bottom of the soles of my feet and fill me in a way that I didn’t know I needed. So, I know it’s
possible” (Sunrise Interview 2022). Sanctuaries also house faerie archives, libraries, closets, and
memorials which ground and root faeriedom, while preserving material culture. However, not all
urban faeries are able to visit the sanctuaries, nor do all of them necessarily have strong desires to
do so. Survey participants, on average, have only visited one or two sanctuaries in their lifetime (n
= 22) and approximately half of participants spent less than a week cumulatively in these spaces
(n = 19). While there is a bimodal distribution of faeries who have never or barely visited sanctuary
land and those who had spent over a year, the lack of diversity in sites suggests the accumulated
time was not split across scads of sites but invested in a few. In the past two years, survey
respondents visited sanctuary land approximately yearly, which was significantly less than before
the pandemic (-0.29, n = 21). Additionally, 30% of respondents, who predominantly lived in cities
(90%), had never before visited formal faerie sanctuary land. Sanctuaries closed their doors for the first time in nearly half a century during the pandemic, but there was high degree of consensus between survey respondents this closure had altogether little personal impact (n = 19). These data demonstrate sanctuaries hold a powerful but unrealized ideal for most urban faeries, something which needs to exist for the good of the community but not necessarily for the good of the individual. Despite this, there was a very high level of agreement the participants desire to visit sanctuaries more often than they currently do (n = 19). Even more historical than the sacredness of the sanctuary, the radical faeries have a long tradition of hosting temporary gatherings providing sacred faerie spaces more accessible to urban faeries.

Gatherings are events, typically a week or less in length, and typically centered around a time of significance, such as the Pagan lunar calendar or seasons of the year. Gatherings are open to all—the faerie and the faerie-adjacent, those simply curious to play and interact with new forms of knowledge. Larger, international gatherings are hosted on sanctuary land and smaller regional gatherings are often in rented periurban spaces. Gatherettes are even smaller, either in time or attendance, and often a single urban community may host one. While periurban gatherings are usually not held on sanctuary land, a faerie’s first gathering still produces a sense of homecoming to faeriedom, as Dawne remembered, “For the first time, as a queer man I was able to walk into a space and be completely void of expectation, void of agenda, void of insecurity, void of anxiety, surrounded by intergenerational queer men, which is just absolutely empowering and refreshing and inspiring. A true meeting of the spirit” (Interview 2022). You see this is not a homecoming to the land, as with the sanctuary, but to the community. Even after years of attending, gatherings generate an ongoing transformative potential for urban faeries, a life-changing space is created, translating the utopian imaginaries of the sanctuary into a weekend in the woods.
Radical Faerie spaces and practices have been demonstrated to perpetuate norms and reify systems of settler colonialism in an effort to find queer belonging and purpose (Morgensen 2009). This is true for both separatist and urban emplacement and their translated subjectivities (Morgensen 2011), and this continues to be true for periurban gathering spaces created by urban faeries. When discussing the creation of sacred space, one faerie proclaimed the inherent sacredness of the land, which empowered the placemaking ritual, and in doing so noted his belief of terra nullius, the land is a blank slate from which one can work (Interview 2022). This inconsequentialization of the historical and contemporary context of land, while true for a lot of faerie spiritual practice, erased the political contestation of the land and Native claims of sociospiritual access to this same space. By ignoring or actively erasing these contentions, it then becomes easier for faeries to utilize this space and temporarily claim it through practice and presence. Additionally, when discussing the significance of land or ground during his interview, another faerie commented, “I think of how the Native Americans did not have a concept of land ownership. Like, it was just the earth and all of it was sacred…” as he then scaffolds his own views of connection, nurturance, and groundedness from this belief. While various Native American nations have diverse notions of land use, land appropriation, resource sharing, and material ownership, this statement not only brushes hundreds of Indigenous communities in a single stroke, but also tells a convenient narrative for the appropriation and exploitation of their lands. Some Native cultures may not have had beliefs or practices which would signify as land ownership in a Western context, such as market commodification, exploitation, and extraction, but all have beliefs regarding land appropriation and sovereignty. Although, if it is believed the Native American nations do not have a concept of land ownership then they cannot be upset at the theft of their land and thus settler society need not feel guilty. A final faerie concedes, “A lot of it is based on
Indigenous culture, I hope appreciatively borrowed and integrated into faerie culture. That’s my intention when I engage with those types of rituals, so I think intention is key about that” (Interview 2022). While intention does have a lot of power, as demonstrated particularly well within faeriedom, intention or good faith does not appear to be sufficient here. The delineation between appropriation and assimilation is often defined by collaboration, working with and alongside other communities and peoples whose culture has been taken or wants to be assimilated, to make sure it’s done properly, respectfully, and consentingly. And, while some faerie events and meetings begin with a traditional Western land acknowledgment, there was no mention during this project of involvement in ongoing Native reparative endeavors or land-back initiatives. This is supported by survey data, in which there was a very high level of agreement in the need for more acknowledgment of colonial histories (n = 19) or contemporary racial reckonings (n = 19), while this consensus was more than halved in regard to more material reparations for Native nations (n = 19) or people of color (n = 19). As faeriedom globalizes, acquiring land around the world to support a panspiritual culture created on the practices and beliefs of other cultures, more imaginative and creative work is needed to address past colonial harm and reconstruct more caring and collaborative.

Gatherings are also mobile nodes along international networks of faerie culture. Angel discusses the annual regional Texas gathering each fall which draws in national and international attendance (Interview 2022). As mobile and social spaces, whose materiality matters relatively less, the sustenance of gatherings depends less on guardianship and stewardship than on maintaining a critical constituent mass; flexibility and adaptability to diverse temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts; maximizing accessibility across broader geographic ranges and cultural backgrounds; and adequately providing spaces and practices for information and resource
exchange, deep community-building, and broad networking. People discuss Kumbh Mela or Burning Man as ephemeral tent cities, built for the event, attended by a global array of people, and then deconstructed, both creating a moment of glocalized communitas and an utterly brief materialization of Sassen’s global city (2002). I would like to discuss Radical Faerie gatherings, not as tent cities of thousands or millions, but as tent neighborhoods of dozens or hundreds, also built or reshaped for the event, attended by regional, national, or international faeries, also creating a discrete period of glocalized communitas and acting as material nodes on an international Radical Faerie network. When faeries rent a campground in Texas for the weekend, they transform the space materially, socially, and spiritually, eventually creating delineated space quite similar to other faerie spaces along the global network than the Texas spaces which actually touch it. Further, there is an intentional social and material network which supports the flow of information, people, and resources through this network to localized nodes to purposefully cast away the mundane and American for Savastano’s cosmic cosmopolitanism (2007). These spaces become so foreign to other locals who might lay eyes upon it because they were not created with the greater local population in mind, but to connect a select few to those with similar desires across the world. However, global materializations of faerie culture paused temporarily during the pandemic.

In the past two years, faerie survey respondents had attended a physical gathering once or twice a year, on average (n = 20), with no significant change since before the pandemic (n = 20); however, about a third of respondents attended virtual gatherings yearly while the other two-thirds had never attended online (n = 20). Thus, virtual gatherings were a creative adaptative placemaking strategy during a crisis, but are once again seen as subjacent to physical spaces for assembling faeries along global networks. While global information sharing continuously occurs virtually, as is discussed more later in this chapter, gatherings are a temporal and spatial emplacement, a
materialization of these flows, of the shaping of the land and space by local and global aspirations. Steve comments on his lack of vacation time at his job, but a desire to “see more of them and to be a part of more of that, to definitely touch more people and have more people touch me with their ideals and their thoughts and their lifestyles and be open to it” (Interview 2022). The placemaking of the gathering creates a sacred and queer space and time for radical transformation and homecoming along global and local scales, the effects of which are then dissipated out along these international networks and grounded communities. When attempting to locate modern faerie aspirations, Sunrise remarks in his interview, “Anywhere, everywhere, options are key. You need to be able to be mobile. And I loved hearing for the first time in my last gathering about the international RadFae gatherings. The next one is happening in Estonia. How fun would that be? The last one was in South Africa. Could you imagine those cute accents?”

For the focus of this project, urban faeries leave the city to temporarily create these separatist spaces, and, as Morgensen noted, these rural/urban networks of flow sustain the seemingly dichotomous iterations of local faerie community (2009). These spaces become regionally mobile and flexible sites of imagination and potential. Zooming out, these sites come to be material emplacements of globalized faerie culture, glocal nodes of migration and exchange around the world. Faeriedom is a spatiocultural system embedded within larger hegemonic, neocolonial frames, resisting and reifying strategically in negotiation with global and local fae interests. Placemaking at gatherings and sanctuaries are loci of influence and information which affect local practices and beliefs when brought back into the city. Global directionality guides the emplacement of new nodes along the network and the catalytic potential for local placemaking practices of existing communities. This project only considered the urban placemaking practice of two, overlapping nodes with faeriedom, and is thus just one small snapshot of global faerie
placemaking practices and beliefs.

Placemaking within the Gathering

The space is sanctified through an opening ritual, usually calling in the four directions and declaring an opening to the gathering (Mimosa). Socially though, “a gathering is a space that’s intentionally carved out of this modern world to create a safe and brave space for individuals to show up and be their unadulterated selves” (Dawne Interview 2022). The gathering, as much as it is positioned within larger contexts, is meant to be a space of belonging and deep connection, a sense of community, and a sense of attachment if hosted on sanctuary land. Cultural domain analysis results, illustrated in Figure 4.8, suggest faeries use separatist spaces for spiritual and social connection, as well as self-expression (CDA 2022). Knopp defines this queer search for collective community as a “seeking people, places, relationships, and ways of being that provide the physical and emotional security, the wholeness as individuals and as collectivities, and the solidarity that are denied us in the heterosexist world” (2004, 123). Sunrise describes an inherent, unspoken mutual support in faerie spaces (Interview 2022). These spaces are effective in creating a container for processing emotion and tension while simultaneously grounding faerie space and time in various localities and contemporaries. Formal sacred spaces and spiritual placemaking can help “[develop] an awareness of the physical structures and social relations of public space not as static, neutral, and eternal but as dynamic, unfinished, and transformable space for imagining and enacting alternate possibilities” (Toolis 2017, 188). A space of creativity and imagination, transformation and transmutation, of artistry, self-exploration, and self-expression, of sexual, spiritual, and relational possibilities. For all that, formal knowledge, rituals, or behaviors are not necessary to create sacred faerie space.

An important piece of placemaking, sometimes forgotten, is intentionality. Dawne
remembers, “there have been some gatherings where I didn’t have much intention, and I could feel that kind of chaos within me because I didn’t sit down and spend time figuring out what my intention was going to be that gathering, even if it’s just to meet new people. I think it’s important to have a vocalized and cemented idea of why you’re going to a gathering.” (Interview 2022). Faerie intentionality parallels the neo-pagan notion of will, where a goal is defined (Grieve 1995). This can take the form of both individual and overlapping and collective intentions, all of which form the foundation of separatist, utopianist fae imaginaries. Faeries prioritize process over outcome, and intentionality provides fundamental direction for the journey. As Hennen so eloquently stated, “Most fairies understand their community as intentional, but exactly what this intentionality consists of is an open question” (2004, 96). Intention, especially setting an intention when placemaking, is not necessarily defining a clear path to arrive there but having a vision, a utopian imaginary. Freedom to crawl, stumble, skip, your way to the goal, give up, or forget about it entirely. Intentionality is created for the entire gathering, but discrete spaces within the gathering exist for myriad and diverse smaller intentions. Multitude of various sacred spaces within the larger sacred space of the gathering, intentionality, morality, and desire are mapped onto the landscape.

Deep-Rooted Ancestry and Tradition

Through intentional spaces created within the gathering for communication, faeries can share culture, wisdom, and best practices. Faeries will volunteer to host rituals or spiritual practices to lead others in spiritual becoming while also sharing tradition. Yoga, tantra, qi gong, erotic hypnosis, and libations ceremonies are all methods of leading a discrete group of faeries through ritual practice, communicating collectively through body and spirit. Workshops are hosted by faeries with the intention to develop specific skills, such as breathing, meditation, or masturbation, or teach certain topics. At one gathering, there was a workshop on death and dying, Draco and Bel
hosted a flogging demonstration and Hammer, who is an accountant from Portland, hosted a workshop titled “The Dirty Word: Money,” in which he discusses faerie individual and collective financial stability, urban cohousing, and communal ownership of sanctuary land. Workshops, activities, and more formal events within the gathering space can be spaces for creativity, imagination, and self-expression. While faerie culture and ritual are constantly changing, the survey results conveyed tradition is still regarded as markedly important (n = 19). The Austin gathering will often feature the traditional no-talent show for more performance-based art, as well as an annual faerie film festival, for which faeries can create and submit their own video. Through theatre workshops, show-and-tells, fashion shows, and dance parties, faeries allow their creativity to flow freely. These myriad intentions, materialized into various spaces, demonstrate the flexibility and mobility of faerie gathering placemaking, and a need for faeries to creatively express themselves.

Most faeries were not able to recall any spaces within the metroplex through which they connect to faerie ancestry. “With sacred space, there’s an opportunity for people to usher in and connect with hierarchical or ancestral energy. I think, for me, that’s been experienced when we had the mini gathering,” which was hosted at a campground outside city limits (Blueflame). Peter seconds this in saying he feels connected to faerie histories at gatherings, “especially where there are people from other cities and stuff like that who I don’t know very well and who may have a lot more history than I do, or the people I know here” (Interview 2022). Gatherings provide a space for ancestral faerie placemaking, as CDA data illustrates separatist faerie spaces are used to tap into the fae heritage and ancestry, portrayed in Figure 4.8 (2022). And there was a high level of agreement between survey respondents who felt it was both necessary to know faerie history (n = 19) and for mentors to guide others (n = 19). Eldership can be a title formally given to or taken by
a faerie, or informally used in reference to someone wise and knowed. “There are people who think of me as an elder and I appreciate the honor they bestow on me, and I learned so much from it. I just get to keep learning and growing and, you know, the world has changed a lot in the last 30 years. There’s a bunch of stuff happening in the outer world that especially the younger faeries have access to and can help me understand, and I have the opportunity to share the things that I’ve learned. Those kinds of things that are the traditions” (Mimosa Interview 2022). Mimosa understands his role as elder as a position of teaching and of learning, a privilege to be able to grow alongside a community instead of lifting them up. Talon explains the significance of eldership in his life, as an older man but relatively newer faerie, “I can learn from this person. I can learn what he or she went through. I can learn what he or she feels. What they learned. what was it like? What did they learn and how did they grow? You lose the wisdom and knowledge, but you will also lose a lot of the warmth that only comes with age” (Interview 2022). Here, Talon deconstructs the nuances of various relations within eldership, a combination of platonic or sexual intimacy with mentorship.

Eldership practices contribute to faerie placemaking by “facilitating conscientization…aiming to produce historic knowledge about oneself and about the groups to which one belongs, thereby producing a different understanding, and giving sense to one’s temporal and spatial place in the society, and one’s specific life-world” (Toolis 2017, 189). A part of coming home to faeriedom is learning the histories to foster a deeper narrative of belonging and emplacement. Radical faerie adults do not typically give birth to little radical faerie children and raise them in the fae faith. It is a burden for the elders to pass on faerie tradition and individual practices and knowledge to newer faeries. Dawne expresses, “gatherings to me are that passage of stories, which passing of the faerie culture baton. That’s where we learn about our faerie ancestors
and where we step on their shoulders to create even more faerie spaces and experiences” (Interview 2022). When discussing eldership during his interview, Bel realized he was the eldest faerie of Austin, attending his first gathering in 1981, and discusses his accumulation of fae history and knowledge, as well as his desire to pass it along. Mimosa echoes this sentiment in his interview, in a half-jest, “I really want to stay connected to younger people, because I don’t want to have all my friends just die out. I want to be one of the ones that the young people will have to mourn.” Beyond a willingness and urgency to teach faerie culture, there must be faeries willing and able to learn it.

     Faeries demonstrate respect to elders in an eagerness to receive their wisdom. Some younger faeries seemingly do not prioritize this as much as older faeries would like them to, while others are greatly motivated to learn everything they can. Draco says, “I’m relatively new. So, I don’t know much history about Austin faeries, but I do know people who have been here 25-30 years, you know. And just hearing all their stories. ‘Oh, I remember so and so…’ and ‘This is my 29th campout…’ It’s just, like, wow!” (Draco). Draco continues to say he is not only fascinated by the temporal depth of faerie culture, but the spatial breadth as well, listening to stories of faeries who travel along national or international faerie networks and picking up stories and wisdom along the way. Of course, when reproducing cultural knowledge, sometimes problematic faerie beliefs are perpetuated in the next person. Some attempt to keep faerie culture as close to what they perceive was the original intent of the founders, while others are attempting to adapt faerie culture to changing contexts. And this creates tension in the eldership process, discouraging younger faeries when they encounter older and seemingly problematic viewpoints and discouraging elders when they believe they are disrespected. While respect for elders is crucial, as an elder himself, Mimosa believes mutual respect and honor for the younger ones is equally important (Interview
2022). For Mimosa, this is a hands-off approach of passing on the wisdom he has gained and allowing the newer faeries to choose their own informed path forward. Ancestral faerie placemaking can be a space for intergenerational dialogue, mutual growth, discussing multiple histories and contested narratives, and creating an informed path forward.

Distributions of Power and Labor

Based on anarchist values, faeriedom is not governed, no centralizations of power or formal vertical hierarchies exist. Egalitarian utopian ideals are materialized to various degrees within all faerie space and culture. Over time and with practice, it has become general knowledge with more established faeries what kind of labor is needed to coordinate and maintain the gathering, and people are urged to volunteer for specific rotating collective or stable individual duties. Some tasks are more task oriented, like trash duty, while others are more spatial, such as maintaining the love lounge or dining area. Those who volunteer to do one of the most laborious but most respected roles, of providing sustenance for all the people thrice daily, are lovingly called the kitchen queens. Of course, positively little is truly mandatory within faeriedom and thus people can choose to not take on any responsibility. While Hennen (2004) witnessed more labor from newer faeries who lived on sanctuary land, possibly due to a new fervor or attempting to prove one’s belonging by overcontributing, I found the opposite to be true at periurban gatherings not hosted on sanctuary land. Many newer faeries and I took on smaller responsibilities, not knowing exactly what to expect or how things are typically done, and thus more of the laborious or intensive duties were taken up by the established faeries. Thus, instead of a system where the newer faeries did much of the labor to support the elders, I encountered a system where newer faeries did more auxiliary work to support the grander work of the elder faeries. Beyond this, within the atmosphere of contribution, playbor demonstrates one’s commitment to the gathering and reverence for its
sanctity. While faeries volunteer to maintain the space and provide sustenance for the people, they also volunteer to host workshops, heartcircles, or other activities. Faeries usually experience little resistance during the gathering in taking on responsibility and committing to contribute enough time and energy to making the space magical; however, planning for the gatherings can be more taxing.

There are typically a few faeries who plan each gathering. Urban faeries, when not already in the magical space of the gathering, seem to have a challenging time self-motivating to contribute to the good of the community. The emphasis on individual interests of freedom from constraint and freedom of choice creates tension and anxiety when too many faeries simultaneously want to reap the rewards of the gathering without first contributing. Blueflame observes a disjointedness in various faerie communities around the globe due to this foundational anarchy, except there was a common belief sense European collectivism lent to more bolstered social cohesion and stronger faerie communities (Interview 2022). At the moment, communities cannot compel a faerie to contribute to planning or execution, and even making contribution a mandate to attend often does not sit well within faerie ethics. In his interview, René scrutinized the need for more balance between creative self-expression and structure, “I know they clash with each other, and so it’s not easy to find a balance. But to somehow create a framework that allows for freedom and creativity, but at the same time, being able to have some kind of way to organize it, as well, which is very challenging” (Interview 2022). Often the prioritization of individual rights over collective needs, from a foundational anarchist ethic, sometimes breaks a community or prevents a gathering from materializing.

Faerie Sexospatialities and the Love Lounge

Within faerie culture, sexuality is not simply what you desire or how you behave, or how
many partners you may have, as Rubin’s original sex hierarchy was categorized (1998), rather sexuality is an expression of one’s faerie essence and potentially a connection with another’s essence. Mimosa described his understanding of faerie sexuality as progenitor, “our sexuality is what brought us into the creation of faerie space. That’s the beginning of it. So, there is an availability to us of sexual ritual, but the spiritual focus is different than having sex and then praying for forgiveness. I understand that gods have given me my sexuality and it is a gift. And it is something for me to treasure as part of my miraculous creation of me, Of the miraculous creation of meaning” (Mimosa). Thus, sexuality is not merely behavior, it is not even an identity, but a connection to the divine, an expression of care and reverence, and a mode of finding and achieving purpose. Talon argues, “for most gay people, sex is just a part of who we are. It’s not something that is dirty, it’s not something that’s hidden, it’s not something that is to be ashamed of. It’s a joyous wondrous gift to be shared… it was meant to be freeing” (Talon). Sexuality is a method for accessing the divine inside and connecting to the divine surrounding them. Faerie sexuality is a form of communication. “I think it’s a form of communication. I think it’s a form of ritual. I think it’s a form of worship.” (Dawne Interview 2022). Here, Dawne uses these words polysemously—communication between people or with the divine, ritual as in traditional spiritual practice and repetitive sexual practice and worshiping of the deity and of the other person. Sexual communication, if all goes well, can lead to connection, intimacy, and magic.

At the base level sexuality is an expression of a desire. Within a faerie worldview of multiplicity and freedom, there is of course a recognition and nurturance of myriad modes of desire, including a broad range of things to acceptably be the object of sexual desire and a spectrum of intensity with which each person can feel and express this desire. Connections may materialize
in the form of platonic and/or collective intimacy, as Steve discussed his first faerie gathering during his interview:

When I went down to the [gathering], one of the things that I was hoping for was to be able to find friendship that had a bit of intimacy to it. And I think that sexual connection provides a lovely something that has been missing for me going through a divorce, going through the pandemic. Intimacy, being able to trust another person with, you know, a little bit of love, a little bit of tenderness, and sharing of myself. And I found a lot of that there. And it was actually one of the reasons why I think I really enjoyed it was to be able to be intimate with lots of people. And not necessarily, you know, throw-me-against-the-wall sex, but just kind of sharing each other and enjoying each other.

Faeries often have intimate or sexual moments scattered throughout their friendships, and intimacy, like all other aspects of faeriedom, can be collective and egalitarian. Orgies, touch rituals, bodywork workshops, and even naked cuddle puddles are all forms of shared intimacy and sexual connection within a community which relieve social tensions, break down egoism or hierarchies, create liminal spaces of expression and exploration, and strengthen community attachment and bonds. Another form of sexual connection, to the self, to the other, to all, or to the divine, is sex magic. Mimosa asserts, “Even if I don’t know his name, even if we never speak, the expression of my sexuality becomes a holy ritual to bring me—another person if there’s another person involved—and my higher power to a connection” (Interview 2022). Since sexualities originate from the spiritual fae essence, the expression of that sexuality becomes ritual, prayer, and worship. Faeries often believe an orgasm is giving a bit of your essence to the other person, and taking some of theirs, the ultimate form of intimacy in the melding of two spirits and two bodies. Sunrise joked, he was not trying to use faerie culture as a dating pool, but “if I find myself dating someone who’s not as free as me--mentally, spiritually, whatever--I find myself trying to open their mind and their hearts in whatever way I can. And their hole, you know, with my Radical Faerie energy” (Interview 2022).

Gatherings have an established practice of delineating a discrete space for intimate or
sexual connection, called a love lounge or love temple. Peter explains a defined space for sexuality makes it easier to locate for faeries who desire it and easier to avoid for those who do not (Interview 2022). Like the other spaces mapped across the gathering for various intentions and connections, the love lounge does facilitate these interactions; however, unlike other intentions and desires amid the gathering, open sexuality at gatherings outside of the love lounge and one’s own sleeping quarters has customarily been discouraged. Hennen reported nearly two decades ago:

> While I did not expect that the gathering would take the form of a non-stop public orgy, I did expect to see some tolerance for public sexual activity. In fact, I overheard part of a rather heated discussion on the topic, wherein one faerie was arguing against public sex by linking it with issues of respect. (2004, 130-131)

It is paradoxical—for a culture founded on sexual liberation—open and unstrained sexuality should be one of the hardest ideals to achieve. Draco explained he understands both viewpoints because sometimes he wants one-on-one interaction and privacy, and other times he pines for sex against a tree with a group of people watching (Interview 2022). During my one Austin gathering, I witnessed the love lounge in use and a pre-planned circlejerk at a personal campsite, both of which provide a spatially discrete and formalized expression of sexuality. Why do faeries seem to have issue with open and public displays of sexuality? For many, this is seen as a distraction. Steve comments, “if someone has an intention that doesn’t belong there, I’m certain that would ruin it...a lot of people thought I was going to faerie camp for a sex party which, you know, there’s this that and the other. But I think that could be something that ruins the intention if you’re just there looking to get dirty” (Interview 2022). Here, it seems like the faeries who discourage open sexuality may be reacting to, and possibly overreacting to, perceived public assumptions about gathering goings-on. Blueflame spoke the same sentiment with stronger language, “you’re always going to have people on the physical sexuality side that are just seeking cock constantly. And I’m like, how boring is fucking that?” (Blueflame). Also, there seems to be a valuation and
hierarchization of individual faerie intention for the gathering, where sexuality is not seen as equally valuable, insightful, or transformative as spiritual or social intentions, despite the sentiments about sexuality discussed above.

Other faeries argue against open sexuality at gatherings in respect for the creation of sacred and intentional space. This could be a respect for the full diversity of faeriedom, of those who lie on all parts of the spectrum from hypersexual to asexual, or an invasion of mainstream sexual stigma and obsequious kowtowing. Hennen proposed another possible factor in the application of subject-subject consciousness to faerie sexualities (2004). Faeriedom was, in part, founded on a reaction against heteronormative and urban objectification of queer culture and peoples. In exalting subjective connection above all other forms of being and doing, seemingly objectifying sexuality—and any other form of shallow connection—are lesser and possibly even disrespectful to those who are attempting to focus on the seemingly truer form of faerie being. CDA data, shown in Figure 4.8, supports the latter argument as separatist spaces were perceived as spiritual and social, deprioritizing sexuality—meaning, while sex did happen quite frequently at gatherings, urban faeries were not attending for this purpose (CDA 2022). Lastly, and most probably, is a refusal to acknowledge the messy and complicated realities of sexuality and desire because “an open acknowledgment of these patterns would work to undermine the notion that gatherings represent a space where love and acceptance are extended to all” (Hennen 2004, 132). In this argument, there is a distinction between the utopian imaginary of open sexuality and of the lived realities of desire. Within faeriedom, as in every other culture in the world, there is still a desire for beauty and youth. The notion of a truly open and equitable sexual culture and practice, of equal desire and opportunity for all, is not realized by those who are undesired by other faeries in attendance, shattering the illusion of the ideal and thus calling into question countless other ones.
However, through discouraging open sexuality, faeries can bind sexual expression and connection to a discrete space, and this space can be more easily avoided, as Steve mentioned, only needing to be encountered when one chooses. Additionally, faeries can then create a hierarchical framework where sociospiritual intentions are more true than sexual ones, providing them ample reason to not interact with this space without having to question their own avoidance. This bifold logic maintains the utopian aspirations for those who fear to lose it, but at the cost of the freedom of others.

Sexuality and sexual expression, especially queer forms, have been stigmatized and violenced within mainstream spaces and cultures. In his interview, Mercury contextualizes growing up in the 1960s-70s and not having the resources or cultural knowledge to understand his sexuality, repressing it until his sexuality started to resurface in considerably ‘unhealthy’ expressions. Blueflame, who is a decade younger, believed sexuality is more accepted recently than it has been in past decades, but is more ‘diluted’ now, making truly intimate connection less available than it had previously been (Interview 2022). Gatherings are spaces for healing past traumas and current tensions, slowly and carefully undoing the damage wrought mostly within the city.

Spaces of Sobriety and Healing

Mind-altering drugs are commonly used in faeriedom to enhance social, sexual, and spiritual connection, as well as to heighten pleasure. Faeries seemed quite accepting and encouraging of the use of mind-altering substances and quite open to discussing the topic. There is more frequent use of more common substances, such as alcohol, caffeine, and weed, and rare use of stronger psychedelics, such as ayahuasca, peyote, shrooms, and acid. Mimosa stated in his interview inappropriate substance abuse could disrupt the sacredness of the gathering, but often
can be worked around and accommodated. Within faeriedom, the freedom from constraint is foundational, but there is a collective sense of acceptability for types of substances and respectability for proper dosing. As with sexuality above, this creates a virtue-based ethic relative to the supremacy of subjectivity, and other intentions or behaviors are seen as lesser. In this same logic, there was a distinction made between numbing and stimulating substances, and some faeries believed the numbing substances were less conducive to enhancing one’s experience. It was also conveyed stronger substances were more appropriate for personal spiritual journeys while weaker substances were ideal for social circumstances (Ibid). Other faeries spoke of the capacity for mind-altering substances to both bolster sociospiritual experiences and to support the healing process. It was encouraged to use consciousness-altering substances, especially psychedelics, for individual or collective ‘mind-expanding.’ Alcohol was especially controversial, and was the only substance specifically placed right on the line of acceptability, with dosing becoming the deciding factor (Ibid). This ambivalence to alcohol may stem from experiences and memories of alcohol abuse causing disruptions to faerie communities and individual faerie livelihoods alongside the common acceptance, desire, and consumption of alcohol within faerie culture and more mainstream cultures.

Gatherings are viewed as a safe space and time to explore; however, there have been a handful of calls, and a smattering of attempts, for more faerie sober spaces. Faeries engaged in this project who identified as sober in relation to sex, drugs, and alcohol. There is a subnetwork of sober faeries who see each other at urban recovery meetings, provide mutual support, and often will have sober-oriented discussions at gatherings. They do not attempt to hide but are instead somewhat invisibilized by the other faeries until a new call for sober spaces emerges. Sober faeries will often incorporate faerie wisdom into their 12-step programs or sobriety. Heartcircles, which
interestingly from the outside appear entirely like a typical circle-style AA meeting, are often safe spaces for vulnerability and healing. I encountered two rationales for creating sober spaces: to foster genuine and authentic subjective connection, and to be more respectful and inclusive to sober faeries. I did not ask faeries if they identified as sober, but many openly discussed it with relatively less shame and stigma. All sober faeries who participated in this project vocalized they did not need a sober event or a culture of prohibition; they were at a place where they can be around the behavior and substances and choose whether to engage. Mercury referred to the adage, “The scenario of passing a joint around a campfire, I’ve been in that. I was at a faerie gathering and they were passing around a joint and I was like ‘Oh no thanks.’ They didn’t care. So that’s yeah that didn’t bother me at all” (Interview 2022). Although none of the sober faeries felt they needed a sober event, when asked if having the love lounge, or similar spaces like a drugs and alcohol lounge, designated for sexuality and substance use would be helpful, quite a few agreed it theoretically could. An important caveat though, faeries who participated in this project only discussed substance abuse from the position of sobriety, and no perspective was obtained from faeries who may still be actively abusing. As Mercury said, “I would call [the love lounge] sacred space. But you can also do that out under the tree or the stars, you create your own sacred space there. And quite honestly, I’m also a bit of a voyeur, so I’ll go out there and just watch” (Mercury). While he said this half-jokingly, I believe he really did not want to see the sociospiritual potentiality of sexuality--or its chemical enhancement--disappear, for either the faerie community or for himself.

These spaces create intentional faerie space for connection, communication, and creativity. Angel says, “In the faerie community, you’re given the freedom to explore whatever you want to explore, you’re given the freedom to work through whatever you want to work through... to
explore whatever fantasies you might have” (Interview 2022). Through spaces of connection and community, faeries can facilitate collective healing and discovery. Heartcircles are quite customary practice, and this structure can be commandeered for other activities. Peter explained an activity which focuses the ethic of the heartcircle into a specific intention and application—communicating your needs and desires and having them affirmed or echoed back to you, here quite literally (Interview 2022). And another faerie commandeered this egalitarian arrangement in hosting a circlejerk, while expanding the standard objectification of the activity to more nuanced modes of connecting by having each person share their sexual aspirations with the group. In this same manner the structure is used to create a space of vulnerability in speaking your needs and desires and having them affirmed in various ways by the group, here affirmed by the ongoing masturbation. Through the sex magic of the circlejerk, they were attempting to speak life to and manifest their desires. A pivotal step in the creation of sacred space, for Angel, is verbalizing one’s needs and desires; once verbalized, others can affirm those desires and potentially help realize them.

When leaving the city is not desired or possible, or in the temporal spaces between gatherings, these purist placemaking endeavors must be translated into cityspace. The next section discusses these transpositions and other uniquely-urban forms of faerie placemaking.

The City

Each faerie community is formed within and influenced by distinct urban cultures, and therefore must contend with unique negotiations of discontents and benefits. Urban faerie communities in North Central Texas have unique regional spatial, cultural, and environmental contexts, and even localizing faerie culture within Austin and Dallas, whose communities significantly overlap, produces distinct subjectivities. While the focus of this study is the urban
faerie communities of these two cities, it is important to always keep in mind these local emplacements are but two nodes on a global faerie network, and the localization of faerie culture in each of these nodes is but a piece of the diverse mosaicism across multiple continents. Thus, it is necessary to understand the general urban faerie ecology and experience shared by Austin and Dallas, as well the significant diversity within each. It is also important to stress some of these findings may apply to a portion of urban faerie communities, especially within the United States, possibly across the Western neoliberal world, while a good portion of these findings may only be useful in quite discreet spatial contexts. Less research has focused on urban faerie communities and their specific ethnoecological contexts because academics believe the true potential of faeriedom lies in its more separatist and countercultural settings, and faeries will often state urbanity can be overwhelming or exhausting.

The faeries are quite sensitive to spiritual, energetic landscapes, either through presence or more active forms, such as divination. The urban landscape is an affectual environment to which faeries are often socio-sexo-spiritually attuned. Sunrise, as a faerie and a real estate professional, states he is quite aware of spaces through both perspectives as he moves throughout the city (Interview 2022). Thus, when exploring urban faerie placemaking, it is important to also consider non-physical and non-representational ethnoecological epistemologies and experiences, which are often understood and expressed by faeries as energies, auras, frequencies, histories, vibrations, and a myriad of other forces and states of being. Blueflame explained this realm as an “energy ether that’s around” which imbues spaces with sacredness (Interview 2022). Although a presence is needed to refine one’s attunement, faerie affectual and energetic purview is not limited to the present. Angel notes of the past, “I believe that the frequency and the energy of that event is still in that spot” (Interview 2022). Faeries are sensing the spatiohistories of the city, their effects on
the present, and the energetic and affectual capacity of a space for creating potential for the future. As Grieve purported, “energy, the affective sentiment perceived to be generated by creative acts… gives a common order to a particular group of human actors and thereby channels a field of discourse and practice along parallel lines” (1995, 97). The environment has the power to amplify experiences and empower faeries, but, while the ecological magnification of faerie socio-sexo-spirituality within nature is assured, this is much more tenuous spatially and temporally within an ever-changing urban landscape.

Urban flux can create an environment of uncertainty and even volatility, leading to a faerie ambivalence to their place of dwelling. Most urban faeries choose to live in the city, while some only live within the sprawl due to economic or social constraints and would prefer to live elsewhere. Significantly overlapping but not correlational, there is also a split in urban faeriedom for those who yearn for queer separatist lifestyles and those who do not. Where any individual urban faerie falls onto these spectra of desire and agency greatly influence their impression of urban life. This is supported with survey data, in which 90% of participants currently report living in the urban metroplex, but only half would like to remain there, if given the chance to live anywhere (n = 18). However, they are not escaping far to achieve this idyllic life since almost 90% of participants would still like to remain within an hour of the city (n = 18). This data demonstrates a significant tension between the desire to escape and the unwillingness to give it up entirely. Seymour philosophically asks what it would mean to queer ecology to “not love nature, or to love something which is unnatural” (2012, 64). While the faeries do still love nature, they have come to love the city too. Deciding to live in urbanity and finding purpose from the placement, faeries believe they can achieve change. Faerie collaborators identified a commitment of “taking gathering knowledge into the city. Going through darkness and pain and unpleasantness in order to get to
where we want to be.” The faeries are acting as Morgensen’s urban primitives, using a panspiritual
nativism from appropriated world cultures to bring new knowledge, practice, and potentialities to
urban contexts (2011). In turn, in their worldview, the relationship of urban faeries as bearers of
knowledge and wisdom is transformed from a strategic assimilationism to a transgressive
infiltrationism. As the urban faeries, they believe it is their role in the community to translate faerie
wisdom to the city folk, and in this context, faeries are saviors of modern peoples and must
sacrifice by remaining within urbanity to achieve a better future.

To Be An Urban Faerie

Within the city, faeries are not only surrounded by the multitude normativities of
mainstream urban cultures but are enveloped in an environment founded in and materialized of
these values and norms. Fears, ignorances, expectations, and erasures are part of urban life, and
“framing problems of naturalized sexual oppression as issues of environmental justice” will work
toward linking the social and ecological oppression of queerness (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010, 63).
Because lived space is the product of cumulative past decisions placed within various temporal
contexts (Lefebvre 2000), the social oppression of the past and the present, as well as the desires
for future normativities, aggregate within the materiality of the built environment to ecologically
oppress urban queer folks. In the city, faerie bodies are policed by three mechanisms of social
control – the common people, the policy, and the police. As children, they are enculturated within
the educational system and society to fit into certain ways of being and behaving. “The other kids
at school picked up on that before we even picked up on that, and so we’ve been living in this
guarded way for so long,” said Sunrise (Interview 2022). This continues into adulthood with
neighborhood policies and see-something-say-something policies. Sunrise continues, “And in the
city, you’re constantly accosted by the rest of humanity. And it seems like a majority of them seem
to understand what isn’t normal, that thing that the kids recognized in me in elementary school that I didn’t understand for myself” (Interview 2022). The disciplining of the body by other community members creates stigma, anxiety, and fear. Mimosa explained, “I worry sometimes too much about what people think. And there are people who criticize me, sometimes loudly, for being different” (Interview 2022). Faeries often believed neglected areas of the city were bodily unsafe; on the other hand, they also discussed perceptions of increased vigilante harassment in heavily-securitized, upscale areas. Draco commented, even when using ride-share transportation, he does not want to be standing there at night, alone, signifying as nonconforming. With or without public sentiment, faeries also feel shamed and policed by municipal and state policies. Peter quipped, “So, I imagined the state capitol is not a particularly faerie-friendly space. And some people might be taken aback or not appreciate certain faerie activities and get ups and costumes” (Interview 2022). And Mimosa explained why he feels urban policy often works against the faerie community, “I think I want to say that the authorities who make those decisions have no concept of anonymous sex as a spiritual practice they’re like not a clue and if you suggested it to them, they would be horrified and really curious.” (Interview 2022). Law enforcement imposes social policy and law, uphold power structures, and maintain capital and wealth by intimidating, citing, arresting, or destroying bodies. With greater privatization and securitization of urban landscapes it becomes more difficult to access spaces within the city. “And you can just be hauled away for trespassing just for sitting down sometimes in a place, right? Or they’ll ask you to leave…” said Steve (Interview 2022). Furthermore, these social mechanisms support an increasingly urban atmosphere of fear which shapes the contemporary physical cityscape for the next few generations of urban queer people and completing the co-constitutive cycle of oppression between social and ecological queer oppression. While social policing creates stigma and shame, policy and its
enforcement create second-class citizenship and legal informalization of the faeries which can have rippling effects through employment and social service systems.

In many circumstances, urban faeries can exert some agency and refusal in attempting to avoid these spaces of policing; ultimately, they all must work in order to afford housing and other living standards, and, in this system, they feel beholden and powerless. DeLight says, “I work in a corporate setting. I can’t be faerie in the way I would like to be because I gotta wear, not just any kind of clothes, I got to wear like a dress code to walk into a corporate setting. That’s challenging to have free flowing like a radical self-expression in corporate urban settings” (Interview 2022). Sunrise discusses how he felt the need to appear ‘princely’—handsome but wholly regular—when he was a dancer looking for employment. He goes on to say, “That limited me. And yet, we all have to work. So if we’re wanting to return back to spaces that are perceived as normal, corporate spaces, spaces that are dictated by straight folks, then sometimes we feel like we need to cut our hair or, you know, take out the piercing or put on a long sleeve shirt to cover our tattoos. So, it’s that idea of fitting into the norm that gets in the way of me living my life as a faerie” (Interview 2022). Social and physical urban landscapes were designed to maintain a docile and complacent labor pool for capital accumulation, and intimidation, fear, and punishment maintain the prescriptive normative ideal. Faeries transgress social norms, when possible, and bear elevated risk in doing so. KJ explains, “There is a certain way that you have to be without standing out to avoid certain conflicts. I think when you grow up, fearing, expressing yourself…for like physical violence or mental violence, stuff like that. It makes you rethink wanting to be your true self in the settings. So, you have to put a mask on to like, be like everybody else” (Interview 2022). Faeries code switch when in various urban spaces, strategically assimilating through the art of glamouflage, blending in while simultaneously standing out. For example, Steve will wear colorful
socks under his slacks and Peony often will pair his work polo with a modest pearl necklace. Glamouflage is historically common of most queer identities since distinct signifiers may be utilized to loudly claim one’s belonging to the marginal while not understood by others.

While navigating the social realm of urbanity, faeries must also contend with the material city itself. Development is forever changing the urban landscape, but it is not always appreciated, “I’m just like, God, what is this monstrosity building that they’re putting up or whatever. But I live here, and I have to make it work. And I can complain, and I do complain. But in the end, that gets me nowhere” said Draco (Interview 2022). Faeries complained less regarding the process of change and more about the quality of the new landscape, a witnessed carelessness. Additionally, development requires destruction and reconstruction, often competing for space and time with transportation systems and other urban resources. Surprisingly, most faeries named movement and congestion by far as one of the largest hinderances to faerie life in the city. Transportation as a factor of time was an issue in finding the spare time to meaningfully engage in faerie life or in the cost-benefit analysis of impossible commutes across town for smaller faerie meet ups. Steve explains of Austin, “during rush hour getting over the river is deadly. So sometimes you get home you just don’t want to go anywhere, right? You certainly want to go back over that way or back over there” (Interview 2022). As numerous faeries engage in informal economies and not all own their own vehicle, mode and availability of transportation was also an issue. Some faeries would have to negotiate rides from family or friends, navigating public transport or ride-share systems, and circumventing rush hour times. Sunrise amusingly wished he could get around by skipping!

Development and fossil-fueled transportation systems lead to increased urban heat and sprawl. Faeries feel it is more difficult to use urban green spaces in the heat of Texas summers, and do not always have access to periurban parks or bodies of water. Peter finds “for someone that
finds connection with nature as being very spiritually fulfilling, living in any city can be a bit more challenging” (Interview 2022). Lastly, gentrification and increased urban costs of living are catalyzed by development and capitalist-backed inflation. René comments, “I mean, to be able to live an urban life, you have to have your financials in order…Like if I have to live in Dallas, I’m gonna have to have a job that pays me so I can afford to live in Dallas. And that takes away from allowing me to be in a fae lifestyle more readily and more often and more on a continuum” (Interview 2022). Steve says, “Austin has become incredibly expensive to live in. This place I know already rents for $200 more a month than when I started renting it in February” (Steve). Draco lamented things are going to keep getting more expensive and money will perpetually be a struggle. In addition to the anxieties of the urban faerie under capitalism, the community enclosed in the urban chaos.

In the postmodern city, people are constantly busy and going their own ways. Angel says, “There’s always stuff going on. I will admit that there has been a challenge to creating community more consistently. And I think the main reason for that is people’s busy lives” (Interview 2022). Commitments, competing priorities, and superimposed communities all divert energy and time from sustaining faerie community. Mercury calls this constant cacophony ‘swarming.’ Bel named this mentality the gotta-gotta-gotta because one feels the need to do this or that all the time, not slowing down and refocusing. Mercury no longer has time to sit and rest and do the things which fulfill him, like journaling or singing. Furthermore, the dissipation, dilution, diffusion of queer spaces over the last decades contributes to the sidetracking, as Blueflame discusses, “they think oh, you know, I’m gonna go and play kickball with the straight people for the next two seasons and not worry about going to fae tea” (Interview 2022). Dawne discusses having to compete between individualist and collectivist desires, he has his day-to-day activities, having to work to
pay rent, interpersonal relationships, passions and goals, anxieties about his living situation and environment, all of which distract or prioritize things over faerie community. Draco mentions the omnipotent clock, and the difficulty of aligning everyone’s individual calendars as they complete the daily grind. Steve discusses how these distractions keep you from finding oneness, “That’s a hard thing to do. You’ve had a tough day at work, and you don’t want to go do it. You’d rather just slumped down in front of the TV and watch Netflix, right?” (Interview 2022). Urban noise and affect contribute to the abrasiveness of the city. In his interview, Blueflame said, “It’s crazy here, the energy is crazy. That’s why I’m leaving in a week’s time for good.” However, most faeries live and even thrive within urbanity and, if the city truly is so pernicious, perhaps their placemaking practices generate powerful new negotiations and practices for minoritarian communities.

Urbanity is perceived as a place for growth, reinvention, discovery, whim, pleasure. Urban faeries believe in an urban culture of diversity, acceptance, and community, actively avoid ‘small town mentality,’ and view separatist life as too difficult or disconnected. Urban faeries see the city as independence and opportunity. “A city is essential for unlimited new potential connections. Recognizing, you know, that I really needed queer spaces, and that queer spaces exist in their largest, most realized forms in urban areas, I’ve always wanted to be a part of that,” said Sunrise (Interview 2022). Faeries feel nourished by urban affectual energies, although too much of a good thing can guarantee faeries intermittently leave the city to take needed breaks. Hennen argues the faeries are “exemplars of post-modern community movements, with all the paradox this implies…a curious indeterminacy about faerie identity, a postmodern emphasis on fluidity and incoherence,” and the city is the most complementary ecology for these beliefs and practices as it is constantly in flux (2004, 502). The density of urbanity provides the increased proximity
necessary to form nuanced, overlapping, co-constitutive affinity communities. Peter says the city allows him to find other faeries and other queer folks. René said, “If you’re living in a jungle, there’s only so many people we can interact with… You lose access to so many people, you know, just to influence, connect, and be with a larger community. The chances of having fae tea, people showing up for a tea” are minimized (Interview 2022). Sunrise takes this a step further in purporting urbanity enhances his identity and experience as a faerie, “It’s the people, it’s the connections. It’s those like-minded individuals, the other queerdos, I just stand a better chance of running into them naturally. in an urban setting. I’ve always felt that way” (Interview 2022). Urban culture and proximity allow for urban faeries to find community and social belonging, but it is the spatial and temporal landscape which allows the community to develop a sense for and attachment to the city.

Dawne discusses the geographic closeness of the faeries equates to relational closeness through additional quality time together. One faerie joked about having to drive too far for every Grindr hookup if you lived on the side of the mountain. Mimosa observed the spatial contiguity of urban faeries supports their temporal continuity by providing a critical mass of community members. The city provides both a diverse array of people with whom the faeries can share affinity, as well as a diverse array of spaces to create sacred space. For example, René is excited to have access to so copious queer-owned businesses and mystic stores. Bel discusses the opportunity for curiosity, spontaneity, and adventure in a larger city, “you never know what’s going to happen. Next thing you know, we’re out on a trip to some strange place, you know, let’s go see this the Museum of Strange Things, or something like that” (Interview 2022). It is much more difficult to purposely lose oneself in a small rural town with one stoplight. Bel also discussed the curiosity and imagination extending beyond the arts and culture scene to the vast troves of urban knowledge,
saying he enjoys his access to the four universities and dozens of public libraries his urban metroplex address grants him. The diversification of space and people allow niche communities to still find a sense of attachment and even some trust. In this trust, faeries discuss the city as a repository for their life-long community energy, as the sanctuary land has been for generations.

The Sanctity of the City

While there is relatively no debate within faeriedom regarding the sanctity of nature and wilderness spaces, even between urban faeries the sacredness of the built environment is contested. In his interview, Dawne echoed historical sentiment when stating urban spaces were “by nature antithetical to faerie sacred space” (Interview 2022). In considering Christian churches, Mimosa qualifies some urban spaces are ‘recognized generally’ as sacred, but these built spaces ‘tend not to be’ considered sacred faerie spaces due to the historical exclusion of queerness from Judeo-Christian religious traditions and sanctified grounds (Interview 2022). These examples demonstrate past systems of oppression and power, and how these spaces excluded or were weaponized against queer folks, need to be examined in considering the present or potential sacredness of urban spaces. However, because this project considered only the perspectives of urban faeries, many participants believed urban spaces to be sacred, at least partially or temporarily. As Bel eloquently observed, “Just because we don’t have goats wandering around on the front lawn doesn’t mean it can’t be a sacred space, or a safe sacred space, or a holy space... there’s quite a fashionable urge to bash the city but the city is extremely magical” (Interview 2022). Even Dawne changed his mind during his interview, eventually stating urban spaces can be sacred for certain groups of people employing the right intention and engagement. Thus, at a gut-instinctive or affective level, urban spaces may seem to be quite profane, but placemaking practices permeate them with faerie sacredness.
For some faeries, all spaces are inherently sacred and energetic, and they do not understand constructed delineations between urban/rural or natural/built spaces; however, for most others, although they choose to live in the city, feel not all built environments are sacred, or equally so. Draco examines how age is a specific consideration for built spaces, from ancient structures to historic buildings, the relative maturity of the space accumulates sanctity. Urban spaces are also sanctified by their perceived authenticity. In his interview, Mercury says, “I’m gonna sound silly when I say this, but they’re true to themselves. Sacred space is nothing more than what it is if that makes any sense” (Interview 2022). The authenticity of nature spaces is often defined by its relative wildness, but defining authenticity within the built environment is more difficult. Mercury attempts to define these spaces through feeling calmness and profundity simultaneously, an anticipation of transformation by means of “hearing something the universe wants [him] to hear” (Interview 2022). Urban spaces can borrow its authenticity directly from nature through conversation with or assimilation of natural elements. Talon derides people for considering concrete and brick churches as sanctified spaces while ignoring or decimating urban green spaces, saying they are ‘not in touch with anything’ (Interview 2022). Here, the sanctity of space is defined in its relationship with the natural world.

If urban spaces do not lift their authenticity from nature, they can assuredly collect it from the people. Sunrise remarked in his interview on the sacredness of built space:

So, I think urban spaces always are built with the idea that as soon as it’s built and completed, people will come and make use of it. And urban spaces are contingent on that use. So yes, they’re sacred. They’re sacred to many people. They’re transient in that sacredness… And whether, you know, the energy remains or not, they can be rest assured that there’s been hundreds, thousands, and millions of people that have passed through that space, since they were last there. And yet, there’s something magical that remains. So yes, urban spaces are sacred.

Sunrise described a sacredness of spaces which aligns with both faerie ontology and Western
developmental epistemologies, the construction of the space imbued the space with intention. And although legions may share this space, the inherent sacredness is not diminished, and may even be amplified by communal use. The conceived space imbues the lived space with intention, if done properly; then, if this conception matches the needs of the community, they will properly use the space, maintaining the sacredness. It is a postmodern sanctity not tied to community or identity, but to movement and change. DeLight echoes the notion of inherent sacredness of the urban through proper aesthetic care. If the space was designed to be properly functional and to additionally infuse the city with beauty, it carries inherent sacredness from this intention and effort. Further, Sunrise shares how he is always ready for change, and does not feel compelled in the city to perform formal ritual for a space which is decommissioned or destroyed to be reconstructed, as the sacredness is inherent in the geographic space itself which might undergo innumerable transformations in a single lifetime (Interview 2022). On a lived temporal and spatial scale, the built environment greatly influences community and attachment, but on spiritual scales of eons, the sacredness remains with the earth and elements. In this perspective, nothing in the city is forever and these changes need not be grieved or dwelled upon too deeply, and the built environment itself may be a distraction from more authentic, durable forms of sacredness. This large-scale spiritual ambivalence to place creates both a deep connection to earth and a detachment to the contemporary specifics of the human-made.

The sanctity of built space can also originate from the inherent sacredness of humanity, or from a faerie essence more specifically. For example, Dawne believes city hall, or any other place designed around “... an act of service such as the food bank or a shelter. I think those are sacred spaces” (Interview 2022). The sacredness of space here comes from the social construct of servant leadership and the virtuosity of behavior, underpinned by a belief in the sanctity of democracy and
political engagement. Further, urban faeries can imbue sacredness to the built environment through presence—both the state of existing and the intentional mindfulness. For Draco, this appears as “Just walking in there and just taking it all in and my presence there and the presence of everything that’s in there whether I see it or not that just makes it sacred... welcome to the space, just relax open your mind, and just be in the moment” (Interview 2022). Talon believes in having the peace of quietly communing with urban nature, being conscious of the surrounding animal and plant life in an urban form of presence placemaking. It can be more difficult to become or remain present in the city due to the “hustle and bustle, the responsibilities, the pressure of work, our daily routine, and the daily grind and urban spaces are designed more for business and commerce and like doing busyness... There’s so many distractions it takes an extra layer of discipline and focus” (René Interview 2022). Dawne speaks specifically to this discipline, “the demarcation helps you transition out of that urban sprawl into a sacred space, and when you’re in nature that happens organically but in urban space you have to create that space with intention and ritual to demarcate... breaking the monotony and stepping into a sacred space to help facilitate that connection” (Interview 2022). A space can be sanctified through individual or collective repetitive or significant use, but distraction, noise, unplanned chaos, all quite urban phenomena, can interfere in this process. Sunrise notes if a space is ‘too public’ and there are people around whose energies do not align with the energies or intentions of the faeries, “imagining people in the same way as a rain cloud if a group comes over with a strong energy that’s contrary to the energy that we’re trying to facilitate like we’re just cut through the space like a knife” (Interview 2022). In response to these distractions, interruptions, and constraints, urban faerie placemaking has adapted to be strategically mobile, temporary, and flexible. Being able to tap into the divine realm of either nature or of the faerie spirit allows urban faeries to transform the material and social spaces of the
city to meet their individual and collective needs and desires.

Urban Faerie Placemaking

Creating sexo-socio-spiritual place within the city varies greatly from that which was previously described in separatist spaces. On sanctuary land, placemaking is intergenerational, imaginative, and emplaced. Gatherings translate these endeavors into a transient placemaking always relative to both the sanctuary ideal and the urban origins of its constituents, as they often focus on a weekend of cathartic healing, unrestraint, and community-building beyond the city. In the vastness of these separatist spaces, faeries map myriad and simultaneous intentions and imaginaries across the land. Within the city, where the space is durable but often shared, faeries use a multipurpose and mobile style of placemaking, often too ephemeral to focus on more than a few imaginations, and thus transmutes within various spatial and social contexts. As described previously, the urban faeries employ both formal and informal placemaking processes for various goals, but they can also choose public or private, internally-focused or externally-focused, visible or invisible placemaking. While these are described as dichotomies, they are by no means mutually-exclusive or stable constructs. Faeries adapt multiple and often competing placemaking strategies simultaneously and can proactively or reactively adapt to changing temporal contexts. Faeries create pockets of faeriedom in the city for “the flourishing of queer identity and sexual desire in relation to the sacred” (Savastano 2007, 21). All in the hopes of finding that hidden gem of a space within the city which faeries temporarily call their own.

The Domestic

The home provides the spatial foundations of urban faerie community. Whether a rented space or owned, an apartment or house, the home contributes a stable and reliable space for faerie placemaking. Some urban faerie communities have a long-standing tradition of naming faerie
homes as a way of formalizing them and branding them urban sanctuary residences, providing spatial and material resources for the local community. For example, Dawne first owned Peckerwood before moving into Milkweed Manor in Dallas which was the physical site for much of this project. Faeries often feel as if they found home in faeriedom, and faeriedom finds a home in the urban household. Faeries bring the empowerment of creativity and imagination from separatist spaces into the urban home. Demonstrated in Figure 4.12, the home is a significant site for quite a diverse array of placemaking desires. Numerous faeries establish spiritual shrines within their homes, creating a stable space for bridging the sacred and the profane. Other faeries accumulate cultural and material archives, connecting to faerie histories and ancestry, to be shared freely or eventually inherited by others. Mimosa describes a gallery of pictures at Cetacea’s house, which “in a lot of ways documents my journey through the faeries…pictures from my earliest gathering, sometimes with people that I love and who have gone on” (Interview 2022). Ongoing domestic faerie placemaking creates distinct spaces of intention and desire, as a common space for both formal and informal social placemaking, as well as one of the predominant sites for individual or collective sex placemaking.

Homes are the location of urban faerie translations of stewardship and guardianship through ethical scruples of legal ownership and queer settler colonialism. Especially with access to yard or balcony, faeries cultivate land and life through gardens and foliage, feeling a groundedness within the placelessness of urbanity. Sunrise, and other faeries, feel the importance of putting literal roots in the places where he lives. Faeries connect with nature, temporarily tapping into the sublime, in these peri-domestic spaces. “Even in the backyard, earth has a specific frequency it vibrates that is very grounding to me. Like, if I am charged with emotions, the minute I step onto earth I can discharge” said Draco (Interview 2022). Thus, the home serves as a
dependable space for withdrawing, resting, and healing; however, this becomes more difficult as rents and housing market values skyrocket due to gentrification and record-setting post-pandemic inflation. Thus, even the faerie home must be mobile and adaptable, and faeries move often throughout the urban landscape, but they often tow their shrines, gardens, archives, closets, and art with them. Although not encountered during this project, quite a few faeries expressed desires for co-housing opportunities within the city in order to translate the imaginative communal practice of the sanctuary while also cost- and labor-distributing.

The Social

Socially constructed spaces were enveloped in physical space and time but were not dependent on a specific spatiality or temporality to exist. In other words, when spaces were defined by their social and cultural significance, and the physical place which housed it was minimally significant, they were coded as social spaces. The primary intention of social spaces is relational and not material; for example, it is important to have regular heartcircles and relatively less important where or when they happen. Informal mingles, formal events, heartcircles, cruising spots, nudist spaces, and working groups are all examples of social spaces used by urban faeries. Referring to Figure 4.11, social spaces were also viewed as ideal for self-expression and exploration among likeminded people, spiritual connection, and connection to cultural heritage (CDA 2022). As social spaces were not defined by their materiality, they were less constrained by it and relational placemaking emerges as quite mobile and flexible. DeLight explains, “And then you have like nomadic or temporary spaces. You set up a space, and you set up a container because you maybe rent it out and that’s more temporary but you can still like bring everything you need into that space to make it sacred for that time period and for that moment and then after it’s done then it can be moved away and then used for something else” (Interview 2022). The portability
and multi-purposefulness of urban placemaking generates adaptive spatial and temporal potentialities.

An informal example of faerie social placemaking is the deliberate use of faerie names. Within faerie separatist spaces, such as sanctuaries and gatherings, faerie names, when chosen, become the primary signifier to show acceptance, respect, and belonging. Relatively few faeries choose to have their faerie name be their primary designator in all realms of their lives, and thus must choose when and with whom to code switch. Most faeries do not see the use of non-faerie names in urban contexts as disrespectful, especially when in mixed company, but then the strategic use of one’s faerie name, when referring to self or comrade, becomes more meaningful and political. On the other hand, tumultuous is the fear of potentially outing someone as a faerie to neighbors or coworkers. There is sacredness and power in a name, a faerie magic which gives representation to that most essential faerie essence, and urban faeries believe sharing this ‘true’ name with non-faeries is an act of vulnerability and trust. Choosing to use faerie names within faerie spaces, or when engaging with overlapping communities or general audiences is a form of visibility, protest, and urban faerie social placemaking. The more faeries feel comfortable using their chosen names in various urban spaces and social contexts the more emplaced they may feel.

As Dawne succinctly said, sacredness is ‘where two or more are gathered’ (Interview 2022). There was a very high consensus between survey respondents regarding the importance of associating with other faeries (n = 19), but a moderate level of agreement in the contentment of urban faeries with their social lives (n = 19). The most usual form of urban placemaking is the informal gathering of less than a dozen or so faeries with overall little intention set besides spending quality time together, which I have termed the urban hangout. These informal hangouts align with Stillwagon & Ghaziani’s queer ‘pop-ups,’ liminal social spaces for exploration and
expression, however pop-ups are generally in more public spaces, such as parks or bars (2019). These pop-ups create intentional queer spaces beyond formal LGBTQ+ spaces, allowing for more diverse forms of queer space and being (Knee 2022). Urban hangouts can be in public with a group of people, or one-on-one at a person’s home. Smaller hangouts provide opportunities for deeper connections by identifying and fostering affinity within the urban faerie community, while larger ones broaden connection and affirm community-scale identity and belonging. In his interview, Sunrise surveys his experiences with meeting other faeries in the city and finds it is predominantly lunch dates, coffees, and dinners as he simply “loves to sit and gab like we’re doing now.” Bel echoes this sentiment in his experiences of having a ‘chill time’ with faeries collectively doing something frivolous (Interview 2022). And Blueflame comments he enjoys informal hangouts where “we could be in fae energy and just carry on” (Interview 2022). These more casual forms of urban faerie space with just a few people and virtually no structure allow faeries to access community and sacredness, connect subject-to-subject, while working around urban environmental constraints of competing time and space.

These hangouts intentionally mirror typical urban life, but imbue the interaction with faerie ontology, intention, and sacredness, achieving the smallest and easiest, but most flexible meeting of the spirit. The most ordinary form of urban hangout was a recurring, open-邀请 coffee or tea. While not as powerful or transformative as other placemaking strategies, these urban hangouts allow faeriedom to exist within the busyness of the city and play a part in sustaining urban communities. Toolis purports these informal gatherings create spaces for learning and relearning, localizing culture, and forming critical consciousness (2017). These informal spaces recognize and materialize the complexity of identity relative to mainstream cultures and the power inherent in
this relationship. More optimistically, low-stakes placemaking strategies create space for childlike creativity, trifling, flirtation, dabbling, and joy.

Informal faerie placemaking strategies utilize presence, living in and focusing on the moment and being attuned to the affective environment, to create sacred relational space. Especially within the chaos of urbanity priorities and responsibilities often compete, and faeries believe growth is inhibited unless one is able to focus on the moment (Angel Interview 2022). Some feel these moments are more precious because they are ephemeral. An attunement to the sense of the place, paired with a social conscientiousness, allows urban faeries to emplace themselves within larger spatial and temporal contexts, informing their placemaking strategies. René said faeries should cultivate a ‘centeredness’ or ‘being with what is’ within oneself, within the community, and within the ecology. This radical acceptance does not change the world, but it allows space for communing, healing, and contentment. There is also a placemaking of presence via existing bodily within the space, sharing affirmation, legitimacy, and belonging, and showing up for others. Both being there oneself and being there for others. A non-spatial example of social placemaking is ‘being there for each other,’ as was most prominently demonstrated when the partner of a local faerie passed away and the faerie community came together to support them through this period (Peter Interview 2022). Faeries assume space, often more than expected when their creativity and desires are unrestrained. However, presence can be socially contested, and faeries “push and stretch definitive…political, heteronormative boundaries,” queering urban space and time through daily life and practice (Lambert 2017, 1337). Presence placemaking forms a transitory and temporary attachment to space, and, since presence finds its sanctity in both self and environment, it can infuse placeless spaces with energy when an affectual landscape is lacking. Thus, faeries leave their footprint on the landscape to be felt far into the future.
Public urbanism is defined as physical spaces within the city boundaries which are not privately owned, such as urban parks, streets, and public buildings. Public spaces are relatively more accessible to more people than private spaces and thus have an egalitarian placemaking potential. As seen in Figure 4.9, public spaces are used by faeries for self-expression, sexuality, connecting with nature and the divine, and imagination (CDA 2022). Since public spaces are open to all and usually not as mired in capitalist endeavors, they become an ideal urban space for faerie placemaking; however, faeries often felt slight agitation at the competition for space and intermittent disruptions inherent in their communal nature. More alarming was the perceived apathy of fellow urbanites to properly maintain these spaces for all users, or to respect cross-cultural uses of the space. As Angel said, “our creation of a sacred space in an urban setting, sometimes it’s harder to maintain because people who do not respect that are crossing in and out of those spaces” (Interview 2022). Additionally, there is a cleansing of non-normative social spaces, like nudist and sexual spaces, even within the queer community, to attempt to assimilate and attract the broadest user base possible.

Weather permitting, parks and recreational spaces provide a natural retreat from the ubiquitous concrete, especially when faeries cannot venture out of the city to more liberating wild spaces. When asked how sacred space is maintained in the urban environment, Draco pithily responds, “I guess by the Parks Department” (Interview 2022). That sacred and green spaces were so readily conflated without hesitancy demonstrates the sheer importance of urban green spaces to faerie placemaking. Because entrepreneurial cities attempt to market themselves in a global market, and because ecotourism and environmental justice initiatives have boomed in the past decade, cities are greenwashing their spaces and people in order to attract investment (Cugurullo
Although green spaces are not equitably accessible for all urbanites, they do provide additional spaces for faeries to connect socially and spiritually with nature, and thus, urban faeries benefit greatly from greenwashing tactics. However, while the quantity of these spaces seems to be increasing, their quality may be ever diminishing, since parks have become as chemically, mechanically, and socially controlled as the suburban lawn (Ibid). And with increased securitization and surveillance, the bodies within these spaces are increasingly controlled, as well (Chatterjee 2014). Vibrant urban green spaces are reduced to beautiful, placeless simulacrum of wilderness.

Urban pedestrian paths in Austin and Dallas, converted from antiquated railway lines in a recent sweeping rails-to-trails initiative, provide authentic space to some urban faeries. Quite a few faeries spoke of the sacredness of running along these trails while seeing the distant skyline or watching the sunset. However, another faction believed most urban trails to be too contrived and were thus useless. Dawne commented “a cement path through grass with a couple trees is the embodiment of Dallas nature” (Interview 2022). In response, Mimosa often chooses his own path, intentionally traveling through the less tamed parts of urbanity where nature still breaks through, such as alleys and creeks. Further, Mimosa analogizes the resilience of urban wilderness with the plight of the urban faerie, the ability of a small nature space to flourish and thrive in marginal spaces of the city predicts faerie culture can thrive as well (Interview 2022). Faeries crave more untamed greenspaces. Draco recounts a nearby park, “it’s one of those places you kind of forget that you’re in the city and then you can go off and I’ve actually gotten lost in there. I couldn’t get my way back to the parking lot! I like going off the path because it’s just, you know, all natural and the way it should be” (Interview 2022). While there are considerable green spaces appearing in the greyness of the built environment, faeries also desire more blue spaces. Urban bodies of
water, when accessible, often carried their own placemaking potential. Of an urban spring Steve says, “All the water that comes out of town, like you probably get a disease going there to get in the water, but it’s pretty and very magical” (Interview 2022). Another site surrounded a small city lake with “a bunch of hanging natural ornaments mostly junk people found in the water but have hung up everywhere, and it kind of reminds me of being a little bit of a fantasyland.” (Steve Interview 2022). It is a particularly urban faerie phenomenon to see the beauty in a junk jungle. Urban water is often built into the landscape as a purely aesthetic feature, and while this only unlocks part of its placemaking potential, urban bodies of water are so rare faeries seem content with being able to simply enjoy their beauty.

Public green spaces are designed for recreation and leisure, and queer use of leisure spaces provide casual and informal locations for grounding community (Knee 2022). Angel speaks of faerie placemaking at Zilker Park in Austin as “one of those places where it’s just this vibe of freedom. Typically, with the example of heartcircles, we’ve had them on Sunday, late afternoons, evenings, and there’s always like this big, huge drum circle that’s happening right next to us, and so just kind of brings out that hippie call to just be who you are” (Interview 2022). Communal use of public space by different communities can be harmonious. Harmony with people and nature imbues power to urban faeries to re-enter mainstream urban spaces once more. While loud and proud protest is important in LGBTQ+ activism, and is discussed further in the next section, there is a significant practice among urban faeries of surreptitious protest within the urban landscape. Invisible protest placemaking provides faeries with a modicum of empowering agency and creative expression. Sunrise believes the urban faerie is a member of society who reminds those around them of their radical queerness in “subtly beautiful ways—sometimes not so subtly like on the dance floor, darling!” (Interview 2022). Although ephemeral and unseen, the use of these public
spaces for spiritual and creative expression is a form of critical placemaking in transgressing normative structures of power and imagining new possibilities for urban queer space (Toolis 2017). Cruising is a common form of invisible protest placemaking.

The majority of the faeries currently or have previously engaged in cruising. With the rise of urban privatization and securitization, cruising has become more difficult without risking repercussions. Mounted cameras, sensors, coded barriers, automated spaces, and ever-present cellphones create an ecology of technological surveillance where even covert protest becomes visibilized (Dear and Flusty 2005). Gradual neoliberal defunding of public spaces and services, however awful, make these spaces relatively more viable for remaining unseen. Cruising provides urban faeries with much more than an enjoyable time, as Dawne stated, “So yeah, I get my dick sucked under a stall in a hotel downtown where there’s an NRA convention happening. That’s hot that’s amazing that can be spiritual because it’s reminding me of who I am and the power that I have and how I do not have to abide by the laws of this land that don’t serve me and that’s a spiritual act” (Interview 2022). Within a system where one person may feel motivated but unable to effect change this act demonstrates individual agency and resistance. In addition to the expression and agency inherent in most invisible protest, cruising allows for sexo-socio-spiritual, subject-subject consciousness and a connection to queer heritage and ancestry. The liminal spaces of cruising create placemaking potential for sexual exploration and self-discovery, a way to connect with others and to connect more deeply with yourself. Cruising is a form of sex placemaking practice, which blurs the boundaries between public and private, social and sexual, self and other (Drysdale et al. 2022). Faeries feel connected to heritage by this shared ritual, often practiced in the same spaces, passed down through queer lineages. Knee argued cruising is a “counterhegemonic animating force” generated from a “longing for historical queer memories”
which “envisioned an alternative collective possibility” (2022, 7). Thus, cruising spots become a queer inheritance of land, commonly owned and accessed by the people, bequeathed through queer lineage across time to provide spaces and practices for imagining alternate potentials.

_The Private_

Private urbanism is defined as physical spaces within the city boundaries which are owned and managed by any non-governmental entity, regardless of their financial or legal status. This category is an admixture of businesses, bars, bookstores, game shops, adult stores, restaurants, cafes, bars, yoga studios; categories of business, gay-owned, sex-oriented, mystical, and artistic; and nonprofits, like museums, churches, and LGBTQ+ centers. The entire urban plane is built, destroyed, and rebuilt for capital consumption (Harvey 1976), and it is inevitable and unavoidable urban faeries rely upon more palatable business spaces to meet their needs. As shown in Figure 4.10, privately owned urban spaces are used far more often than public spaces for economic and material placemaking, but are also significant sites for spiritual, sexual, and relational endeavors, depending on the type of establishment.

Western urban queer spatiohistories often center on the gayborhood, a concentration of queer-owned or queer-friendly businesses (Higgs 1999). Most faeries felt faerie-friendly businesses are pivotal to urban faerie experience (n = 20). While Dallas has historically had Oak Lawn, Austin has not had a formally recognized gayborhood. Draco visited Oaklawn and commented on the convenience of the gayborhood, but was hesitant to desire one in Austin, and this ambivalence was shared by most Austin faeries (Interview 2022). While the gayborhood provides a space for connecting to queer history through historic energies and spaces, they are contemporarily viewed by faeries as tokenizing and commodifying of queer culture, and they do not feel connected to faerie culture, specifically in these spaces. Surprisingly, most faeries did
believe queer-owned and queer-friendly businesses often reliably translated to faerie-friendliness since the business need not be aware of the existence of faeries to create a welcoming space of community engagement and belonging. Genuine Joe’s Café, in Austin, is the epitome of a faerie-friendly establishment—created by a gay couple and passed down to their son, this café has been the site of bimonthly faerie coffee socials for seven years.

While more businesses are attempting to be queer-friendly, the gayborhood itself is in peril. A common belief among faeries was the dissipation of queer spaces, caused by increasing societal acceptance and epitomized by the gayborhood. As Kilhefner stated, “The disappearance of the gay community and the diminution of identity are inherent in gay assimilation theory and practice, and they are happening everywhere” (2010, 21). Decreased stigma permitted queer folks to move out of the gayborhood, creating an urban queer diaspora into suburbia, and others moves into the void left behind. KJ describes instances “when straight people come and make it their own, then all of a sudden, it’s a couple of gay people and a bunch of like bachelorette parties. And it’s like, is this really a gay space? Is this a safe space for gay people? And that’s an example of urban community that’s no longer sacred” (Interview 2022). However, continued urban faerie placemaking in gayborhoods could help them, as Knee described the intentional positioning of the leisure placemaking endeavors of his participants, who recognized Chinatown was struggling and wanted the presence of their placemaking to have a positive response, ‘a collective taking up space together’ (2022). Faerie placemaking and presence within historically queer neighborhoods could have positive, mutual social effects.

Within the city, businesses are commonly used spaces for sexual connection and exploration, as visualized in Figure 4.10 (CDA 2022). Leather and underwear stores, sex shops and adult bookstores, and bathhouses are all businesses traditionally used for sex placemaking. Bel
says he had not been to a bookstore in years because he became “tired of the same gloryhole” (Interview 2022). This demonstrates the objectification of sexuality in certain businesses and the transactional utilization of the space to meet physical needs, which detracts from radical sex placemaking of resistance (Drysdale et al. 2022). Urban faeries also enjoyed businesses focusing on hosting nudist, sex, or kink events. From naked yoga to fisting parties, there were several businesses which offered a variety of sexo-socio-spiritual experiences. As a social nudist, KJ attends the events to experience communal nudity in a friendly and nonjudgmental environment, which most faeries agreed is not offered in more traditional sex businesses, like the bathhouse. In addition to the park, urban faeries also use businesses of all types for the invisible protest placemaking of cruising. Dawne discusses an ‘alignment’ of comfortability and safety in some private spaces, mostly queer-owned businesses, which supports faerie sex placemaking practice (Interview 2022). Gyms, spas and hotels, airports, bars and clubs, are all commonly used cruising spots.

Although emplaced within the materialized landscape of capitalism, urban faeries still generally hold some vestiges of anticapitalist sentiment. While corporations may have floats and T-shirts at local pride parades, faeries still discuss the workplace as unwelcoming, uncompassionate, and exclusive. Within a spectrum of refusal, faeries adapt or reject the current economic system by creating their own businesses or engaging in informal economies. Faerie-owned businesses, like the faerie home, generate material and spatial resources to the urban faerie community. These businesses generate faerie wealth which can be reinvested back into the community. In Dallas, Dawne DR and his partner own Common Ground Games, a tabletop game store which has provided space for countless gaymer (queer gaming) events and generates money to sustain Milkweed Manor, the faerie home in Dallas.
In the urban environment, faeries have less opportunity to escape and must adapt to economic systems of individualism, competition, and expertise. According to survey data, there is a general ambivalence toward the importance of work (n = 19) and economic success (n = 19), but very high consensus regarding the necessity of financial security (n = 19). Thus, faeries find other modes of sustaining themselves. Faeries provide spiritual services, such as tantra, yoga, breathing workshops and reiki; commodify sexuality, such as intimacy and touch workshops; and sell faerie cultural creations, including photography, vocal performance, and visual art. As a result, “the culture they create becomes…a product of urban life” both metaphorically and materially (Morgensen 2011, 164). The ability to purchase the essence of faeriedom may detract from the authenticity of the community identity and culture. Due to the unregulated nature of informal economies and subsequent lack of insurance or stability, faeries who refuse traditional employment are more likely to depend on social services and urban infrastructure, which have been increasingly underfunded. However, in the postindustrial city, informal economies are gaining social legitimacy in parallel with a dramatic rise of the gig economy and hustle culture (Dear and Flusty 2005). Mimosa chose to live in the city because “it enables me to make money from my art. That’s like, really big. It makes it possible for me to make my living. Some of the same things that I do here, I could do in smaller communities, but not get paid for it.” (Interview 2022). Thus, the proximity and opportunity of the city directly sustains urban faerie financial placemaking, which create microcosmic economic imaginaries scattered throughout the built environment of capitalism, transgressing notions of ownership, competition, fitness, and propriety.

When urban faeries choose more traditional employment, it is often within job fields which fit into their worldviews and ethics, such as the nonprofit sector. There tends to be more sexual and gender diversity allowed within these business environments, especially within gay men’s
health or other queer nonprofits. “I get to dress as silly and gay as I want when I go to work. I could probably get away with wearing a dress if I wanted to. I can wear clever fun gay T-shirts and all sorts of things to work I can be more me,” said Steve (Interview 2022). It is within the nonprofit sector urban faeries engage in more visible forms of protest placemaking. “Going out into space and engaging faerie events in Dallas is an opportunity for us to grow, learn, and show people that there’s another way to live” by promoting gender-bending, decadence, and empathy (Dawne Interview 2022). These visible protest forms create creatively queer spaces in the city for discourse, which are mobile and adaptive to changing political contexts (Knee 2022). As simply as demonstrating queer power, skill, or success, or as complex as urban policy work, faerie political placemaking changes the spatiality of the city in an attempt to change urban futurity. Through these various placemaking practices, faeries create sacred sexo-socio-spiritual space within built environment which supports and, hopefully, sustains urban faerie communities.

Sustaining Urban Faerie Community

While sanctuary land is continuously maintained by faeriedom, urban communities go through a natural ebb and flow, sometimes even disappearing completely for a stretch of time. Angel recounted a previous faerie community in Austin in the 1970s-1980s, which dissipated and left an Austin-sized space in faeriedom until 2012 when the current community came into being. The loss of a single urban constituency may be felt by the global community, if noticed, but does not affect the stability of the larger faerie culture. On the other hand, decentralization and organizational chaos sometimes leads to multiplicities of urban communities or intergenerational disconnect. As Mimosa recalls, “it was interesting because these faeries were really enthusiastic and not very connected to a lot of the history, and saying they were the first when there was all this history that they didn’t know about. So, we finally got connected up and started having some
interpollination, and I have tried to stay involved with the older group that I knew better and also try to get involved with the young group because that seemed important to me” (Interview 2022). Blueflame attributed these disconnections and gaps not to disorganization, but to the unwillingness of younger faeries to hold space for and support the community, or to take the bulk of the responsibilities from the older faeries. Then instantaneously this disconnect was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic.

As Bel recounts, “And right now, as of the past three or four years, mainly because of COVID, I believe, it’s disjointed. We know each other by Facebook or maybe we belong to some of the same groups that meet face-to-face, but as a get together, a collective heartcircle, I haven’t seen that happening. Maybe these five faeries get together or these two faeries because they’re friends and they wanna do something” (Interview 2022). Mimosa discussed the vibrant forms of faerie placemaking in Dallas—heartcircle, musical events, coffees—until they ‘came to a screeching halt’ at the start of the COVID pandemic (Interview 2022). The acute and lasting effects of the socially distancing measures, as well as virtual placemaking adaptations is discussed in the next section, but—in short—they instantaneously and profoundly affected the capacity for sustaining urban faerie communities. Virtual placemaking boomed and thrived in the context of brand-new necessity and imagination. Some people attempted to adapt to these newer placemaking practices while others stepped away from faeriedom temporarily; others never came back.

Either due to a lack of wherewithal or desire, post-COVID urban faerie placemaking lacked the imagination and drive of previous virtual placemaking, or even of pre-pandemic times. Urban faerie life in Austin and Dallas centered around regular coffee or tea socials, which provided people a chance to meet in-person once more and experience some level of communion and intimacy. However, these placemaking practices alone do not seem to have fully nurtured the local faeries.
Dawne said, “the coffees didn’t work, for me personally. It felt very surface level. But I was probably too impatient, there might have been a space to have deeper spiritual connection, I just didn’t get it the time that I went” (Interview 2022). Talon seconds this experience, saying he went to check out the faerie coffee social to only find them disappointing and exclusive to newer faeries who may feel they are interjecting on a long history of friendship. Faeries noted the coffees were fine for some, but not for them and they had no other events or placemaking endeavors to which they could turn. Although possibly a bit too organized for faeries, in response to only seeing coffees Draco hoped for a centralized calendar for various events which could incentivize more people to both host and attend. Dawne mentions even within the fae teas, which he often hosts, he desires to imbue more intention and ritual “because it reminds people why we’re actually here. It transforms and invites people to raise their frequency a little bit and kind of pull themselves out of the day-to-day life and conversations” (Interview 2022). It seems the urban faeries need a dollop of intention and imagination to reenergize and sustain the community, only then can they refocus their powers of queering space and time to catalyzing urban change. Unfortunately, during this project faeries had to demonstrate their communal and individual capacities for creative methods of sustaining urban communities in times of crisis and revival.

The Computer

Faeries do not formally prohibit technology within faeriedom but hold a bifold motivation toward luddism. As discussed, the founding faeries sought to remove gay men from the modern context to focus on subject-subject consciousness, or the meeting of these spirits (Kilhefner 2010). Faeries over the decades have believed certain technological materializations distract or dilute the capacity for subject-subject dialogue, and while there is constant revision and contestation over which fall into this category, these have traditionally been relinquished when in fae spaces.
Mimosa recounts, especially in the beginning, often there was no electricity on sanctuary land, and for much of their history, there was no cellphone reception, Wi-Fi, or cable TV. It was not until quite recently these even were options for such remote communities, thence it has become a question of voluntary maintenance of technological separation or modernist assimilation. Mimosa commented, “now there’s reception and everybody’s got their cell phones…it separates us when we’re in the same space, it’s too easy to pull out a device, check into the device, and check out of the physical” (Interview 2022). Dawne believes gatherings are a radical time and space away from virtual communication and connection to focus on oneself in community (Interview 2022). Additionally, in the rejection of modernization and urbanization, faeries perform a queer ecoprimitivity. Morgensen encountered a community of faerie caretakers who desired to build a sun dial so they would have an alternative method to timekeeping (2009). Mimosa also remembers a debate during a gathering to simply allow acoustic and records or to also permit electronic forms and genres of music (Mimosa). Although performative, as it is not believed these technologies disrupt faerie subjectivity, the refusal of conventional modes and creativity in finding new forms of being are key features of faerie utopian imagination and possibility.

Faeries believe something is lost within virtual spaces and for some this space carries no sacredness. KJ believes virtual spaces are not sacred because he does not feel he can feel other peoples’ energies within the space, and Mercury is missing the ‘them-ness’ which pairs with his ‘me-ness’ (Interviews). Ecospiritual practitioners generally believe authenticity is conditional to physical interaction (Grieve 1995). Sunrise laments “It was so wonderful that Zoom came in and helped us all during a time where we could not be together for her own safety, but I never once at any events that I attended online feel that same sense of community and sacredness” (Interview 2022). Depicted in Figure 4.13, virtual spaces were viewed often as adequate sites for relational or
sexual placemaking, but not for spiritual endeavors (CDA 2022). Draco attended regular planning meetings online, or the occasional Zoom social, but had never attempted to sit in a virtual heartcircle, saying he felt it would feel disconnected, like being by yourself. Dawne had one of the more polar perspectives, “I do believe that faeries are very powerful creatures, but to me, the medium, the form of online space just did not resonate with me. It did not work…I don’t think technology can create community in my opinion and I don’t feel community through technology” (Interview 2022). What is lost in digital spaces which prevents some urban faeries from being able to create virtual sacred space while most other faeries manage?

There are constraints inherent in the medium itself, “this placeless place in this timeless time,” before considering how it is utilized (Grieve 1995, 110). Queer people often identify with, find comfort in, and adapt these liminal spaces (Knopp 2004), demonstrated quite often throughout this project; however, there may be additional constraints limiting faerie capacity to do so. Mimosa said, “it can’t go beyond the designated time or designated boundaries,” subverting users the capacity to queer virtual temporality and spatiality (Interview 2022). Some digital spaces do not generate much possibility beyond heteronormative space and time because the software and hardware were intentionally designed with those constraints. As with the built environment of the city, virtual spaces are built with a normative world view, shaping the landscape. Talon described the use of virtual space by faeries as ‘agreeing to the terms and conditions,’ here meant quite literally in the sense of relinquishing control and privacy to the capitalist systems, but also in conceding these spaces were made to be functional and efficient, not creative and transformative. In doing so, he says you are giving away yourself, giving away your sacredness, a trading of one’s sovereignty in a time of need to gain community (Interview 2022). There is a vulnerability and
objectification in third-party modes of communication, especially when you do not have trust in all involved.

Other constraints are more fluid and dependent upon access and artistry. There is a sensory flattening in some virtual spaces which can be exacerbated if the user does not understand proper use or have access to quality accessories. When reduced to audio and video, faeries repined it can be more difficult to read body language or hear speech tonality without higher resolution cameras, auxiliary lighting, and expensive microphones and speakers. Due to the novelty of virtual faerie spaces, there can be awkward silences, distractions, and over-speech which can break focus or intention. Additionally, Steve discusses his desire to share another person’s reality when briefly intertwining lives, and he does not feel he is able to perceive the holistic experience beyond what he can see immediately behind them. Peter mentions he misses his other senses beyond sight and hearing when in virtual spaces. Turner and Turner argued in relation to creating a sense of place, “real places are enormously richer and more sensuous than anything that can (as yet) be created with technology” (2006, 204). This goes beyond being able to sense the space but an inability to react to it, as Bel mentions the reassuring handhold or hug (Interview 2022). Other faeries concede it is difficult to hold vulnerable and healing spaces digitally because it can be hard to console or assuage through traditional fae intimacy. Despite shortcomings, most urban faeries assimilate into mainstream urbanite technoscapes when not actively placemaking with other faeries; and, over time, some self-identified technofaeries have come to believe the digital world can support faerie experiences and create sacred space if used properly.

Mimosa tellingly said he believed it ‘had to be possible’ for virtual spaces to be sacred, speaking to the childlike optimism and openness of faeries. Blueflame conveyed the most common sentiment encountered in saying “any space, whether it’s physical space, virtual space, or in your
dreamspace, it can all be sacred” (Interview 2022). Although some spaces are more inherently sacred or more conducive to sanctification, most faeries believe all spaces are sacred or could be made so, including virtual spaces. Additionally, there was a moderate level of consensus on the sanctity of virtual space between survey respondents (n = 19), and for most, virtual spaces were not as sacred as physical spaces (n = 19). Bel believed there was no true distinction between the physical and digital, as virtual presence is through ‘molecules and electronic auras,’ which infix the space with sacredness (Interview 2022). Neopagan communities are able to create sacred space digitally, not through presence, but through the flow of energy, which originates in and flows between the individuals in the ritual, and the shared phenomenon creates community (Grieve 1995). Thus, the virtual realm becomes an affective environment to which faeries can become collectively attuned when placemaking digitally. Grieve believes this non-representational experience comes from shared imagination and creativity, an “explosive, non-abstract, gut-level sentiment that has both a religious and a magical side” (Ibid, 97). Draco supports this when he says he felt the creative energy flowing during fae virtual committee meetings when people were generating ideas and possible solutions. Steve only became truly aware of the sanctity of virtual space in its shattering, when an internet troll Zoom-bombed a group ritual. After this cyber-attack, not only were faeries more aware of the sanctity of their space, but they also validated this feeling by taking additional measures to protect it. Thus, the faeries are stewards and guardians of sacred virtual spaces as they are sanctuary land or urban faerie homes.

Faeries gain community and support through virtual placemaking, which Grieve believes to be one of the primary driving forces of modern urban protest religions (1995). Draco talks about finding a sense of purpose and belonging in being able to participate in society and the meaning which comes from this. Talon endearingly responded, “you get love, love that you might not
otherwise have” (Interview 2022). Through the shared affective experience of energy, a virtual meeting of the spirit, one feels ephemeral communitas and durable belonging (Grieve 1995). Through virtual placemaking, urban faeries can avoid the chaos of urbanity; one faerie noted the reduction in physical risk of virtual local, national, or international faerie placemaking. Peter believes virtual placemaking is more convenient even with other locals, circumventing transportation and traffic, policing of urban spaces, or the distractions of busy city life. Virtual spaces refuse the constraints of the physical realm, collapsing space and time to create new placemaking potentialities beyond connecting local communities. Bel has engaged with faeries from cultures around the world through his virtual storytelling communities, experiencing stories told in various languages and perspectives. Faeriedom has always been a relatively small niche community spread thin and wide, connecting all global faeries online creates the critical mass needed to sustain biweekly virtual gatherettes (Grieve 1995). This amount of work would be too burdensome for any one urban community to sustain but can be distributed throughout a global presence, circumventing constraints through global recruitment and outsourcing, or by scale alone. Virtual placemaking can support physical placemaking, as Dawne described “I went to New York a couple years ago and went to a faerie group on Facebook. In some sense that was technology creating physical space, but to me, there’s got to be that physical space to it. I can use technology as a means to create community through the lens of faeriedom” (Interview 2022). In the end, these are mutually-beneficial, co-constitutive realities supported by mixed-use placemaking strategies.

Virtual placemaking creates opportunities and futures beyond the capacity of other placemaking practices. Or, as Mimosa so wonderfully put it, “the virtual environment allows some things to happen that wouldn’t be able to happen in meatspace,” providing an example of hanging out with his friend digitally alongside both of their pets, previously impossible due to allergies,
and the accompaniment bolstered the quality of their time together (Interview 2022). Virtual spaces are also an opportunity for people to express themselves more creatively or freely, unlocking a ‘wider version’ of people (Blueflame Interview 2022). Behind the safety of the screen, some faeries feel empowered to be more vulnerable or imaginative or authentic without fear of stigma, shame, or embarrassment within some urban spaces. Blueflame provides the example of getting up and leaving when you feel the need, which is a lot harder with in-person interactions; further, the setting of strong, healthy boundaries can be practiced in virtual placemaking until dependable, then this practice can be translated with confidence into the physical realm. Virtual placemaking reduced economic and medical constraints, providing more accessible spaces. These new potentials for connection, growth, support generate world-changing possibility, until crisis hits.

COVID and Crisis

Faeries rarely agree on anything but were in full agreement the COVID pandemic, and the subsequent social-distancing measures, had a profoundly negative impact on faeriedom. Ky stated “time stood still as nature fucked with our bodies and society. I’m not sure we’re out yet” (Interview 2022). This liminal space of hiatus—knowing life will eventually move forward but just not yet—created a constant deferment of self and society. Faeries felt trapped in the domestic sphere, still supplicated to work as much possible while being denied the ability to thrive socially. Dawne says it can already be quite lonely to be an urban faerie, even without a pandemic. Mercury said he was not precisely good at virtual placemaking, and although he saw other faeries creating intentional space, he stepped away during the pandemic and became more withdrawn. Blueflame mirrors this sentiment in saying, “since COVID, I’ve been quite insular, so I haven’t really been exposed to a lot of fae energy” (Interview 2022). Although Peter found some social connection
online, he was too isolated and withdrawn romantically and sexually; Steve had a similar experience feeling a lack of intimacy through a divorce and social-distancing. Other faeries mention having vibrant spiritual lives full of community ritual and practices before the pandemic. Because the faeries had to be on their computer all day for work, they were often too burnt out of virtual reality to engage intentionally with other faeries in the after hours. In some ways, the COVID pandemic and social responses were one of the worst tragedies to befall radical faeries since their inception.

In his ethnographic work with the faeries, Morgensen saw “urban gay men in travel along the spatial circuits of gatherings at rural sanctuaries” which “placed gay men in motion from modern to primitive and settler to Indigenous while grounding Radical Faerie culture in a mobile relationship to emplacement” (2008, 26). This mobility helped faeries during times of crisis. The AIDS epidemic, concentrated mostly in urban areas in its first decade, caused a “rapid destabilization of sexual minority institutions, from families and friendship networks to bars, baths, and political groups” which resulted in subsequent “crises of identity, community, or spirituality” (Morgensen 2008, 84). This turmoil brought more radical faeries home to the sanctuary lands for safety and support. By “celebrating drag and social sex,” faeries transgressed mainstream stigmatization and medicalization while still meaningfully pushing “qualities that would appear in primary and secondary HIV prevention education,” such as emotional communication and community building (Ibid). The faeries responded to the medical and religious pathologizing of queerness by “making it the very path gay men could follow to spiritual healing” (Morgenson 2008, 87). In addition, the heartcircles practiced within both the sanctuary and urban fae spaces allowed faeries to speak on their emotions, experience the grief of loss or guilt of survival, and share experiences and best practices of illness or caretaking (Ibid). Angel discusses the death toll
of the AIDS epidemic and its effects on faerie culture “And so we lost, you know, just generations of gay men. And so, it’s kind of created now, it’s like there’s an older community, and there’s a younger community. I think that creates a huge cultural gap” (Interview 2022). And, over time, memorials for those lost were created and maintained on faerie sanctuary land, which “focused an otherwise dispersed mobile constituency on its ties to land in ways that assured their future communion” where faeries could return time and again to mourn lost friends and reaffirm their “commitment to faerie survival” (Morgenson 2011, 144-145). While many queer separatist communities did not endure the AIDS epidemic, and queer urban communities were decimated, the fluid mobility of Radical Faerie culture and people allowed access to two disparate but crucial spaces of connection, resource gathering, information sharing, and healing.

The COVID pandemic, on the other hand, saw the first closing of faerie sanctuaries since their inception; radical faeries could not leave the city and venture to sanctuary land to find home and community. Between these crises, Hennen observed the “impulse toward introspection and retreat from that larger culture seems now to be something that faeries take for granted, as is the need for the ‘sanctuary’ that the faerie community provides” (2004). However, the COVID pandemic was an abrupt awakening; retreat and introspection were forced on urban faeries, but in isolation within the placelessness of the city. The same cultural traditions and beliefs which supported faerie resilience during the AIDS epidemic—mobility, anarchy, intimacy, primitivism—made faeries more vulnerable during the COVID pandemic. They were no longer able to find solace in transience, refusal, and affection. The antimodernist history of faerie culture resulted in an ambivalence toward and inexperience of virtual placemaking practices. The pandemic exposed and exacerbated the digital divide as “those who are already embedded in digital environments had more advantages—technologically, socially, economically—to survive the
pandemic’s externalities” (Halegoua & Polson 2021, 574). Of the AIDS epidemic, Morgensen states it brought the faeries home (2008), which happened to also be true of the COVID pandemic, but home was not belonging and community but their actual residences, which transformed from safe spaces of comfort and reprieve from urbanity to cages of isolation and deferment. Almost a cautionary tale of being ‘careful what you wish for.’

Nevertheless, curated culture, foundational anarchy, and a postmodernist worldview allow for more flexibility in faeriedom. As the faerie spirit lies in the person, faeries believe new practice, ritual, or tradition can and should be created to meet current needs. As KJ advised, “Nothing is infinite. I think everything’s forever changing, everything’s always going to be different. You should just enjoy it for however long it lasts because again it doesn’t last forever” (Interview 2022). It was this worldview, matched with a half century of practiced adaptation and imagination, which provided the radical faeries resilience during the pandemic. Morgensen argued urban faeries eventually created “subjectivities that finally require no material movement in order to know their ties to the sexual freedom of life on ‘the land’” (2009, 145). Beyond no longer needing to withdraw from the city to the rural to meet faerie needs, emplacement is now taken to the extreme as new post-COVID faerie subjectivities do not require movement in any sense, outside the city, outside of the dwelling, or outside the computer. In this new paradigm faeriedom and faerie placemaking are space of flows instead of spaces of space (Castells 2010). Although not the original desire of urban faeries, once these necessary adaptations had been made to sustain community during time of crisis, the bell cannot be unrung and this reality will remain to one degree or another across faeriedom.

Virtual Placemaking and Pixelated Paganism

While some of the older faeries discovered faeriedom through word-of-mouth or flyers,
several faeries discussed finding the community through its social media presence, following the
group for a bit to learn more about it from afar or wait for an interesting event to be announced,
then engaging with faerie culture in person. Thus, maintaining the social media presence has
become a necessary means by which faerie community can recruit and survive. This also suggests
the presence of an even larger online, dormant community of faerie-adjacent people within the
city, but some people have a hard time breaking through from this liminal space into active faerie
community. One faerie, after going to his first gathering in Austin, felt inspired to be more involved
in the urban community and then did not know how to engage; nothing was being posted online,
he was not aware of anything was being done in person, and he did not have the contact information
of people to be able to check in. This demonstrates the effects of the digital divide, where people
may be confused as to how to navigate certain virtual spaces or not understand cross-culturally
appropriate uses of virtual spaces, and without having another way to communicate and they feel
disenchanted and stop trying. Additionally, survey respondents were ambivalent regarding the
decentralized nature of faerie virtual space (n = 19). The anarchy of faerie spaces may provide
freedom for those involved, but additional barriers to those attempting to step in, and these are
exacerbated in online settings because of lack of proximity. The goal is not to restrict and control
faerie virtual placemaking but to foster the “ability to forge attachments to digital media
environments and through digital practices enables people to emplace themselves and others”
(Halegoua & Polson 2021, 574), and in doing so “creating public spaces that are accessible and
inclusive, plural, and participatory” (Toolis 2017, 186). With a lot of intention and a little bit of
effort, virtual placemaking endeavors could invite those in who have been patiently waiting in the
margins.

Virtual faerie spaces bloomed during the pandemic and subsequently flourished. These
were not economic spaces, but relational, sexual, and imaginative, as shown in Figure 4.13 (CDA 2022). While respondents met individually and informally more often (n = 24; n = 24), faeries reported a marked increase in virtual communal placemaking during and after the pandemic (n = 23). Regular online No Talent Shows, rituals, heartcircles, and love lounges appeared seemingly from nowhere, as these were not commonplace before social distancing measures. In the context of weekly Zoom shows, faeries “from around the world could show their talents and perform,” some would create loud, elaborate backdrops in their homes, and dress in grand costume for these performances (Talon Interview 2022). These online spaces provided a mode of self-expression and creativity, of affirmation and support. Grieve argues “what binds neopagans together on the Internet, and how they overcome this lack of presence, is through the experience of the perceived sentiment that accompanies creativity itself” (1995, 88). Regular virtual love temples created digital space for exhibitionism or voyeurism, sexuality or romance, public sexuality or private through chat features or breakout rooms. This was a virtualization of the love lounges found at sanctuaries and gatherings and some urban events, adapted to various contexts to meet the needs of the community in imaginative and resourceful ways. If you did not want to participate in the love lounge, either at the same time or after there was typically a global virtual dance party. Often a faerie DJ curated a moment for people to dance with each other and share a moment of communitas, all while remaining alone at home.

Gatherings, previously hosted annually by certain communities around the world, became more concise and frequent in the virtual realm. These spaces were a bit more structured due to the constraints of virtual placemaking, and often felt akin to a virtual conference. While physical gatherings allowed for more self-determination, exploration, presence, and abandon, their virtual counterparts were often coordinated and scheduled ahead of time, not leaving a lot of room for
agency, fluidity, anarchy, or getting lost. Steve said, “I find in a virtual space it’s easier to stick to format and schedule for some reason, for me, it’s always reminded me of a more of a professional sort of meeting place” (Interview 2022). Less moderated virtual neopagan spaces are “more imaginative and more anarchistic… not governed so much as self-regulated” (Grieve 1995, 105). There is a paradox of ecospiritual beliefs and practices flourishing digitally (Ibid), but they did, nonetheless. Examples of scheduled offerings from the virtual Breitenbush 2021 gathering were Radical Faeries 101, Cultivating the Expressive Body, Erotic Hypnosis, Playback Theatre Workshop, Active Empathy, Nude Qi Gong, Sex as Prayer Ceremony, Queer Short Films, Libation to Aphrodite, a fashion show, the No Talent Show, a pan-African heartcircle, and a Disco & Dance party. This demonstrates a truly eclectic offering, possibly even more varied than those found at a physical gathering due to the larger scope and constituency of the global virtual community. However, almost two-thirds of survey respondents did not attend virtual gatherings in the post-pandemic years (n = 24), so while this may have been a magical moment of pixelated paganism, faeries seem to have returned to prioritizing physical placemaking.

Virtual placemaking creates another dimension of global faerie culture in addition to the scattering of sanctuary land across most continents. This allows people to stay more informed on current social and geopolitical issues around the world which may impact faeriedom, and to create and maintain personal relationships with global faeries. These virtual spaces are composites of different cities, different states, different countries, and grant the opportunity to localize faerie placemaking in numerous locations around the globe simultaneously. And Peter hopes the future of faerie life is global: everywhere. With faeries—through travel and technology—sexuality, creativity, intentionality, and spirituality flow between the different sanctuaries and urban chapters of faeriedom; however, it is important to critique the direction and force of these flows. As an
American creation, now spread around the world, faeriedom may be an example of the extreme hegemonic force of Western society which has the possibility of masking local ontologies and epistemologies of sexuality, gender, spirituality, and ecology. Mindfulness of Radical Faerie positionality within the global system and intention to ethically navigate these abstract terrains is most important as faeries begin to increasingly build their digital presence and placemaking practices. After a period of recovery from virtual burnout, faeries are now beginning to parse which virtual placemaking practices they want to curate into future faerie tradition, adjusting ongoing visions of ideal faerie existence.

The Utopia

Approximately 60 species of mushrooms grow in circular patterns, called ‘fairy rings’ in old European folklore (Morgan 1995). These fairy rings grow in numerous places around the world, can live for hundreds of years if undisturbed, and have been interpolated within various indigenous folklore due to their unique spatial design (Ibid). In European tradition, the rings grew with the dancing of the forest fairies, and entering the circle would allow the formerly invisible faeries to be seen but would also temporarily enchant the newcomer (Ibid). In this way, faerie sacred spaces provide protection for the most marginal, can change one’s worldview by unearthing the invisible, and can be quite alluring to those who are lost. Sacred spaces suspend time and space until they are set free, and this queering provides discrete lacunae for liminal potentiality, as “… realizing everyone has the potential to the maker of place changes not only the place but the people as well” (Toolis 2017, 195). Faerie placemaking is “… more than finding and/or creating new families, new communities, new places… also about testing, exploring, and experimenting with alternative ways of being in contexts that are unencumbered…” (Knopp 2004, 123). Within these pockets, faeries can step away and fancy futurity.
Peter argued the radical faeries are the material expression of the human need to be creative and imaginative. Although imagination has been viewed in urban development and activist spheres as childish, irrational, and impractical in the face of all the world’s problems, Hasbrouck argued the unreal nature of the imaginary could generate social change (2000). Imagination supports future-oriented endeavors, such as adaptation and growth, by providing opportunity and directionality. The radical faeries themselves only exist because a handful of people predicted and materialized the culture (Kilhefner 2010). Imagination and envisioning are skills which are honed with practice; and faeries have a genealogy sustained within separatist imaginaries. Through imagination, queers can escape, disidentify, transgress, or refuse. Whether relational, spiritual, sexual, or political, the urban faeries discussed their hopes and dreams for the future:

Love, acceptance, and understanding. I would like to see a future where people are more empathetic to others’ plights. – KJ

What future would I like to see for faeries? World Peace. The most important things in life are kindness and love. – Angel

It’s anyone that feels misfit or different, or unacknowledged, or unseen or misunderstood. And so, I’m excited and curious to see what the future of faeriedom looks like as we continue to expand and open up our circles. – Dawne

I want to see a radical faerie president! – Sunrise

Do you ever have a good time just sitting back and doing nothing? – Bel

What do we do when we get out there and have fun? We don’t limit the fun. We don’t tell people what they’re doing isn’t fine and they’re not allowed to do it. You know, we accept them, and we share with them. Isn’t that part of what we’re trying to do?– Talon

Creativity is the process through which faeries work toward their vision. The pursuit of creative expression motivates the radical faeries in chasing meaning, purpose, and belonging. Through storytelling, material creation, sexuality, and spirituality, faeries are constantly finding novel modes of self-expression. As faeries, they play the role of the trickster, the fool, the
shapeshifter, and through this they challenge people, deconstruct systems of power, creatively misrepresent reality while simultaneously conjuring new ones. Seymour argued of queering our ecologies, “If we laugh at ourselves, be less sure of ourselves, we might be able to approach our object differently, and invite others to approach our object differently” (2012, 62). And to Talon, this is the essence of the radical faeries, “They’re there because they enjoy life, they enjoy the Earth, they enjoy each other. That’s what we are, what we’re supposed to be. Bringing joy and happiness, bringing love and passion. And now help” (Interview 2022). These pockets of imagination and creativity create placemaking in the present for future possibilities.

Muñoz wrote of queer futurity “We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel this world is not enough” (2009, 1). Thus, utopianist placemaking is creating the sacred space to continually strive for this queer ideal, not focusing on the inherent failure of attempted perfection but instead on the journey of becoming. Utopianism is future-oriented placemaking, superimposing these hopes and dreams onto the perceived futuristic space. However, queer utopian placemaking is less centered on “order, finitude and certitude, than on incompleteness, fragility, and tenuous, fluid relationships… an elusive and ephemeral flurry of activity marked by constantly changing topological relationships” (Knopp 2004, 126). Radical faeries discuss transmutation as a self-actualizing, sexo-socio-spiritual process of creating discrete and temporary spaces for rapid and radical metamorphosis, leaving the experience profoundly transformed. Radical Faerie imaginaries, through creating new beliefs and practices which then are brought into and dispersed throughout the city, reconfigure social and ecological normativity (Hasbrouck 2000). By radically altering self, they unlock the capacity to influence other. Some faeries saw their futures in separatist spaces, while others envisioned them within urbanity; several
saw faeriedom spreading wide encompassing the entire world, while others had a hard time seeing it realized anywhere; some saw ideal faerie life digitized and uploaded into the freedom of virtual reality, and a few others hoped to one day have faerie communities in the ocean or the sky. As Angel says of faerie utopianist placemaking, “I think the future is now because the more we put it off, the more it’s never going to happen.”
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Through placemaking practices which access the imaginative and experimental spatiality and temporality of queer sacredness, urban radical faeries transform dimensionally discrete spaces within the city in order to thrive within the seemingly hostile built ecology. This study found urban Radical Faerie space to be an ephemeral zone of radical experimentation and creation, as faeries make intentional space for expression, exploration, collectivism, participatory decision-making, creativity, and imagination.

Urban faeries leave the city to temporarily create these separatist spaces, and in the vastness of these separatist spaces, faeries map myriad and simultaneous intentions and imaginaries across the land. On sanctuary land, placemaking is intergenerational, imaginative, and emplaced. Gatherings translate these endeavors into a transient placemaking always relative to the both the sanctuary ideal and the urban origins of its constituents, as they often focusing on a weekend of cathartic healing, unrestraint, and community-building beyond the city. Zooming out, these sites come to be material emplacements of globalized faerie culture, glocal nodes of migration and exchange around the world. Faeriedom is a spatiocultural system embedded within larger hegemonic, neocolonial frames, resisting and reifying strategically in negotiation with global and local fae interests. Placemaking at gatherings and sanctuaries are loci of influence and information which affect local practices and beliefs when brought back into the city.

Within the city, where the space is durable but often shared, faeries use a multipurpose and mobile style of placemaking. In responding to the placelessness of modernity, this multipurpose, mobile, and multiplex faerie placemaking allows for rapid reactivity, adaptability, and accessibility. Through these various placemaking practices, faeries create sacred sexo-socio-
spiritual space within built environment which supports and, hopefully, sustains urban faerie communities. More casual forms of urban faerie space, such as cruising or urban hangouts, with just a few people and virtually no structure allow faeries to access community and sacredness, connect subject-to-subject, while working around urban environmental constraints of competing time and space. Although ephemeral and unseen, the use of these public spaces for spiritual and creative expression is a form of critical placemaking in transgressing normative structures of power and imagining new possibilities for urban queer space. Additionally, the proximity and opportunity of the city directly sustains urban faerie financial placemaking, which create microcosmic economic imaginaries scattered throughout the built environment of capitalism, transgressing notions of ownership, competition, fitness, and propriety. As simply as demonstrating queer power, skill, or success, or as complex as urban policy work, critical faerie protest placemaking changes the spatiality of the city in an attempt to change urban futurity. Being able to tap into the divine realm of either nature or of the faerie spirit allows urban faeries to transform the material and social spaces of the city to meet their individual and collective needs and desires.

Further, this thesis found these creative placemaking strategies were further adapted to maintain community and identity during the COVID-19 pandemic through the collapse of spatial and temporal distance in accessing the sacred. Community-building and purposeful social engagement is pivotal in times such as the pandemic when social distancing measures are antithetical to relational and ecospiritual faerie practices; however, the recent pandemic saw the first temporary closing of sanctuary land since faeriedom’s inception. Virtual placemaking creates opportunities and futures beyond the capacity of other placemaking practices, and in the end, these mutually-beneficial, co-constitutive realities support urban faerie community by mixed-use placemaking strategies. In addition to the scattering of sanctuary land and gatherings across most
continents, virtual placemaking creates another dimension of globalized faerie culture. This project provides historical documentation of faerie urban life during and immediately after a pandemic by examining the adaptations of faerie spatial culture to the previous social distancing policies. Although not the original desire of urban faeries, once these necessary adaptations had been made to sustain community during time of crisis, the bell cannot be unrung and this reality will remain to one degree or another across faeriedom. These pockets of imagination and creativity create placemaking in the present for future possibilities. By radically altering self, they unlock the capacity to influence other, as Radical Faerie imaginaries, through creating new beliefs and practices which then are brought into and dispersed throughout the city, reconfiguring social and ecological normativity.

Blessings for Urban Faerie-to-Be

A portion of the recorded interviews was delivered in the form of a short (5- to 10- minute) oral history documentary. In addition, a project website provides the local and larger faerie communities something accessible, useful, and relatively durable. In order to provide digital storytelling as an instrument for virtual placemaking, an interactive map of local faerie history and a visualization of the survey results, as well as a copy of this thesis will be uploaded to the project website to provide communal access to the knowledge gained from this project. As this process mostly took place during the pandemic, not all local or regional faeries had access to participate in the project in real time, but the website provides a retroactive method of engagement. Furthermore, the information provided gives a critical snapshot in time of faerie life and experiences during the COVID pandemic. These material and digital echoes of the project will continue to ripple through the faerie networks, hopefully with some positive effect.

As a mode of radical placemaking, urban faerie space is a temporary zone for radical
experimentation and creation; however, this potential does not seem fully realized within the urban faerie communities of Dallas and Austin at this time. As discussed, Radical Faerie placemaking has been rather prosaic and complacent after the COVID pandemic, focusing primarily on informal social hangouts to sustain community. In discussing the kaleidoscope of vibrant placemaking practices, Peter realized, “which come to think of it, we haven’t done for a couple years because of this dumb pandemic. We really needed to get those started again. Yeah, this is a good kick in the butt.” This endeavor would be twofold, to expand and diversify the types of placemaking strategies and to imbue them with more intention, ritual, and formality as to unlock the full depth provided by the new diversity. For example, faeries discussed sharing food could be informal and social, or could be intentional and imbued with practice and sacredness, “there’s something to me about doing something sustaining, like eating in the company of other people. So that can be a very spiritual experience and fulfilling, touching maybe on something a bit broader than myself” (Peter Interview 2022). The distinction between the hangout and something deeper is the intentional demarcation of sacred space, of pulling away from the mundane and signifying this space and time is extraordinary, through intention and ritual and practice. Morgensen highlighted heartcircles as the singular practice of urban faeries which transformed the radical faeries from an affinity-based social group to “cohesive networks whose shared values grounded collective work to influence society” (2009, 153). Through this intention, faeries can find belonging, meaning, and purpose. Angel believes heartcircle serves “to honor who you are and recognize that divine essence in you. My experience of faeries is men that come together who want connection, who are willing to go below the surface, and really get into a heart space. And so, I think that’s where that unconscious intention starts to happen” (Interview 2022). However, it does not seem Dallas or Austin faeries have had regular heartcircle practice, or any other deeper engagement, since before
the pandemic. Mimosa says his ideal faerie future would have more heartcircles and more sex, and everyone can agree on this, but the work needs to be done. In Dawne’s words, “Intention. It’s not simple to always have intention when you do things. I think if we did, we’d be in a much healthier environment.”

Within faerie culture, there has been a long-standing ethical tension between the prioritization of either personal freedom or community stability. Some believe personal freedom should be limited slightly to ensure community stability, as is the case within most sanctuary contexts where the land and community materially require it, while other faeries feel the communities ebb and flow at the behest of the people, formed when people want them and dissipated when they do not. This extreme prioritization of individual agency and freedom is most common within urban contexts where faerie life is often seen as supplementary to a more mainstream lifestyle. Faerie community, identity, and practice, beyond personal beliefs and behaviors, affords urban faeries with innumerable resources and benefits; however, the faeries receive from community what they cumulatively invest in it, and this intention seems lacking or distracted in recent years. If urban faeries choose community, the work must be done. Traditionally this work has fallen to the meager few who attempt to hold up an entire community until they inevitably burn out, and the community breaks apart until another few faeries come along later to take on the bulk of the responsibility once again. It seems the egalitarian and communal ideal of the faeries, practices to some extent on sanctuary land, is not being realized within urbanity. If community stability is the ultimate goal, urban faeries must invest time, work, and money into sustaining it. Faeries express a desire to have more opportunity and potential within urban emplacements of faeriedom, but all told hardly any are willing to step up and make it happen.
through shared organization and execution. While there is a great deal of freedom in separatist faerie spaces, there is a great deal of accountability, as well.

Accountability of labor and resources maintains the material community, but socioemotional support mechanisms, such as wellness checks, sustain the people. Although traditionally anticapitalist, faeries living within the landscape of capitalism cannot ignore the material needs and desires of the community. However, faeries can learn from the economic imaginaries of their separatist spaces and apply this wisdom to creating systems and practices of mutual aid, community ownership, and cohousing. Urban faeries could find ways to pool their material and spatial resources and identify community level economic goals, such as buying a plot of city land for a communal faerie home or creating a faerie emergency fund. By investing in the urban landscape and faerie folk, these spaces for radical experimentation can begin to take root within the city. And systems of urban responsibility and reciprocity, translated from gatherings and sanctuary spaces, could support long-term sustainability, strengthen community identity and place attachment, and provide purpose and meaning to urban faeries.

Urban faeries could also find significance and directionality from interacting with and attempting to improve the world in which they live, placemaking for co-constitutive social and ecological. Furthermore, there are so many overlapping communities within the city, all of which provide relational placemaking opportunity, but urban faerie culture could provide sexo-socio-spiritual placemaking potentialities through ritual, healing practice, educational outreach, and creative pursuits. Thus, faeries can once again imbue their wisdom and practice, learned in the queer spatiality and temporality of the utopian imaginary, into urban ecologies. As small an influence as committing to be authentically radical and fae in urban contexts, allowing the fae spirit to influence embodiment, relationships, and work. Surprisingly, one of the strongest impacts
of the pandemic on urban faeries was a renewed vigor to authenticity and self-expression. Survey respondents reportedly, in the past couple years, divulged their faerie identity with others, educated others about faerie culture, and invited others into faeriedom significantly more often than pre-COVID times \( n = 21 \). Although the rationale was not discussed, faeries may have been compensating for years in isolation or may feel a newfound apathy toward the potential risk of vulnerability. Either way, urban faeries have removed themselves from the isolating walls of their homes and of their social reservations.

To larger spheres, as Dawne—who believes faeries have an inherent civic responsibility and sacredness of representation and self-determination—suggests faerie energy can be brought to city halls, bringing these spaces ever slightly closer to their intended ideal sanctity of servant leadership. Bel said:

> Hell, if you have to go out into the streets, let’s go out into the streets and do it! I always go to one of my favorite sayings, Emma Goldman, the great anarchist, who said, “If I can’t dance at your revolution, I’m not coming.” It can happen, where should it happen? It should happen in the halls of the legislature, it should happen in the courts, it should happen in the streets, in the buildings of the schools. You know, stop putting people in “you have to be like this.” But then you speaking to an old socialist gay. Where should it happen? It should happen everywhere!

Collective action can lead to shared prosperity, social justice, and ecological integrity, and as faeries live their lives, creating imaginary and experimental space within the city, each interaction changes themselves and changes the world in which they live, creating more potentiality for better futures.

**Directions for Future Research**

Additional research may be directed toward the ethnoecologies of other urban spiritual communities to understand cross-cultural, multipurpose use of city space. Research could survey meeting the material, social, and spatial needs and desires of urbanites within the public and private
spheres beyond the work/play/sleep trichotomy which ensnares urban districting and planning. Future research could probe the translation of alternative economies and lifestyles within urbanity, urban communal ownership and cohousing as an example. Lastly, academic collaborations with urban stakeholders could investigate urban community-based placemaking focusing not on fixing-up but on showing-up. This research could quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the efficacy of community presence and belonging, supported by systems which sustain community, compared to top-down placemaking strategies of urban renewal.
APPENDIX

CULTURAL DOMAIN ANALYSIS GRAPHS
Peri-urban spaces were defined as any space outside of the city which was denoted based on its physicality. Examples include: campgrounds, state or national parks, wilderness, rurality, and remote bodies of water. Notably, these spaces were utilized to connect with nature and fae spirituality and sexuality but were not typically used as economic spaces.

Figure A.1: Cultural domain analysis of peri-urban placemaking practices.

Separatist spaces were defined as any space outside of the city which was denoted based on its sociality. Examples include: the global network of sanctuaries and regional or global gatherings. These spaces were used as futuristic imaginaries and places containing a plethora of faerie histories and spiritualities, but not places on which urban faeries rely to meet economic, sexual, or ecorelational needs.

Figure A.2: Cultural domain analysis of separatist placemaking practices.
Public urbanism was defined as any space within the city, defined by its physicality, which is generally viewed as accessible and open to citizenry, legally or socially. Examples include: city parks, public recreational spaces, public buildings, and urban bodies of water. These spaces were overwhelmingly used by urban faeries to connect with nature and their ecospirituality, but less so to connect others socially or their ancestors, or to use as economic spaces.

Figure A.3: Cultural domain analysis of urban public placemaking practices.

Private urbanism was defined as any space within the city, defined by its physicality, which is owned and/or operated by a non-governmental business or institution. Examples include for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations. These private spaces were most often used as economic spaces for urban faeries, as well as sexual spaces often enough, but were not significant sites for communing with nature or imagining future potential.

Figure A.4: Cultural domain analysis of urban private placemaking practices.
Social spaces were defined as any space within the city, defined by its interpersonal nature rather than its physical location. Examples include: formal events, informal hangouts, Heartcircles, recovery meetings, and cruising spots. Predominantly, these spaces provided the opportunity to connect with other faeries socially and spiritually, to allow for self-expression and passing on tradition, but not used as economic, future-oriented, or ecorelational spaces as often.

![Figure A.5: Cultural domain analysis of social placemaking practices.](image)

The home was defined as the location of dwelling of the participants or their social network, including the apartment or home, yards and gardens. The home was a truly multi-purpose space for urban faeries, providing a safer space for socializing, self-expression, spiritual practice, sexual connection, and drawing from faerie histories. However, these spaces were not noted as economic or future-oriented spaces.

![Figure A.6: Cultural domain analysis of domestic placemaking practices.](image)
All digital or virtual spaces were binned into one domain, including social media, communications technologies, and the internet. These spaces were primarily used as relational spaces, and sometimes as sexual spaces and imaginaries, but not often as a means of self-expression, connecting with faerie ancestry, or economic spaces.

Figure A.7: Cultural domain analysis of virtual placemaking practices.
REFERENCES


