

# THE



# MANIFESTO

**Quinta** aims to cultivate an experiment in creating queer\* ecosystems. Through inclusive and shared experiences, we strive not only to go *back* to Nature but also to *go forward with* and *for* Nature. Along this poetic pathway we endeavour to build diverse places and celebrate both the fauna and flora of our environment. We are in continuous fluidity and bewilderment as we encounter the beauty and the fecundity of our place known as **Quinta**.

Minha alma é como um pastor,  
Conhece o vento e o sol  
E anda pela mão das Estações  
A seguir e a olhar.  
Toda a paz da Natureza sem gente  
Vem sentar-se a meu lado.

Alberto Caeiro,  
*O Guardador de Rebanhos*

My soul is like a shepherd,  
It knows the wind and the sun  
And walks hand in hand with the Seasons,  
Following and looking.  
All the peace of peopleless Nature  
Comes to sit by my side.

Alberto Caeiro,  
*The Keeper of Sheep*

1. We exist at a moment of possibility and danger for a planet that is both adaptable and vulnerable. At **Quinta**, we privilege KINDNESS and believe that ACTIVISM can produce POLITICAL CHANGE for a **culture that is sickening**. We envisage the world as it could be and can be and resist the logic that it will inevitably remain as it has been. Charged with hope, we look for ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVING.

2. We CULTIVATE QUEER\* ECOSYSTEMS in the world: inclusive and **capacious**. We celebrate the similarities between the many identities that exist under the two names *Queer\** and *Nature* - recognising their paralleled experiences of precariousness, vulnerability, symbiosis, solidarity, hope, loss, regeneration, passion, and **love**. We challenge the assumptions that destroy under the names of heteronormativity, cishnormativity, racism, anthropocentrism, and speciesism: assumptions that drive people to **lives of quiet desperation**. We build DIVERSE SPACES - both physical and online - in which fertile differences are embraced. We recognise the beauty of all bodies and the wisdom of all minds.

3. We SHARE PRINCIPLES; this is an active sharing in which ideas are exchanged, debated, and developed. We disagree, but we use our disagreements to queer assumptions and to find new and better points of view. We grow our thought through experience, discussion, and reading; this study begins and ends in our VARIED AND INTIMATE EXPERIENCES of the world around us, which transform all of us into **students and observers again**. We explore the world with all our senses - with our eyes, our ears, **our shoulder blades** - and use our voices to defend that world.

4. We commit to going **back to nature**, but also to going *forward with* and *for* nature. We both REDISCOVER AND INNOVATE as we live lives in SYMPATHY WITH THE NON-HUMAN. We embrace the **infinite variety** of the world, and see ourselves as part of that variety; we encounter other lives as specific and unique, and do not make reductive generalisations about a homogeneous Nature. We recognise and reject the ways in which a false cultural idea of 'Nature' has been - and sometimes still can be - used to condemn queer\* lives as unnatural. We support the beauty and fecundity of the land we occupy; we regenerate and revive that land and ourselves together. We see the **poetic value in building our own farm** as a space without cruelty.

5. We LIVE ALONGSIDE OTHERS in a spirit of compassion and care. On this farm - peopled by badgers, dogs, Egyptian mongooses, foxes, fresh water turtles, frogs, human beings, rabbits, salamanders, wild boars, and wild cats - we EXPLOIT NO BODIES and cherish all the lives that equally share the stars, the sunrise, and the sunset. We eat and dress in a spirit of kindness.

6. **Quinta** DOES NOT CONSTRUCT HIERARCHIES. It works symbiotically to enrich all its parts and all its members. We coordinate the distinct parts of our community and VALUE ALL CONTRIBUTIONS. Our roots are deep in the beautiful landscape of the Alto Alentejo. Sustained and supported by these roots, the trunk of our online community grows. The branches of our ideas spread to the world beyond the community, inviting wider engagement. The fruits of those engagements fall, returning to the land project and the roots below, stimulating development, growth, and NEW CYCLES OF ACTIVISM.

7. In Portuguese idiom, to be joyful is not to be in seventh heaven but *estar nas suas sete quintas*, to be in one's seven farms. We PRACTISE JOY on the quinta, delighting in each other's company and in a shared sense of purpose and pleasure. We can never have enough of nature. We laugh. We live queer\* lives in a space free from judgement and censorship. We cultivate a DETERMINED OPTIMISM, presuming nothing, doing much, and hoping everything. We question the insistence that progress must be slow and that lifestyle change must be painful. We declare that nothing is lost and everything might be gained through A RE-EVALUATION OF HOW, WHERE, AND WITH WHOM WE LIVE. We believe in the restorative potential of love. We try to extend - gently or boldly, softly or with abandon - what we learn and do at **Quinta** into ALL CORNERS OF OUR LIVES: rural and urban, leisured and professional, private and public.

---

Post Script. We make manifestos which are in MOTION and not static; we believe in learning and not knowing - in productive bewilderment - and as we learn we revise, adapt, expand, and improve our statements of intent. Because the land is indefinitely wild, unfathomed by us because unfathomable, this manifesto will be washed away in time and something new will grow in its place. We welcome all contributions to this constant re-writing. Our experience of queerness is that it is collaborative and collective and that it is in the coming together of disparate voices that change can happen.



quinta.lgbt

November 2021

## NOTES

All sections of the main text which are **marked in green** are quotations, allusions, and references to other texts. We value this dialogue with other texts and the perspectives which they represent. Many of the works referenced have been discussed in the Quinta Book Club. Details of these references are given in the notes that follow.

**Epigraph.** This quotation comes from the first poem in Alberto Caeiro's poetic collection *The Keeper of Sheep*. The poem was written in March 1914. The world – a century younger than it is today and yet to discover the full effects of the Anthropocene – was marching to the drum of a new, industrialised Modernity. Against that backdrop, Caeiro (who was one of Fernando Pessoa's heteronyms) produced a sequence of poems that celebrate an unthinking sensory engagement with the non-human world. The poet explores, from his isolated cottage, a different engagement with the world which dispenses with assumptions and prejudices. The natural world in these poems is never a something to exploit, but a series of many things to discover and delight in. Caeiro's poems articulate a number of attitudes which resonate with our work at Quinta.

1. We believe that the activism of Quinta is urgently needed. The best estimates of the rate of planetary decline make it clear that we are teetering on a tipping point and that human willingness to adapt in the years ahead may determine whether ecological disaster is averted. This state of affairs was commented on by Edward Carpenter in his prophetic 1889 work *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* when he portrayed contemporary culture as 'a kind of disease which the various races of man have to pass through' and that 'our climate is greatly of our own creation... [as] we have covered the lands with a pall of smoke and are walking to our own funerals under it.' Jeanette Winterson, in her 1989 novel *Sexing the Cherry*, goes even further when she writes that 'The earth is being murdered and hardly anyone wants to believe it.' This is also a time of rising legislative and social attacks on those who identify as queer, with startling assaults on hard-won freedoms in parts of Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Africa. While demonstration and lobbying can form part of the Quinta response to this crisis, the emphasis is on modelling the possibility of an alternative to disastrous consumption. The quinta itself is a space that combines the sustenance of friendship, community, self-sufficiency, and outreach. Our hope is that, by demonstrating the pleasures of this kind of living, others will choose to adopt aspects of it.

2. The word *queer* retains the capacity to shock. In his memoir *At Your Own Risk: A Saint's Testament*, Derek Jarman expresses some of the challenge of finding the right term: 'These names: gay, queer, homosexual are limiting. I would love to finish with them. We're going to have to decide which terms to use and where we use them... For me to use the word "queer" is a liberation; it was a word that frightened me, but no longer.' We choose to use it because it is a term that embraces (and complicates) many identities and seeks to avoid exclusion. The asterisk in *queer\** extends this further, gesturing towards an endlessly deferred footnote that stretches the term as broadly as it can be stretched. Quinta is not just for those who identify in a set way. It is for those who are out, are coming out, are yet to come out, are considering coming out, were out, will be out, or resist identifying as a fixed identity of any kind. All ecosystems depend on productive variety, and Quinta welcomes diversity of all kinds. Most people are by now familiar with the welcome notion of inclusivity; capaciousness may be less familiar. Ashton T. Crawley in 'Lifting Voices in the Key of Blackqueer YES' (in the *L.A. Review of Books* from September 2020) advocates an affirmative spirit of YES that encourages us to rethink gender and sexuality as expansive and capacious. This capacity for radical inclusivity is at the heart of Quinta. It also allows an inclusive recognition of the overlap between the Queer and Nature; both homophobic and anti-ecological discourse have insisted on myths of excluding, damaging hierarchies of privilege; at Quinta, we see Queer and Nature as twinned and mutually supportive. The idea of queerness which we understand is one that celebrates love and attraction and passion in all their diverse forms and expressions; as Jeanette Winterson writes in *FranKissStein*, her queer reworking of *Frankenstein*: 'I am saying this, only this: love is not limit. Love is not this far and no further. What the future is bringing will also be the future of love.' We call out heteronormativity, cisheteronormativity, racism, anthropocentrism, and speciesism where we encounter them and we campaign for changes to any laws, cultural attitudes, and social practices that disadvantage anyone based on their sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, or species. Henry David Thoreau writes in *Walden, Or Life in the Woods* (1854) about the 'lives of quiet desperation' that result from a resistance to nature; we stand in solidarity with all our neighbours who continue to live such lives because of unjust attitudes.

3. The calendar of events run by Quinta is extensive. All of these focus in one way or another on the exchange of ideas. Some of these ideas are practical – how the farm should be run, what our political activities should be, how we can cultivate plants and vegetable crops. Others are more abstract, such as the conversations in our book group, where we discuss how queer and ecological issues are explored in fiction, poetry, philosophy, and graphic fiction. The members of the community represent a wide range of national, cultural, political, professional, and personal backgrounds, and individual experience shapes much of the discussion. Thoreau, in *Walden*, argues that ‘all men would perhaps become essentially students and observers again’ if they were to experience life in the woods. We want to learn from these experiences and not to impose ready-made assumptions onto the world that we encounter. Caeiro celebrates this kind of direct engagement with the world when he writes in his *Uncollected Poems* that

I close my eyes and the hard earth on which I lie  
Has such a reality that even my back feels it.  
I don’t need reason when I have shoulder blades.

4. In the nineteenth century, Edward Carpenter advocated ‘a return to nature and community of human life’ as ‘the way back to the lost Eden.’ The aspiration to go back to nature is a sound one, but it can inadvertently neglect the reality that much of the natural world has been lost. Any going back must therefore also be a going forward. We believe that living cooperatively with nature allows for a regenerative lifestyle that works for nature, that encourages regrowth. This demands an intellectual, emotional, and behavioural empathy for geological, vegetable, and animal existence; it demands a compassionate consideration even for soil and stones. It demands that we do not simply reduce all the non-human world into a simple monolithic thing: Nature. Caeiro writes that:

I saw that there is no Nature,  
That Nature doesn’t exist,  
That there are hills, valleys, plains,  
That there are trees, flowers, grasses,  
That there are rivers and stones,  
But that there isn’t a whole to which this belongs,  
That a real and true unity  
Is a disease of our ideas.

We are trying to cure ourselves of this disease. Every encounter we have with a human being, a dog, a wild boar, a plant, a tree, or a stone is an encounter with an individual and not with a representative of an amorphous mass. It is easier to care for individuals. This care for others becomes care also for ourselves, and the regeneration of the quinta is of enormous self-benefit. We pursue Thoreau’s project of healing ourselves through a more contemplative life; in *Walden*, he recognises the ‘poetic value of building one’s own house.’

5. One of the delights of the quinta is the abundance and diversity of life. As biodiversity is squeezed in most parts of Europe and North America and in much of South America, Asia, and Africa, it is essential that we cherish such diversity as remains. The quinta reimagines the farm; no longer a space which exploits and harvests the bodies of other animal species, we offer them sanctuary and neighbourliness. We produce vegetable crops and delicious and sustainable vegetarian food. Choices of what we eat, what we wear, how we travel and so on are acts of activism.

6. Despite having its base in a patch of rich land in Portugal, Quinta is always also an online space in which close community happens remotely. If our activism is to have the impact it must, it needs to extend beyond our 5.5 hectares, out into the world of our online members. There is no hierarchy in Quinta, and all members are invited to be as involved in the decision-making as they care to be. There is always scope for new ideas about activism, advocacy, and activities.

7. Quinta should be a tonic for the body and the mind. It is a space – actual and virtual – in which everyone can shed the strain of putting on an act and can live without judgement. We accept our slip-ups, errors, and

oversights and celebrate our successes. We are a happy group and our sense of political connection stems from friendship. We are frustrated, angry, and saddened by so much of today's politics – but we are also defiant, determined, hopeful, and joyful. The life that we model on the Quinta is one which can make big strides towards sustainability while also enshrining pleasure and comfort. We work on the farm, but the activities are communal and the fruits of our labour beautiful. The spirit of Quinta is one which sees no loss in a closer engagement with beauty, calm, and space. We also believe that what we are able to do in relative ease on the quinta can be adapted to other spaces which we inhabit. A flat in London, a country house in France, a loft in New York, or an apartment in Lisbon can accommodate many of the philosophies and behaviours that we practise on a farm near Marvão.

**Post Script.** This document is designed to be adapted; parts can be altered, excised, revised, replaced. Our ideas – and the words we find for them – change all the time, with every new week, every new event, and every new member. In *Wild Things*, queer theorist Jack Halberstam celebrates the idea of 'bewilderment' which complicates all the consensus terms of any particular era; 'While the arc of modern queer histories has bent toward legibility, recognition, maturity, and mutuality, wild bodies plot a different course through history and appear only at the very edge of definition, flickering in and out of meaning and sense and tending toward bewilderment.' This bewilderment is 'the process of becoming wild by shedding knowledge (as opposed to becoming civilized by acquiring it)' and it offers a fundamental challenge to the myth that human beings have all the answers. This is not a new idea; Thoreau wrote almost two centuries ago that 'At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable.' We live on the land and with the land in order to learn about the land; we do not own, do not master, do not know the land. And, in the spirit of not knowing, this manifesto will continue to grow and change.