

European Network for Queer Anthropology (ENQA) Workshop 2021: Futures beyond Crises, 16 & 17 Sept 2021

“Queering Design in Alaska”

Nicewonger, Fritz, and McNair

This paper examines how a small cadre of builders are “queering” design in Alaska. Specifically, it draws on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork to introduce the concept of “design queering” as an analytical framework for situating the creative practices of housing designers within wider debates about housing insecurity and activism in the Panarctic. This requires drawing on queer theory (e.g., Hayward 2010; Hayward and Che 2017; Boyce, Gonzalez-Polledo, and Posocco 2020) to describe how a set of intersecting experiences inspired this small group of builders to develop a kit-of-parts prototype. This prototype is influenced by the lessons these builders learned while collaborating with rural Alaskan communities on building projects where they witnessed how contemporary construction methods pollute landscapes and force homeowners into what Michelle Murphy has termed “regimes of chemical living” (2008). Later, through their own personal research efforts they began to weave together a set of construction principles for decolonizing the building industry, both in Alaska and beyond. These principles include design for disassembly, designing for the circular economy, and the notion of home ownership as a human right. By mapping out how this prototype came into being through the “queering” of housing design, this paper explores what a “future beyond crisis” might look like from the perspective of a small group of builders who are invested in transforming the structural inequalities produced by construction industries in Alaska and beyond.

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant 2103556.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.