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Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens's New Ecosex Art Movement, But Were Afraid to Ask



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The Ecosex Manifesto exhibition promised to "queer," eroticize, and glamorize the environmental movement and be both serious and satirical, as well as a call to arms, and a political campaign.



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Former adult film actress and self-described "post post modernist" Annie Sprinkle (b. 1954) earned her place in the annals of feminist and body art with her 1990 performance "[Public Cervix Announcement](#)," in which she invited viewers to inspect her cervix with a speculum and flashlight. As its title indicates, the gesture was as much sex education as sensationalism, promoting, as she saw it, greater understanding of — and less shame about — the female body. Since, Sprinkle has continued to promote her own unique and relentlessly affirmative take on sexuality through her art and teaching.

More recently, Sprinkle and her partner Elizabeth Stephens, who teaches in the art department at UC Santa Cruz, have come together to take up a new cause: the environment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, this new endeavor takes a decidedly fetishistic turn, fusing interests in exploring environmental themes with celebration of the more taboo regions of human sexuality. And thus, the new discipline of "sexecology" was born. After having staged a symbolic series of weddings between themselves and various natural phenomenon — the Earth, the Sea, the Moon — Sprinkle and Stephens have now launched [their Ecosex Manifesto](#), holding a symposium at San Francisco's Center for Sex and Culture in June — panels included "Greening the Sex Industry," "Anal Ecology: A Dedication to the Earth," and "The Ecstasy of Gardening" — along with an art show on ecosexual themes.

The curious reader might wonder, hearing all this, just how serious this movement could possibly be? "We caress rocks, are pleased by waterfalls, and admire the Earth's curves often," the manifesto declares. "We make love with the Earth through our senses. We celebrate our E-spots. We are very dirty." At the same time, it vows soberly, "We will stop the rape, abuse and the poisoning of the Earth," and the duo have very serious things to say about "Mountaintop Removal," an ecologically disastrous form of mining that is decimating the West Virginia countryside. And, though ecosex is hardly in danger of becoming a major political movement, its merger of kooky theater, environmental consciousness-raising, and broad-minded affirmation of sexual experimentation of all kinds (see the accompanying graph of "ecosexual" fetishes) has actually made a few converts.

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To get to the bottom of what is all means, ARTINFO recently sent the duo some questions about their new

manifesto while they were in Spain presiding over an ecosex workshop. Here is what they said:

Can you give me some background on the movement — how it started and what you hope to accomplish with it? What is the connection between sex and the environment?

This movement has had many beginnings and really many other iterations before us. In other words, what we are doing is not really new. Rather, we are engaging in something very old, pre-Christian ideas and practices that indigenous people across continents and centuries invented and that has to do with the belief that non-human beings are sentient. We believe that the earth can feel both pleasure and pain. Perhaps differently than humans — but anything that is alive feels. We are combining these beliefs and practices with notions and practices of contemporary sexuality in order to engender more empathy for the earth.

We also hope to help make the environmental movement a little more sexy, fun and diverse. We do this through a combination of ecosex art, theory, practice, and activism. We are very concerned with the environmental state of the world and this is our attempt to engage some of the problems that we see as most pressing such as global warming, pollution and mass extinction. The environment is full of sensuality and sexuality everywhere, if you let yourself see and experience it. We want to recognize and engage that erotic life force energy as a way to inspire people's empathy for the Earth, engender their creativity and to fill them with wonder and delight as well as be a source of power to nurture and defend the earth from damage caused by exploitation. With ecosex, a person always has a lover, the Earth.

What kind of responses have you received to the Manifesto?

As we were writing the Ecosex Manifesto we sent it around to a few people for feedback, a couple academic colleagues, sex worker friends, and artists. Everyone loved it as is, although we call this version 1.0 because it's likely to have some amendments eventually. Then we posted it on Facebook on the night of our opening at the Center for Sex and Culture (CSC) in San Francisco. Again we got positive feedback. People said that they resonated with the Manifesto — which is a great compliment as well as an indication that we are on the right track, even in this age where manifestos may very well be obsolete. At CSC we printed a large-scale Manifesto as wall text and hung it in a Baroque golden frame, with an ornate chair and table with a pen, so that people could sit down, read it, and sign. Over 150 people signed it so far. There will be updates and new audiences we reach as we continue to formulate our ideas.

The Ecosex Manifesto seems to translate to other cultures as well. We are in Spain right now doing a whirlwind series of performance: theater work, performance art, ecosex workshops plus two ecosex weddings — one to the rocks at the Center for Contemporary Art in Barcelona and another to coal at Laboral Center for Contemporary Art in Gijon on the 23rd of July. The people who are coming to these events seem to resonate with our ideas. Many people who are coming to a lot of our events and they are very excited to talk to us about the work afterward. These are politically active and astute individuals who are also sexually sophisticated. Here in Barcelona our participants and collaborators have a punk aesthetic and lean much more towards anarchism than to California New Age. And yet, they too are looking for a way to connect to the Earth in order to try to help save what is left of this planet. Individuals participating in our events say our work inspires them to have greater empathy for the Earth and that this creates a new space to think about environmental art and activism. We consider all of this to be art because we practice art as life.

There are queers, drag queens, punks, experimental artists, sex workers, people that don't feel they can fully be themselves in the environmental activist movement. We feel that sometimes we have to be on our "best behavior" when we are working with environmentalists so as not to confuse the issues for people. But in ecosex all are welcome, all can fit in. Ecosex is also totally hilarious and silly as well as serious.

To what degree is the movement you hope to found connected to the mainstream environmental movement, or a critique of it? I find this passage of the manifesto interesting: "We do not condone the use of violence, although we recognize that some ecosexuals may choose to fight those most guilty for destroying the Earth with public disobedience, anarchist and radical environmental activist strategies. We embrace the revolutionary tactics of art, music, poetry, humor, and sex. We work and play tirelessly for Earth justice and global peace."

We love all of the various environmental movement factions, mainstream as well as the more radical branches and have a great deal of respect for environmentalists because it is hard work. We leave criticizing environmental groups to others. We live in San Francisco but travel to West Virginia as often as we are able because that is where Beth was born and her family lives there. We especially admire environmental activists who put their bodies on the line in the fight against large corporations who are plundering the Earth's resources for profit. In this vein we'd like to acknowledge Reverend Billy Talen and the Church of Earthalujah who is tirelessly fighting with his partner Savtri D. and their Life After Shopping choir to save the Earth through art ministry and performance.

We've been going to protests and hanging out with some of the folks who are fighting mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining in West Virginia. MTR is a highly destructive method of blasting and scraping coal out of the mountains cheaply by literally blowing off the tops of the mountains and then digging the coal from the exposed seams with a house sized bucket called a dragline. The overburden, which consists of the rock, dirt, trees, dead animals and other once living beings, are then pushed into the valley between the mountains and into the stream beds. MTR is really what politicized us and got us very interested in on the ground environmental action.

As far as violence is concerned, Beth is not sure that nonviolence will be enough to stop corporate plundering of our natural resources especially at the current rate of profit that they are making. Annie is purely a lover, and Beth a bit more of a fighter. But we need all types. Even the most extreme. If West Virginia is any indication of

how natural resources will be excavated to meet our exponentially growing energy needs and to maintain our "energy security" then the sky is the limit on the destruction and devastation to the earth that energy corporations are capable of wreaking. The scale of destruction caused by MTR is unimaginable unless one has seen it in person. But the country at large ignores this situation and will continue to ignore it until we have no more drinking water. That is exactly the situation that people living in southern West Virginia face in addition to increased rates of cancer, respiratory disease, and birth defects linked to MTR. It is unlikely that greedy corporations are going to be reasonably convinced to give up the profits that they make from mining and selling natural resources through peaceful means. Annie on the other hand is more optimistic. But we are both committed to nonviolence and use the methods of art and free speech to bring about a greater awareness of the environmental crises that we all face.

We absolutely love to use humor, and play as well, because really the situation is so dire that making already depressed people feel worse about the reality of their situation only serves to shut them down and scare them more than they already are. This is in part why the combination of ecology and sex delivered with love are such a potent combo — people perk up and listen when we introduce them to the terms ecosex and sexecology. This new field holds great potential for reaching new audiences, such as a queer audiences or for example, the anarchist artist audience here in Barcelona.

I'm also interested in your notion of ecosexuality as a sexual identity. What does it mean to say that one's primary identity is ecosexual? What does it mean "come out" as an ecosexual?

Ecosexuality as a sexual identity, according to us — we might be the only ones that explain it this way — means that you find the Earth erotic and treat her/him as an object of love and affection rather than simply as a resource to be infinitely exploited. This is part of the reason why we think that it is important to shift the metaphor from "Earth as Mother" to "Earth as Lover." The Earth is tired of being considered as the ALL GIVING MOTHER where we can continually suck from her tit forever. We need to start giving back to her as we would give to our lover. We need to engage in a more mutual relationship with the Earth if there is going to be a viable future for living beings (like plants and even human animals).

So we see ecosexual as a metaphor but we also see it as a physical erotic attraction to the Earth and we experiment with what it means to find the Earth sexy and to even give and receive sensual and sexual pleasure from our beloved planet through the elements of earth, fire, water, and air. We have just taught four day-long sessions of the first Ecosex workshop in Barcelona and we have discovered that many people are erotically physically attracted to various aspects of nature and the environment. The participants in this workshop were from Australia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Argentina, and the United States. We were amazed that people came from so far away, but they did.

But this was also the case when we married the sea two years ago at the Murcia Pavilion in the Venice Biennale. Performers and collaborators from seventeen different countries participated in this performance and we didn't have any production funds to help them pay for their travel or their stay in Venice. People came of their own accord. We find this very moving because it indicates that people do love the earth and that they are searching for ways to express their concern and to connect in order to slow down the damage that the human race is imposing on our planet. We use art as our preferred method of action but sex and sexuality are strongly involved as sex always plays some part in great art-making and expression. Perhaps ours are small poetic gestures, but in any case, they make a lot of people very happy, ecstatic even, and feel loved. With ecosex love can grow to universal proportions. We feel a union, a bliss, that happened right after we married the Earth in 2008.

Ecosexuality doesn't have to be one's primary identity. One can still maintain some other identity (GLBTQI, hetero, or even non-sexual with people) and also be ecosexual. We say that we are pollen-amorous. (Not polyamorous.) In other words, ecosexuality is about diversity, not exclusivity. It is about sharing not owning. And it is about whole systems not about being a single player in a machine whether that machine is normative sexuality or the institutions that try to maintain exclusive mastery over the world within the category of human.

Ecosex is also a great way to do sex education. To teach people that sexuality is about so much more than human bodies coming together. It's also about connecting energetically, with others, and with nature and with the sky, the sea... tapping into the life force with breath for example, can be absolutely orgasmic. Annie Sprinkle has a Ph.D. in human sexuality, and Beth Stephens has done work about sexuality, gender, and queerness for decades. We've been around the block. And now we are poised and ready for exactly where we need to be. The best is yet to come!

Actually, very few people know what ecosex is. But in fact, when we question people, they have almost ALL had what we consider ecosexual experiences. For example deriving erotic pleasure from nude swimming, laying in the hot sun, masturbating with water, being pounded by a waterfall and getting totally ecstatic, getting aroused by the wind being while on the back of a motorcycle, and LOTS of folks have had intercourse with various fruits and vegetables. To us that's all ecosex. Eating psychedelic plants and connecting deeply with nature. Mud bathing. Herbal body wraps. Of course there are lots more extreme ecosex fetishes and paraphilias. We have put them into four categories, and made some fun charts and graphs about it all. There are pyrophiles, aerophiles, terraphiles and aquaphiles. We are creating a big fun lexicon of ecosex terms. We have an ecosex pride flag. We do ecosex walking tours, ecosex symposiums, workshops, eco-weddings, and rituals. The fun thing is that we get to create what ecosex is virtually from scratch. And having both been part of several sexual revolutions, we know how its done! It's so much fun. And we also feel that its important paradigm shift and a new imaginary.

What are your plans for the future of the movement?

In the evolving configuration that we espouse, ecosexuality is in flux. As we said in the earlier question we

didn't entirely invent the notion of ecosex or of animism but our contribution is in the combination of ecology and sexology to create the new field of sexecology. We use art to activate and investigate it. It is a big juicy experiment. I don't know that I would call this a movement as much as I'd say that it is evolution or shift in consciousness.

After the success of these very recent workshops in Barcelona our plans include hosting additional workshops, hopefully in some beautiful natural environments as well as to continue to teach and practice ecosexuality in the urban settings where it is really needed too. In another interview this morning we realized that it is much easier to concentrate outside of the city. In large part this is because of ambient noise that is a consequence of the frenetic energy that every city holds. Outside the city the sounds are predominantly of nature punctuated by the sounds of machines but the city is full of the sound of cars, sirens, and construction that makes it hard to concentrate and let go in a certain way. When we moved our workshop out of Ciutadella Park in the center of Barcelona to a beach about an hour north of the city the ability to concentrate deepened. It was so much easier to let go at the beach and concentrate on the feelings of connection between the earth and our bodies. So far we have now had two Ecosex Symposiums as well as the workshops. Both of these events were very rich in creativity, theory, practice, and activism. We plan to continue working the ways that we have been until we find some kind of momentum that is able to sustain itself or new methods of improving the environment through art actions and performance.

We also expect to learn more about our own capacity for connecting with nature, finding more pleasure than we ever imagined, and want to take lots of folks with us into eco-bliss, so that maybe then they will care for the Earth from a place of love, not sacrifice and struggle.

To see images relating to Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens' Ecosex Art Movement, click on the slide show at the left.

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