

Queer Ecologies Roundtable Discussion

Part 3: Politics, Resistance, Alliances, and Imbroglios

GORDON BRENT BROCHU-INGRAM, PETER HOBBS & CATRIONA SANDILANDS

UnderCurrents: In preparing for tonight’s roundtable, we went back to Andil Gosine’s contribution to the *Queer Ecologies* book, “Non-white Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts Against Nature,” in which he raises three powerful concerns/questions about the formation of queer ecologies. The first regards the “*political geography of queer ecology*: Is the production of ‘queer ecology’ a decidedly Euroamerican project?” (166, emphasis in original). Building on this, the second is “a concern about *race-racism*: If queer ecology is to maintain a primary gaze on the production of nature in Euroamerican contexts—which, despite my reservations is, I think, a legitimate and viable option—what becomes of race-racism?” (166, emphasis in original). Finally, “*a concern about the political resistance*” by way of articulating a mode of politics that goes beyond alliances in its “refusal of race-racism [as] not separate from the refusal of heteropatriarchy,” Gosine finally asks, “Might queer ecology be better served, for example, by the kind of model of political resistance that has been articulated by black lesbian feminists such as Audre Lorde, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Dionne Brand, where its work is not merely to attend to the ‘sexuality’ part of oppression, but to recognize

and work with its full, complex rendering?” (167–168, emphasis in original).

So, in light of Gosine’s questions, what might it look like if queer ecologies were to strengthen its engagements with other self-forming fields and to other modes not only of resistance but also of research?

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram: [O]ne thing I’ve been thinking about is how important these queer nature and ecology conversations have been for creatively coming up with more resources, more theoretical ammunition. To challenge retrogresses and increasingly ‘neoliberal’ . . . conceptualizations of both ecology and LGBT communities. So, for example, I’ve been recently moved by

the new work . . . on critiques of homonationalism, like Jasbir K. Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages*. But also what’s really been useful this year is Christina Hanhardt’s 2013 *Safe Space: Gay Neighbourhoods History and the Politics of Violence*, which is really about missed opportunities for coalition building. I see a lot of potential, and I go to some meetings where people recognize the potential. But in my world out here—and maybe not at York University—it’s still been in its very formative stages [of seeing] how these new forms of queer ecologies investigation and analysis can help us build bridges that lead to new kinds of coalitions.

Catriona Sandilands: To tentative-

ly stick a finger into that huge pie . . . there’s one work, one text that, for me, perfectly encapsulates what I think is the potential of queer ecologies. And that’s Shani Mootoo’s novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*.

One of the reasons that I’ve been, in recent years, so incredibly drawn to works of art and literature is that they are able to stage and perform those complicated articulations and cross-penetrations . . . in incredibly accessible and powerful ways, that works that call themselves ‘theory’ do not necessarily need to do, because theories are attempting to universalize and literary texts are showing the dense particularities of certain kinds of relationships.

But Mootoo’s novel stages—I can’t talk about it in all its glorious complexity—but it stages a relationship among gender, sexuality, species, race, colony, and [ableism]. And I particularly love it because it does so through plants. [I]t’s an extraordinary representation of the dense ways in which all of these different relationships are articulated. Does it offer up a politics? No, it doesn’t. That’s not the work that it attempts to do. Does it draw our attention to the ways in which these power relationships are densely interwoven and actually inseparable? You know, you cannot name a single source of oppression as primary in that text. . . . It offers this incredibly



ELK RADIO. Peter Hobbs.

powerful articulation and you end up, after having read the novel, with an incredibly deepened understanding of each one of those different sets of relationships. If you ask me for a single queer ecological text to read, that's the one I will give you.

The other thing I would say is that . . . the way in which queer theory is going to come back into the queer ecological conversation is through queer people of colour theory. And we've already seen that with Mel Chen's book *Animacies* and I think that there are ways in

which some of this more recent theoretical work is seemingly asking different kinds of queer theoretical questions.

So, Foucault was incredibly influential, Lee Edelman has been incredibly influential, enabling us to ask different kinds of questions. I think that precisely works [by] . . . Puar, Chen, and also . . . Katherine McKittrick [are] asking us to re-think what it means to ask a queer question.

Peter Hobbs: Yeah, I was going to mention Mel Chen's book as my pick. . . .

Mel Chen's book is amazing because it does all this work—and that's the whole point of the book—that's what makes it so good, because [Chen] formats the book so that [the] methodology matches . . . what [they're] doing. There's a mirroring going on there, right? [Chen] talks about messy imbroglios and [is] creating messy imbroglios, and that's important to what queer ecologies is.

Conversation continues on page 60.