

Queer Ecologies Roundtable Discussion

Part 2: Examining Heteronormativity, Reprocentricity, and Ecology

GORDON BRENT BROCHU-INGRAM, PETER HOBBS & CATRIONA SANDILANDS

UnderCurrents: There [were] a lot of really interesting knots in that first round of things. One of those knots touches on something that Peter said about the relationship between queer theory as a kind of academic enterprise and queer ecology as this ostensibly more mobile enterprise that can travel. In queer politics, in general, the process of engaging with heteronormativity, the process of engaging with reprocentricity is, in some sense, what makes it queer. As ecology helps the queer travel in different universes and attaches it to different kinds of things, how do heteronormativity and reprocentricity act as centres for what queer ecologies is doing? Do you think that the insistence on queer ecology or queer theory as an anti-reprocentric or anti-heteronormative enterprise changes when we start to pay more attention to ecology as a mode of doing the work?

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram: I have a kind of a strong response. . . . The queer ecologies framework for me has been pretty easy to graft onto a whole body of decolonial and Indigenous theory around environment. You know, it's hard sometimes, and I say

this as somebody who is very a highly assimilated mixed-race Indigenous person. My mother's family is Metis with deep roots in three regions in northern Canada, boreal Canada. I grew up as part of an Indian Reserve community in Southern Vancouver Island, but [I was], you know, pretty middle class. So like many of us, it has taken me much of my life to process that and I often do it through colonial theory. Now I think that there is a very direct relationship between some of our queer ecologies methods because there is a deeper critique of science. Science as we know was largely a Euro-centric, decolonial, imperial project. . . . The queer ecologies conversation gives me a kind of decolonial bridge between white-neoco-

lonial environmentalism on one-hand, which I see all over this region—Salt Spring Island and Southern Vancouver Island—but also the remnants of Indigenous ecological knowledge on the other hand, which has seen a huge resurgence not only just because of this year's [2014] Supreme Court of Canada decisions [regarding Tsilhqot'in First Nation] but a huge sort of cultural resurgence both in Indigenous populations and in the broader population around here. So it's on everybody's minds out on the west coast. So there are some other bridges and possibilities that the queer ecologies conversations—we'll call them doors, you know—doors that lead to bridges that sometimes people want to walk along.

Peter Hobbs: Brent do you have an example of a good bridge?

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram: Yeah! . . . If you're serious about calling into question the reprocentricity and heteronormativity of modern science and modern ecology, then you start to open the door to a range of other narratives and experiences and investigations of our environments. It's everything from traditional environmental knowledge to the kind of cultural narrative that we see in environmentalism. But ecology as a science as we've known it is up for reconsideration. It's not necessarily undermined, but it's broadened. And I think we've all been doing that. On one level we've been trying to shore up the importance of ecology and environmental studies. At the same time, especially with the queer work, we're calling some of the earlier assumptions, such as reprocentricity and heteronormativity into correct question. We're demolishing part of modern science, ecological science, and we're trying to find substitutes.

Catriona Sandilands: I think you could also argue that there is a trajectory of queering in some versions of ecological science, even though the folks doing it probably—actually, defi-

nately—wouldn't call it that. So moving away from, for example, some of the more reductionist genetically driven accounts of evolutionary biology that focus on the idea of the adaptive trait being carried by an individual through the process of sexual selection. Moving away from an understanding of that as the central model of inheritance—in some ways Lamarck ends up being somewhat vindicated—we're able to look at the ways in which environmental conditions trigger genetic change and mutation. There's one understanding in evolutionary biology that difference in a species is only produced through sexual relationship, but in fact, it is increas-

ingly obvious that that's not the case. So it's no longer the case that you have to have the heterosexual coupling at the centre of questions of change and genetic inheritance. There are . . . epigenetic forces. There are ways in which we can now look at life in much queerer ways, and that queering is coming from the humanities, the arts, the social sciences. I would argue that it's appearing in the sciences as well. I'll just end it there, end of thought.

Peter Hobbs: The only thing that I would add to that is that it's not new. You know, science has always been interested in an experimentation and

wonderment. It thrives, it should thrive on, experimentation and wonderment. That's what the best science does. That's what science is supposed to do . . . it productively mangles and entangles. And I would add, and it might be a trope that I use way too much, but it's that the world is always already queer . . . I think that's one of the main points of queer ecologies—seeking out the queerness in everyday life and reminding people that, of course, science is constructed following certain restrictions and certain disciplines, but it is also the performance of matter. Yeah. And then I'll end there.

Conversation continues on page 46.



VANCOUVER FROM GOOGLE EARTH 4 2008. Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram.