

Introduction

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Introduction

LISA DOWNING AND LARA COX

The editors of this Special Issue are both passionately interested in the relationship between ‘second-wave’ feminism and queer – a pair of terms and a relationship that have been often debated and sometimes misconstrued in the histories of both activism and the academy. The metaphor of ‘waves’ to describe the history of feminism is notoriously unstable and inaccurate, since it assumes that one version of feminism follows consecutively from another, rather than acknowledging overlaps, traces, and discontinuities. Moreover, the notion that there have been wave-like ‘troughs’ is a way of effacing the forms of organizing that have taken place outside of feminism’s ‘crests.’¹ Similarly, ‘queer’, a politics and a method that developed as an anti-identitarian and anti-normative response to the AIDS crisis, has undergone numerous definitional shifts in the academy and in political usage. The result is that it sometimes means no more than ‘homosexual’ (reducing queer’s *resistance of* identity politics precisely *to* identity politics),² while at other times its theoretical and methodological specificities are downplayed and the ‘fluidity’ of queer is emphasized until it becomes largely meaningless.³ Finally, the global movements, politics, and bodies of thought known as ‘feminism’ and ‘queer’ have long co-existed, interpenetrated, and informed each other in a number of – not always easy or unproblematic – ways. A recent body of critical literature, to which this Special Issue contributes, has begun to attempt to explore and re-evaluate this relationship.⁴ Reflecting, perhaps, the sometimes divisive and fraught nature of the subject matter, the editors themselves approach the topic from different points of view.

Lara Cox brings to the Special Issue a particular interest in recent developments in gender and queer theory in France (where she is based), following the publication in 2011 of a special number of *Les Cahiers de CEDREF*, on ‘Théories féministes et queers décoloniales: interventions Chicanas et Latinas états-uniennes’ (Decolonial feminist and queer theories: Chicana and Latin American interventions) coordinated by Paola Bacchetta, Jules Falquet and Norma Alarcón. This volume presents decolonial feminisms and queer theories of colour as in dialogue with one another. Bacchetta et al propose an alternative genealogy of decolonial feminism and queer theory that unsettles the perceived opposition between second-wave feminism and queer theory in academia, which white-centred works have also picked apart. For instance, Richardson, McLaughlin and Casey’s *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory* (2006) exposes this opposition as false, deconstructing both the conceptual and generational differences that pit the second wave – deemed the frumpy precursor focused on materialist analyses of gender-based trauma (rape, violence, etc.) – against a later queer theory, focused on ‘fun’ and individualist transgressive sexuality, but it does so from a perspective that does not decentre the white subject of the feminism and queer theory dominant in academia. Bacchetta et al propose a view of decolonial feminism that evolved coterminously with queer theories of colour. For instance, Moraga and Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981)⁵ may be defined as both feminist and queer, analysing sex, race, class, gender, and sexuality as inseparable categories. These works offer a disturbance of the apocryphal second-wave-versus-queer narrative from a multiracial perspective.

This Special Issue’s cover photograph by Diana Davies, taken at the August 1970 Women’s Strike in New York, exemplifies Cox’s concern with questions of race

and exclusion: a single black woman in a sea of white figures in this image reflects a wider problem in feminism. The 1970 Strike was sponsored by the largely white-dominated National Organization for Women (NOW) – whose president that year was exceptionally (perhaps tokenistically) African-American Aileen Clarke Hernandez.⁶ The white middle-class movement that has come to dominate academic renderings of the second wave has been criticized repeatedly for instrumentalizing women of colour in order to claim inclusivity, while obscuring the reality that autonomous feminist organizing was happening in Chicana, Native American, African American communities and elsewhere.⁷ These historical divisions precede us, it seems, making it particularly challenging to do full justice to conveying the overlaps between decolonial feminism and queer theory of colour. Perhaps out of wariness of white co-optations of the term ‘second wave’, or as a result of being simultaneously under-represented and over-solicited in white-dominated academia, women of colour are unfortunately under-represented in this Special Issue, as in many volumes of its kind.

While recognizing the legitimacy and urgency of her co-editor’s concerns, Lisa Downing’s interest in the relationship between 1970s and 1980s feminism and queer has a different focus. She seeks to understand and interrogate the tendency of some twenty-first-century activists and academics to reject that which is perceived to belong to an earlier age/ mode of thinking as not only *unfashionable*, but as *unpalatable*, and therefore as deserving of being ignored rather than engaged with and critiqued. The class-based analysis of much second-wave (radical) feminism is often dismissed as both an irrelevant methodology/ ideology for the twenty-first century and as exclusionary and ideologically problematic. ‘Third-wave’ feminism, which has been described as ‘a more diverse and polyvocal feminism,’⁸ has become the dominant feminist discourse. ‘Inclusivity’ is the moral centre of this movement and

many texts of the ‘second wave’ are rejected on the grounds of their perceived failure of this moral test. Similarly and simultaneously, a number of works have appeared in recent years declaring queer theory over and naming our Zeitgeist ‘post-queer’.⁹ In *After Queer Theory* (2013), James Penney critiques as no longer relevant the ‘paradigmatic gesture of queer theory’ which is ‘to insist that gender/sexuality subvert claims to identity.’¹⁰ What both some iterations of third-wave feminism and post-queer discourse risk calling for is a programmatic return to identitarianism at the expense of both feminist class-based analysis and queer critiques of identity (both of which are models that allow for – albeit very different types of – analyses of the workings of power).

The inevitable falling-out-of-fashion of certain ideas and theories over time is an ostensibly benign phenomenon, so long as it does not involve a forgetting of the lessons of history. But this is combined and compounded in the case of twenty-first-century versions of feminist and post-queer theory with a particular type of ideological purity and creeping authoritarianism, along with the re-emergence and reification of identity politics, as alluded to above. This tendency casts ‘problematic’ past texts and ideas not as ‘of their time’ and deserving of in-context analyses of their blindspots and deficiencies, but rather as abjected and *taboo* – not even worthy of being read or debated. This tendency (described and dismissed in the sneering vernacular of right-wing populist discourse as ‘political correctness’) can be understood alternatively, from a post-Foucauldian queer critical theoretical point of view, as a new form of normativity – and one that it behooves those who consider themselves progressive and interested in social justice to interrogate.¹¹ It is precisely in this context, then, that queer thinking – far from being redundant – is more urgently needed than ever, as queer challenges *all* forms of normativity (and is

epistemologically at odds with ‘policing’ discourses, preferring instead a strategic and engaged countering or reversing of such discourses). A queer engagement with problematic texts of the ‘second wave’, according to Downing, should look not for what is *recuperable*, but for what is already surprisingly *resistant* or proto-queer, within its logic, and carry out work that can acknowledge deficiencies, prejudices, and lack of awareness of ‘privilege’, without throwing the queer baby out with the second-wave bathwater.

The articles that follow are deliberately drawn from a number of scholars at different career stages. The Special Issue showcases the work of recently post-doctoral researchers (Elliot Evans, Kayte Stokoe) and emerging, early career voices (Lara Cox, Alex Dymock), as well as more established scholars (Anne Emmanuelle Berger, Ulrika Dahl, Lisa Downing). The Special Issue covers, broadly, three subjects of particular import to both feminism and queer: (1) the body, (2) race and whiteness, and (3) antisocial politics. It opens with a historical reflection by Berger on the place of the body and its counterintuitive queerness in the branch of French feminist writing known as *écriture féminine*, more often associated with biological essentialism than with queer. Bringing a trans theoretical slant to the consideration of the body, Evans’s article explores Paul B. Preciado’s appeals to feminists of the second wave to reconceptualize the body via understandings of transgender experience, and to rethink gender in light of a new era of ‘biocapitalism’, while Stokoe develops the original concept of ‘textual drag’, after Judith Butler, to explore parody, satire, and non-conformist gendered embodiment in literary works by Virginia Woolf and Monique Wittig. The Special Issue then turns to proto-queer critiques of whiteness in the second wave offered by Marilyn Frye, as analysed by Dahl, and Donna Haraway, as explored in Cox’s article, while cautioning against recuperating these white feminists

as themselves the proponents of queer theory of colour. Turning to the question of antisocial politics, Dymock's article revisits two of the most unfashionable feminists to contemporary tastes, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon to reveal, counterintuitively, that they share many features of anti-social queer theory, including the notion that sex is 'irredeemable'. The final article, Downing's rereading of texts by Monique Wittig and Shulamith Firestone, argues that if one reads their antisocial, individualistic, and unorthodox writings through the anti-normative lens of queer, rather than applying the currently popular identitarian and inclusion-oriented model of intersectional feminism, their still-resistant richness and relevance for contemporary feminist politics are brought into sharp relief. Just as the editors approach the material from their different perspectives, so the articles reflect a variety of political and philosophical viewpoints. Similarly, the geographical locatedness of the writers vary and shape their contributions (for instance, Berger focuses on a particular French history of feminist and queer thought, while Dahl examines resonances between the issues Anglophone US feminist Marilyn Frye raises and the recent #metoo movement in Dahl's native Sweden).

The Special Issue closes with three interviews with leading scholars in these debates: Paola Bacchetta, J. J. Halberstam, and Clare Hemmings, all of whom have engaged explicitly throughout their careers with the multivalent relationships between feminism and queer. Having sent the same questions to each of these scholars, the editors note that the very different responses they have produced reflect the divergence of views that characterizes this topic. Turtle-Island-born 'racially multiply-mixed person of color' and a 'dyke since childhood', Bacchetta recounts the activities of 'Dyketactics', the first ever collective to take the police to court over brutality against queers in the US. She also reflects on her methodology as a scholar,

particularly her passionate blending of Foucault, French feminism, Indian sociology, and feminisms of colour, offering a counterpoint to much Eurocentric critical theory-informed feminist and queer thought. Halberstam, a leading name in US feminist, queer, and trans theory, considers in their interview the future of feminism and queer as intimately linked to the future of the university itself, articulating that what should be a radical space is fast becoming an increasingly expensive, elitist, and exclusionary site. Hemmings is the author of a number of influential works on feminist histories, on which many of the contributors to this Special Issue draw in their articles, including the recent book, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011). In her interview she insists upon the pitfalls of separating feminist theories from queer theories along the axes of generations or ‘proper’ objects, arguing instead for a genuinely ‘queer feminist theory’ for our age.

¹ See: Clare Hemmings, ‘Telling feminist stories’ *Feminist Theory* 6:2 (2005), 115-139 and Linda Nicholson, ‘Feminism in “Waves”: A Useful Metaphor or Not?’, in Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim (eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 43-50.

² See, for example: Lisa Duggan, ‘The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism’, in Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 175-194 and Stephen Valocchi, ‘Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality’, *Gender and Society*, 19:6 (2005), 750-770.

³ See, for example: Brad Epps, ‘The Fetish of Fluidity’ in Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (eds.), *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 412-431.

⁴ See, for example: Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin and Mark E. Casey (eds), *Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Paola Bacchetta, Jules Falquet and Norma Alarcón (eds), 'Théories féministes et queers décoloniales: interventions Chicanas et Latinas états-uniennes', *Les Cahiers du CEDREF* 18 (2011); Anne Emmanuelle Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*, translated by Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

⁵ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone, 1981)

⁶ Hernandez left NOW and called on all non-white women to do likewise by 1979, appalled by NOW's refusal to confront its white bias. Darlene Clark Hine (ed). *Black Women in America: Volume 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46. See also: Charlayne Hunter, 'Many Blacks Wary of "Women's Liberation" Movement in U.S.', *NY Times*, November 17, 1970, 47, 60.

⁷ See: Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Becky Thompson, 'Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second-Wave Feminism', *Feminist Studies* 28:2 (2002), 336-360.

⁸ See, for example, Susan Archer Mann and Douglas J. Huffman, 'The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave', *Science and Society* 69:1 (2005), 56-91

⁹ See: James Penney, *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) and David V. Ruffolo, 'Post-Queer

Considerations’, in Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke (eds.) *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 379-94.

¹⁰ Penney, *After Queer Theory*, 9.

¹¹ Interestingly, the term ‘political correctness’ has its origins in leftist politics and was only later co-opted as a right-wing slur. Keith Allan and Kate Burridge explain: ‘the expression did not really take off until the emergence of the American New Life in the later 1960s. English translations of Maoist literature seem to have been the main influence. It is supposed that the description *politically correct* became a kind of in-house joke, to mock extreme toers of the party line: someone PC was a self-righteous ideological bigot. It was intended as a kind of self-mocking irony [...] But the term was soon co-opted by conservatives, who stripped it of its ironical element and turned the meaning on its head, thereby creating a sneer (or snarl) phrase to rubbish left-wing activities such as affirmative action’. In: *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91-92.