



Kuva: ©Tulevaisuuden Antenni

Between the Global/Glocal and the National: Intersectional Challenges to Queer Studies

Mikko Carlson & Jan Wickman

Queer studies and the discussions within this field are international and the scholars are mobile. Still, it is important to keep in mind that a globalized world characterized by transnational trends is not homogeneous, not even within the so called Western cultural sphere. Local contexts are various and they are significant regarding both the organisation of research activity and the analysis that are made. The local context is particularly important when the interaction between research and society is highlighted. For example, in the customary genesis, the beginnings of queer theory are described as an outcome of an encounter between poststructuralist thinking and a radicalisation of activism that reacted against ever harsher attitudes in society during the AIDS crisis in the United States, a bit more than twenty years ago.

In other words, the beginning of the story is situated in a certain time and place. Queer thinking was born as a characteristically metropolitan phenomenon in a society with certain circumstances for gender and sexual politics, certain political traditions and facilities. When the queer perspective has landed in new local contexts, it has developed further in interaction with somewhat

SQS
2/2011

v

Introduction

Mikko
Carlson
&
Jan
Wickman

different cultural, political and social frames of reference. In recent years, the regional diversity of queer perspectives has been getting increasing attention. At the same time, (self-)critical attention has been directed towards the silences, blind spots and dead angles, that gradually have emerged within queer research. Not only phenomena that congeal the concept of queer but also topics that have seemed too painful or difficult have now come into view: what attitude to take towards the Anglo-American dominance of the field, issues relating to queer childhood or queer nationalism?

National context has from time to time been discussed, for example, in the national Finnish lesbian, gay and queer research seminars in Turku. Sometimes the significance of national frameworks has been belittled in these discussions and emphasis on them has been pigeon-holed as introvert and parochial. Yet, the “national” is also about recognising local diversity and about viewing analysis of the interaction between the local and the international/global as an element that enriches theorisation in the globalised world of research. The significance of local cultural and societal frames has not disappeared and often these are still organised along the lines of established national units. Even research is often first organised in national frameworks, from which the leap is then made to wider realms. For example, you are right now reading the web journal of the Society of Queer Studies **in Finland**, which is open to writers and readers internationally.

The notion of the primacy of national frameworks is deeply embedded even in the language that we use. A number of new terms have been created to describe social, economic and cultural phenomena and structures that transcend national borders – for instance *transnational*, *global* or *glocal*. Due to the different and specific connotations that some of these terms carry in certain branches of research and the way “global” refers to the entire planet, there are limits to the applicability and usefulness of this terminology when

we talk about (research) that transcends national borders. Hence, we still often say that our work is “inter-national”.

Most of the articles in this issue of the SQS Journal deal with topics that are located in national contexts. From these points of departure, a variety of themes are then discussed in relation to the mainstreams of international research. First, however, we focus on the intersectional turn of queer studies that is definitely associated with the quest for a global viewpoint, provoked by postcolonial thinking. In this process, it has become a central aim of queer theorization to increase awareness of multiple and concurrent mechanisms of power. In her article (in Finnish), **Kaisa Ilmonen** reflects on the grounds and premises of intersectionality studies by constructing a substantial genealogical model of their influence on the emergence of queer studies.

The relationship between national and global theorization is examined also in **Mia Liinason**’s article. She analyses the (official) historical narrative of gender studies in Sweden by considering what happens when a radical mode of thinking becomes institutional. Liinason examines how the story of Swedish feminism was constituted as “a success story” at the political juncture when the established agenda of women’s studies was already falling apart: under the pressure of the emergence of new fields of study it was obligated to reassess its scholarly bases and even its own legitimacy. The construction of a success story involved a rather strict framing of gender studies: the challenge of intersectionality was rebutted by pushing queer studies into the margins of the field and by excluding, for example, the questions of race and ethnicity and the postcolonial viewpoints from it altogether.

Analysis of the local and glocal aspects of cultural heritage is discussed in **David McVey**’s article in which he unravels the default expectation

of heteronormativity in Russian fairytales in particular and children's literature in general. So far queer readings of children's literature have been sparse even though a promising world of queerness can often be found under an ostensibly normative surface, as McVey points out. Aspirations to harness the folktales to serve a political agenda – or to renounce them for the same reasons – cannot be considered new phenomena. Yet, McVey's article compels us to ponder whether it is possible at all to grasp the multifaceted queerness of fairytales from the vantage point of adults' culture. On the other hand, reading this article, it is also worth considering, whose mission or "property" making queer interpretations actually is.

Finally, in his *queer view mirror* -essay (in Finnish), also **Ilari Kiema** contributes to discussions on queer childhood. He examines the prerequisites of queer studies both in the discourse of auxiliary teaching and in the world of school education more generally. In his reflections, he brings to the fore the differences between the particular version of queer that has been adapted to the Finnish school discourse and the international queer theory that dominates, for example, discussions in scholarly conferences. At the same time, he opens up some theoretical and practical interfaces between discussions on medicalization and queer phenomena that intersperse and overlap with a personal queer-political dimension.

Applying concepts from queer theory to the study of non-normative corporeality in *crip theory* is a current and inspiring trend, but so far, this approach has been limited to the study of physical disability. Kiema, however, broadens the scope in a new direction – an emerging critique of "neurological normality". Importantly, this essay becomes even more fascinating by the way the writer positions himself in a multiple institutional margin, not only as a lay person in the field of queer theory but also as a "paraprofessional" teacher in special school.

We hope that this issue of the SQS Journal will provide you with rewarding reading experiences.



Discussions on the limits and responsibilities of queer studies; their global and local connections, and on questions regarding its visibility and invisibility are to be continued in August 2012 at the IX Turku gay, lesbian and queer studies conference entitled of Finland "Queer and Wicked". For further details see conference announcement below.

SQS
2/2011

VII

Introduction

Mikko
Carlson
&
Jan
Wickman



IX Turku seminar for lesbian, gay and queer studies
August 23 – August 25, 2012, University of Turku
Sirkkalan kasarmi, Kaivokatu 12, Turku, Finland

Queer and Wicked

Call for papers and workshops

The ninth Turku national lesbian-, gay and queer studies seminar consists of keynote lectures and workshops. Following the tradition of the Turku queer-seminar, a wide variety of current topics, achievements and challenges of queer studies is under critical scrutiny. This year's theme queer and wicked puts a particular emphasis on the question of ethics in relation to the limits of queer studies and politics, for example in the contexts of nationalism and identity politics.

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Professor Jasbir Puar, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA
Professor Sanna Karkulehto, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Lic. Kaisa Ilmonen, University of Turku, Finland

We invite all those who are interested to propose an abstract of max. one page, to be submitted by Friday **13 April** to Tom Linkinen: tom.linkinen@utu.fi

Papers (20 min) may be held in English, Finnish or Swedish. We especially encourage MA students to propose an abstract and participate in seminar's workshops. We offer encouraging queer-theoretical discussions on each and every subject in our seminar.

Proposals for workshops (three to four papers in one) are warmly welcomed!
Artistic contributions are also welcomed!

This year's seminar covers the following topics:

- What constitutes the dangerous or wicked queer? Or anti-queer?
- How does queerness include or exclude various aspects of queer?
- What does a queer ethics entail?
- How does the wicked queer relate to nationalism? What about transnationalism? Or immigration? Or the lack of religion?
- How do lesbian, gay and queer-citizens situate themselves in current discussions on politics of citizenship and nationalism?
- How do politics of sexuality relate to politics of citizenship and nationalism?
- What kind of particular opportunities are included in a queer citizenship?
- What kind of challenges and possibilities does queer studies face in relation to globalization?
- What is the current position for lesbian, gay-, queer- and transgender studies in the Finnish academic field? And which stand does the scholarship take in current civic discussions?

More information on the seminar:

Tom Linkinen, University of Turku: tom.linkinen@utu.fi

Organizers: University of Turku / Gender Studies, Åbo Akademi University / Women's Studies, Society of Queer Studies in Finland (SQS)

www.hum.utu.fi/oppiaineet/naistutkimus/queerseminaari2012.html