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## How Queer Is Green?

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### Abstract

*Ecofeminism* has sought to unravel the interarticulation of gender oppression with the domination of nature, while *queer theory* has pursued a cultural project of subversion of sexual heteronormativity. *Queer ecology* brings together and extends both discourses, at once drawing upon contemporary biology and subjecting its taxonomies to skeptical critique. This essay argues that queer theory needs ecocriticism to rescue it from its biophobic assumptions, but it is not yet clear what ecocriticism stands to gain from queer theory. Moreover, it is argued that queer ecology risks the appearance of partial, opportunistic, and conspicuously biased engagement with biology.

### Four Exhibits in the Growing Museum of Queer Ecology

#### *Exhibit A: The Bluegill Sunfish*

The reproductive habits of this very widespread North American freshwater fish are such, claims biologist Joan Roughgarden, as to “challenge the foundations of gender and sexuality.”<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular assumptions that other animals conform to the dimorphism of the human species, the sunfish has two sexes (morphs possessing two distinct gamete sizes), but four spawning genders: large males with the orange breast that gave the species its common name; medium males slightly smaller than but visually similar to females;

1. Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People*, 2nd ed. (London: University of California Press, 2009), p. 78.

small, light-colored males with no markings; and females, marked with vertical bars. Large males spawn by aggressively defending territories, or “leks,” while large numbers of small males hover at the boundaries awaiting an opportunity to zoom in and fertilize eggs laid in a lek (male strategists memorably called “sneaky fuckers” by John Maynard Smith, a name Roughgarden rather archly contests). The medium males, on the other hand, court the large males, and, if accepted, fertilize the females together with them. The mere existence of these varied types of sunfish might be considered subversive enough, but Roughgarden knows that the dominant explanations in biology involve “deceit” of the large males by the medium ones, and counters with the argument that they are, in fact, cooperating to gain joint access to reproductive opportunity.

*Exhibit B: Rocky Mountain Sheep*

Another example from Roughgarden: the charismatic, curly horned rams of the species, images of which adorn the bonnets of big macho cars and the logos of American football teams, form gay groups that practice “homosexual courting and copulation.”<sup>2</sup> The most “dominant,” masculine rams are the most enthusiastic participants, while rams that refuse anal sex and prefer to live with the ewes are called “effeminate.” Some domestic rams tested for homosexuality not only preferred to mount other males, but would not mount females at all. Of course, it is not asserted that what is good enough for rams should be good enough to confront homophobia in humans—a signal instance of the naturalistic fallacy—but only that reactionary attempts to invoke the “order of nature” against homosexuality (as in, notoriously, the pope’s claim that anti-essentialist gender theory was a bigger threat to nature than climate change)<sup>3</sup> are wholly without biological warrant.

*Exhibit C: Human Endogenous Retrovirus 3 (or HERV-R)*

Making up around 1 percent of our genome, endogenous retroviruses are thought to be “fossil viruses” whose genetic material has become embedded in the germ line. While some are suspected of causing autoimmune diseases and cancer, the fact that they have been present in our ancestral genome for at least three million years suggests that they may have beneficial effects as well. As Timothy Morton notes in “Queer Ecology,” the alien DNA of ERV-3 may assist in reducing the mother’s immune reac-

2. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

3. “Pope Attacks Blurring of Gender Boundaries,” *BBC News*. 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7796663.stm>.

tions to the embryo, and he concludes that "life is catastrophic, monstrous, non-holistic, dislocated, not organic, coherent and authoritative."<sup>4</sup> Richard Dawkins, who would probably gag at the thought of cooptation into what he would understand as "postmodern theory," seems to agree that the notion of a bounded, coherent identity prescribed by our own DNA is belied by microbiology, saying that "there is no important distinction between our 'own' genes and parasitic or symbiotic insertion sequences. Whether they conflict or cooperate will depend not on their historical origins but on the circumstances from which they stand to gain now."<sup>5</sup> We are, it seems, strangers to ourselves even at the genetic level.

*Exhibit D: Lesbian Park Rangers*

Reflecting, and in some respects representing, these discoveries of the queerness of nature, Lorri Millan and Shawna Dempsey formed the Canadian "Lesbian National Parks and Services" (LNPS) in 1997.<sup>6</sup> Dressed in authentic-looking outfits with embroidered badges, handing out leaflets in Banff near the national park, and guiding "tours" that combine queer natural history with counter-hegemonic sexual and gender commentary, these performance artists could be considered part of the artistic wing of queer ecology. The LNPS makes a striking appearance near the conclusion of Catriona Sandilands's discussion of the sexist and heteronormative structuring of historical narratives of Canada's national parks, which provides detailed evidence of the ways in which Canadian national identity came to be invested in spaces that were constructed, ahistorically, as the wild home ranges of solitary male wardens. Contesting that ideology is a case of both retrieving the more complex history of the parks, and paying tribute to the ways in which the LNPS queers the parks and their wardens: "They raise the possibility of a homosexual presence in official national-park culture; they make same-sex desire . . . a reality in the iconic space of the masculine wilderness-nation; and they call into question the assumption of women's heterosexuality and, along with it, their heterosexualizing role as bearers of the domestic nation."<sup>7</sup> Queer ecology

4. Timothy Morton, "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125:2 (2010): 275.

5. Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of the Gene*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 226.

6. "Lesbian National Parks and Services: A Force of Nature." 2010. [http://www.fingerinthedike.ca/rangers\\_mov.html](http://www.fingerinthedike.ca/rangers_mov.html).

7. Catriona Sandilands, "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation, and Nature in the Rocky Mountain National Parks," in *This Elusive Land*:

disrupts heteronormative natures and proposes an alliance between biological science and the cultural theory that, throughout the “science wars” and beyond, had been assumed to be antithetical to it.

### Taxonomic Scepticism and Queer Nature

How to categorize all these disparate phenomena? What better way than the original anti-taxonomy itself, the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, which divvies up entities as follows:

1. those that belong to the emperor,
2. embalmed ones,
3. those that are trained,
4. suckling pigs,
5. mermaids,
6. fabulous ones,
7. stray dogs,
8. those included in the present classification,
9. those that tremble as if they were mad,
10. innumerable ones,
11. those drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,
12. others,
13. those that have just broken a flower vase, and
14. those that from a long way off look like flies.<sup>8</sup>

Jorge Luis Borges’s brilliant conflation of represented and real, referential and reflexive, animate, inanimate, and ananimate animals inspired Michel Foucault to interrogate the discursive construction of “the order of things,” and it stands conveniently as the ur-text of the taxonomic anti-realism that runs through queer ecology. At the most general level, “queer” itself represents and encapsulates a kind of intellectual Maoism, a perpetual revolution of categories and types. As Noreen Giffney and Myra Hird assert in *Queering the Non/Human*: “The unremitting emphasis in queer theoretical work on fluidity, über-inclusivity, indeterminacy, indefinability, unknowability, the preposterous, impossibility, unthinkability, unintelligibility, meaninglessness and that which is unrepresentable is an attempt to undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries.”<sup>9</sup>

*Women and the Canadian Environment*, ed. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), p. 158.

8. Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions: 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 108.

9. Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, eds., *Queering the Non/Human* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), p. 4.

Rhetorically, queer theory unceasingly (and rather tediously) negates “stable categories” and enthuses over subversive or amorphous exceptions to—or, as they are always seen, transgressions of—allegedly fixed distinctions.

It is perhaps unsurprising that a pioneer of queer ecocriticism, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, declares “an almost phobic dislike of taxonomy,”<sup>10</sup> which she applies to attempts to categorize her as an ecofeminist, but which seem to be shared much more generally within this insurgency-within-an-insurgency. It is not as if ecocritics at any stage of the enterprise have been unaware that nature is a problematic social construct (in some way, in some sense, to some degree), nor have they been blind to the inter-articulation of this construct with gender, racial, and (to a lesser degree) sexual discriminations. Queer theory, though, introduces a radical new level of skepticism toward “nature” and its presumed taxonomies.

Greta Gaard’s “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” is an early contribution to what is now orthodox ecocritical theory, that “liberating women requires liberating nature, the erotic, and queers.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike the new wave of queer ecology with its scientific reference-points, Gaard draws mainly upon historical evidence to buttress what is really a structuralist argument linking oppressively hierarchical dualisms such as male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion, hetero/homosexual, and others, which she hopes to confront by “embracing the erotic in all its diversity and building coalitions for creating a democratic ecological culture based on our shared liberation.”<sup>12</sup> It is a laudable ambition, certainly, but not necessarily well founded theoretically or empirically. For one thing, while the ecofeminist analysis of the persistent (and usually demeaning) association of women and nature is, with some biased selection of sources, defensible,<sup>13</sup> it is clear that queers have consistently been condemned as “against nature” in Western homophobic culture. Gaard admits as much, but

10. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “I Still Need the Revolution’: Cultivating Ecofeminist Readers,” in *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008), p. 58. (Catriona Sandilands’s recent work appears under the name “Mortimer-Sandilands.”)

11. Greta Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,” *Hypatia* 12:1 (1997): 122.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

13. In fact, in some contexts, it is common to think of men as “closer to nature” and women as representatives of civilization—as in cowboy movies, for instance. In popular sexual discourse also, the male libido is imagined as natural, while female sexuality is considered context-dependent, and so on. It might be convenient to describe these as “ideological contradictions,” but it is more likely that popular conceptions of human nature are merely chaotic and opportunistic.

then suggests that “nature is devalued *just as* queers are devalued,”<sup>14</sup> which is not the case: queers allegedly violate the “natural order” according to which, often in other contexts, humans are meant to dominate nature, this time in the *everyday sense* of the nonhuman environment and its denizens. Gaard’s argument depends, then, on an equivocation between two of Kate Soper’s three meanings of nature: sexual oppression relies upon a vicious theological and ideological inflection of the “realist” sense of the word, while the nature that is subjected to modernizing and colonial conquest is the “lay” or “surface” sense.<sup>15</sup> Empirically, it seems unlikely that one would find any correlation between metrics of sexual liberation in a society (taking, say, levels of homophobic persecution or, conversely, gay marriage and civil rights) and those of environmental impact, like carbon emissions (think Canada and Australia). So although the conceptual isomorphism discussed by Gaard and others is popular, intriguing, and perhaps politically motivating, queer ecologists need more evidence that “an ideology in which the erotic, queer sexualities, women, persons of color, and nature are all conceptually linked”<sup>16</sup> translates into real socio-ecological relationships.

Ecofeminists like Gaard have long been skeptical of nature in that ideological sense of “natural order”; the innovation of queer ecology is to draw upon scientific evidence to queer nature in the ordinary, lay sense. It is a complex movement: subverting the ideological fiction of a heteronormative natural order, queer ecologists deploy examples from the (queer) natural world, which are then read back into a transformed natural order reread as always already queer. The initiative enjoys an atmosphere of bracing radicalism: whereas ecocritics always sought to highlight the ambivalence of nature, as well as its historicity, Morton’s *Ecology without Nature* damns ecocriticism tout court as “too enmeshed with the ideology that churns out stereotypical ideas of nature to be of any use.”<sup>17</sup> The leftist alternative is “ecocritique,” which, like queer theory, “thoroughly examines how nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category. Ecocritique does not think that it is paradoxical to say, in the name of ecology itself: ‘down with nature!’”<sup>18</sup> However, while it is clear

14. Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” (above, n. 11), p. 120 (emphasis added).

15. Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 155–156.

16. Gaard, “Toward a Queer Ecofeminism” (above, n. 11), p. 132.

17. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 13.

18. *Ibid.*

that queer needs green, to avoid the ethical dead-end of repetitive aporetic gestures, its reflex of reflexivity, it is not obvious that green needs—or indeed stands to benefit from—queer. Furthermore, while the queer critique of organicism is salutary on properly ecological grounds, and the dismantling of spurious sexual hierarchy desirable on moral grounds, queer ecology's opportunistic appropriation of biology frequently misrepresents both science and the philosophical assumptions that guide it.

### The Debilitating Biophobia of Queer Theory

Judith Butler's performativity theory demonstrates just how badly queer needs green. Even in the later, "chiasmic" form articulated in *Bodies That Matter*, gender performativity is one of the most biologically illiterate—indeed biophobic—theories ever to embarrass the humanities. Leaving aside the question of whether the sentence (ambiguity noted) "It's a girl!" can sensibly be considered an illocutionary act (there is no one authorized to say it, no ritual or procedure establishing its proper from improper instances),<sup>19</sup> the notion that bodies are discursively organized by the reiteration of sexist and heteronormative utterances depends on a Freudian assumption of the lability of desire that is, from the point of view of either evolutionary or developmental biology, frankly silly. The appeal of "performativity" requires perpetual equivocation between a true (though rather shallow) claim about gender—namely, it is performed in something like the way a theatrical role is—and a profound, and profoundly false, claim about sex—namely, it is engendered by language; so much depends upon the meanings of the Foucauldian pass-verb "produce."

Butler protests that "to claim that sexual differences are indissociable from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse causes sexual difference,"<sup>20</sup> even though it seems impossible to conclude anything else from reading *Gender Trouble*. Sex-as-discourse, she states in *Bodies that Matter*, has "the

19. I am aware that Jacques Derrida's "Signature Event Context," and his subsequent debate with John Searle, is widely supposed to have licensed us to disregard J. L. Austin's parameters for the performative. What Derrida actually did was to observe that the necessarily reiterative character of illocutionary utterances tended to threaten the stability of the conceptual parameters used to define and constrain them—especially Austin's distinction between serious and nonserious uses of language. Yet, still, properly conducted marriages are binding and stage marriages are not. While it is true that intersexed infants used to be "reassigned" sexually, at great psychological cost, midwives are not empowered to sentence newborn babies to genders.

20. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.

power to *produce*—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls”<sup>21</sup> (note the slide from the uncontroversial “demarcate” to the deliberately ambiguous “differentiate”). So although Butler graciously concedes that “there are, minimally, sexually differentiated parts, activities, capacities, hormonal and chromosomal differences,” she goes on to assert that “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.”<sup>22</sup> It is clear that, for instance, the chromosomal differences are *in principle* incapable of contributing actively to such “formation.” Here is a sample of the verbs Butler uses for what she calls the performative “materialization” of the body: in addition to “produce,” “demarcate,” “circulate,” “differentiate,” we have “forming,” “crafting,” “bearing,” “signifying,” “framing,” and “regulating.” In the near-total absence of examples or evidence, Butler leaves it strategically unclear whether she means merely that cultural gender is *projected onto* allegedly biologically mandated sex difference (even as the illusion is maintained that gender is simply an effect of biological difference)—an uncontroversial feminist claim—or that the body is somehow *altered* (formed, crafted, produced, in some senses of the words) by the reiteration of sexed language.

That we are entitled to take it in the second sense is confirmed by “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” which draws on Freud’s description of psychosomatic pain as a narcissistic “libidinal investment” to argue that bodily morphology generally is psychically—which means, ultimately, psycho-socially—produced. Freud’s delightful description of the infant as “polymorphously perverse” and susceptible to any prevailing sexual ordering is the ultimate source for the argument in *Gender Trouble* that our very sense of what the body *is* requires problematization: “Is there a ‘physical’ body prior to the perceptually perceived [sic] body? An impossible question to answer! Not only is the gathering of attributes under the category of sex suspect, but so is the very discrimination of ‘features’ themselves. That penis, vagina, breasts, and so forth, are named sexual parts is both a restriction of the erogenous body to those parts and a fragmentation of the body as a whole.”<sup>23</sup>

This is nonsense, of course: the penis and vagina (though not breasts) are the basic elements of dimorphic anatomy<sup>24</sup> in all our

21. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

23. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 155–156.

24. There is an important distinction between popular—and erroneous—notions of

mammalian ancestors and close relatives, but no biologist would therefore limit erogeneity to those body parts. What about lips and fingers, at least? Butler's evasive use of the passive voice here is revealing: not that she condemns the discursive "sexing" of the body for specified reasons with counter-examples supplied, only that it is "suspect." Perhaps the conspicuous absurdity of Butler's arguments lies behind the rhetoric of vague qualification in *Bodies That Matter*? For example: "The materiality of the body is not to be taken for granted, for *in some sense* it is acquired, constituted, through the development of morphology,"<sup>25</sup> which is to say, by the forced investment of libidinal energy—Freud's mysterious psychic moonjuice—in body parts selected not by evolution and development, but by cultures. And later: "The notion of the bodily ego in Freud and that of projective idealization of the body in Lacan suggest that the very contours of the body, the delimitations of anatomy, are *in part* the consequence of an externalized identification."<sup>26</sup>

To what extent exactly? And with what evidence?<sup>27</sup> Could I see through my nose if we all kept calling it my "eye"?<sup>28</sup> Apart from the absurd Freudian myth of the wandering libido, it is true that bodies are materially reshaped by discursive practices such as surgery, tattooing, bodybuilding, and dieting, but the impact of such practices can never be meaningfully specified without reference to the genetic, developmental, endocrinal, neurological, and other capacities, limits, and propensities of specifically human bodies.

sexual dichotomy (e.g., "the opposite sex," Mars versus Venus) and the biological concept of dimorphism, which is applied to typical physiologies distinguished by sex. Intersexed individuals represent a challenge to the first construct, but not the second.

25. Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (above, n. 20), p. 69 (emphasis added).

26. *Ibid.*, p. 90 (emphasis added).

27. I amused myself by gathering together as many pieces of "evidence" as I could from *Gender Trouble*. They are: a report regarding a single nineteenth-century "hermaphrodite" (in fact, an intersexual person); an anecdote about Greta Garbo; reports of how some transsexuals say they feel (no citation); and Monique Wittig's testimony on behalf of lesbians. If I missed anything, I would be pleased to be informed about it.

28. To be fair to Butler, she seems to have acknowledged the cultural creationism of her earlier book by conceding: "I think perhaps in *Gender Trouble* I overemphasise the priority of culture over nature. . . . [It] did not take account of a nature that might be, as it were, beyond the nature/culture divide, one that is not immediately harnessed for the aims of certain kinds of cultural legitimation practices." But she is unable to relinquish discredited Freudian sexual theory: "if the properties and capacities of a body part are truly contingent, acquiring recognition *as a result* of libidinal investiture, then 'the phallus' is a term for the *process* of investiture—for the action of delineating, identifying and eroticising." Quoted by Vicki Kirby, "(Con)founding 'the Human': Incestuous Beginnings," in *Queering the Non/Human* (above, n. 9), pp. 39, 44.

Without ecology, then, queer theory remains a form of cultural creationism. Prescriptively isolated from our evolutionary antecedents, the perpetual reemergence of sexual dimorphism in every generation must seem little short of miraculous—or rather, given how inherently oppressive it is supposed to be, diabolical. The marvelous or hideous cultural process by which each of us has been physically interpellated to gain sexual satisfaction through our penis or clitoris really is as likely as a tornado in a junkyard putting together a Boeing 747, given that any part of our anatomy *might* have been discursively eroticized.<sup>29</sup> (A lost tribe that comes through stimulation of its elbows no doubt awaits discovery.) If Butler were right, the broad cross-cultural uniformity in the interpellation of sexual anatomy, when aspects of human behavior that are more obviously enculturated are so incredibly diverse, would require some spectacular evidence. According to queer ecology, it seems to have arrived in the nick of time—from biology. If the species boundary proves as susceptible to deconstruction as every other conceptual differentiation, if the myth of heterosexual dimorphism in nature can be exploded, and if “performativity” can be distended still further to take in nonhuman identities, queer theory can be saved from the fate proudly anticipated by Lee Edelman’s attack on parenting and the oppressive notion of “reproductive futurity”: *no future* (of which more later).

### The Advent of Queer Ecology

Encouraging though it is that leading humanities scholars are beginning to engage with contemporary science, it must be said that cultural critics have not been well prepared by four decades of theoretical argument to interpret biological results fairly, carefully, and accurately. There are already in the “new materialism”<sup>30</sup> and queer ecology signs of the priority of argument over evidence and the habit of discounting or simply ignoring alternative hypotheses, which have characterized the biophobic strands of theoretical inquiry heretofore and deepened the lamentable abyss between

29. The astronomer Fred Hoyle, though no creationist, outlined in *The Intelligent Universe* (1988) what he saw as the statistical objections to Darwinian evolution, which he vividly characterized as the sudden emergence of complex organization (a jet aircraft) out of the chaos of chance (a whirlwind in a junkyard) *in one go*. The analogy is an absurd misrepresentation of Darwinism, but, if one added someone standing nearby insisting that “It’s a Boeing 747,” it would be a fine characterization of Butlerism.

30. Perhaps the most interesting collection of “new materialism,” which brings together many of its proponents, is Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

the two cultures.<sup>31</sup> So whereas Roughgarden's *Evolution's Rainbow* (which is exceptionally tendentious by scientific standards) gives some sound evidence for her attack on Darwinian sexual selection and admits the force of its central argument, Judith Halberstam's critique of the popular (and powerfully heteronormative) film *March of the Penguins* has this to say about the representation of nonreproductive birds:

[They] are not merely extras in the drama of hetero-reproduction: in fact, the homo or non-repro queer penguins are totally necessary to the temporary reproductive unit! They provide warmth in the huddle, probably extra food, and they do not leave for warmer climes but they accept a part in the penguin collective in order to enable reproduction and to survive. Survival, indeed, in this penguin world, has little to do with fitness and everything to do with collective will. . . . The long march of the penguins then is neither proof of heterosexuality in nature, the reproductive imperative nor evidence of intelligent design. It is, in fact, a resolutely animal narrative about cooperation, affiliation and the anachronism of the homo-hetero divide.<sup>32</sup>

It would not, in fact, run counter to ordinary Darwinian reasoning for penguins to cooperate, although one would expect it to occur either if they were closely genetically related or a highly social species with sanctions for noncooperators.<sup>33</sup> But such reasoning would have to provide evidence for selfless "providing" of warmth and "acceptance" of a nonreproductive role. No biologist would see penguin survival as evidence of intelligent design anyway, nor, conversely, would they be able to make any sense of the claim that heterosexuality in nature or the reproductive imperative stood in any need of proof whatsoever. There seem to be, as exhibit B (rocky mountain sheep) suggests above, numerous examples of homosexuality in animals (though gay sheep are not uncontroversial among biologists), but penguins may not exhibit it in the wild, nor does Halberstam bother to provide a citation to back up her remarkable equation of "nonreproductive" and "homo" penguins.

31. Encounters between literary theorists and other scientific disciplines like math and physics have not been encouraging; see Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Intellectual Impostures*, 2nd ed. (London: Economist Books, 2003).

32. Judith Halberstam, "Animating Revolt / Revolting Animation," in *Queering the Non/Human* (above, n. 9), p. 270.

33. A powerful evolutionary case for altruism beyond kin selection and reciprocal altruism (the varieties accepted by all Darwinists) and in favor of multilevel selection theory (in which individuals, groups, and species may be units of selection, not only of genes) is put forth by Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

One of the defining characteristics of crude deconstructionism, as Richard Rorty long ago observed, is its habit of setting up a “patsy” who believes in something simplistic (identity of word and meaning, or whatever) so that the cunning critic can expose the restless tensions and proliferating contradictions in his assumptions. So it is with queer ecocriticism: popular belief in an ideal, natural sexual dichotomy, rather than the far more complex view of actual biologists, is subverted by the truth of sexual and gender diversity. As Hird points out in “Animal Trans”: “in so far as most plants are intersex, most fungi have multiple sexes, many species transsex, and bacteria completely defy notions of sexual difference, . . . the majority of living organisms on this planet would make little sense of the human classification of two sexes.”<sup>34</sup>

No doubt the incomprehension of fungi, which can have thousands of sexes, and humans, who have approximately two, would be mutual. The operative question for queer ecology, though, is rather, what sort of species are we? Hird admits that “[i]t might be argued that sexual dimorphism is a characteristic of higher life forms and that sex diversity is reserved for lower organisms,” but she responds that “this hierarchical taxonomy invokes the worst kind of anthropomorphism.”<sup>35</sup> Get rid of the tendentially teleological term “higher” and replace it with the neutral phrase “more differentiated,” though, and her objection collapses. Sexual reproduction seems to make more highly differentiated organisms possible and results, also, in some degree of dimorphism. In fact, as Jared Diamond shows, using a graphic-yet-coy illustration of the relationship of dimorphic body size to that of primate sex organs in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee*, humans are midway in terms of sexual differentiation between highly dimorphic gorillas and massively bisexual bonobos, among whom male and female are difficult to distinguish by secondary characteristics.<sup>36</sup> (Human males may be reassured to know that, given our average body mass relative to women, we have medium-sized testicles though surprisingly large penises.) Gorillas, moreover, seem to maintain dimorphic anatomy and “sexist” social order without the aid of oppressive discourse.

34. Myra J. Hird, “Animal Trans,” in *Queering the Non/Human* (above, n. 9), p. 237.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

36. Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee: How Our Animal Heritage Affects the Way We Live* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 60.

### On the Destiny of “Species”

The vexed boundary of humans and other animals is too large a topic for this essay, but it is in any case strictly a subset of the more general question of the identity of species. With characteristic genius, Borges's *Emporium* perfectly evokes the nominalist position in a very long-standing argument. Indeed, as Donna Haraway observes, “[d]ebates about whether species are earthly organic entities or taxonomic conveniences are co-extensive with the discourse we call ‘biology’”<sup>37</sup>—a question about which “Darwin himself” (as he is always called, with apt deference to his originary authority) was at least ambivalent. Morton claims simply that “evolution theory is antiessentialist in that it abolishes rigid boundaries between and within species.”<sup>38</sup> While it is unclear what sort of rigid boundaries were ever proposed *within* species (unless perhaps sexual ones—in which case, see above), those *between* species are undoubtedly far more problematic for Darwinism than for mono- or polygenetic creationism.

Nevertheless, Darwin's discussion of “polymorphic genera” distinguishes between those—*Ruba* and *Rosa* among plants, Brachiopods among mollusks—and species with “fixed and definite” or “good and true” species;<sup>39</sup> some species are morphologically diverse (brambles are decidedly queer and promiscuous), others are more stable. Haraway, reminding us of the “lateral gene exchange” of bacteria, claims that “no species is ever One; to be a species is to be constitutively a crowd, in symbiogenetic naturecultures, with no stopping point. Living piles turtles on turtles, all the way down. Species is about the dance joining kin and kind. The dance is full of syn-copation and oddly jointed moves, as well as sinuous curves—snake curves that tell their own tales.”<sup>40</sup>

The metaphor of species as a “dance” emphasizes fluidity rather than constancy, change rather than continuity, which is, again, an important part of the truth of Darwinism. For instance, “ring-species” are ones in which (contrary to the assertions of creationists that evolution is plagued by “missing links”) intermediate forms of closely related species live in geographically contiguous regions of

37. Donna Haraway, “Companion Species, Mis-recognition, and Queer Worlding,” in *Queering the Non/Human* (above, n. 9), p. xxiii.

38. Morton, “Queer Ecology” (above, n. 4), p. 275.

39. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 40.

40. Haraway, “Companion Species” (above, n. 37), p. xxiii.

continuous variation, as is the case with the herring gull and the lesser black-backed gull. These are distinct species in the UK, but as Dawkins observes “they are linked by a continuous chain of interbreeding colleagues all the way round the world. The only thing that is special about ring species like these gulls is that the intermediates are still alive. All pairs of related species are potentially ring species.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, we are thought to be linked in a continuous chain—temporal rather than conspicuously geographical—with *Homo erectus* and our *Australopithecus* ancestor. Living does indeed “pile turtles on turtles, all the way down”; however, the problem Dawkins identifies is the ethical consequence of our “discontinuous mind’s” ability to think speciation, not the functionality of the idea of species itself.

The most sustained and innervating example of queer ecology to date is Morton’s *The Ecological Thought*, his much more readable follow up to *Ecology without Nature*.<sup>42</sup> Its conceptual reference points are Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Dawkins, which makes for a weird combination of irritating nebulosity on ethical issues and startling insights where biology meets ecocritical theory. Leaving aside the former, Morton’s queer ecological project is summarized early on: “You want anti-essentialism and antibiologism? Just read Darwin.”<sup>43</sup> Not only need theory not fear the encounter with biology, but in Morton’s estimation Darwinism (read suitably, of course) is the queerest theory of them all. Where ecocritical theory once tended to advert more or less vaguely to an interdependent “web of life” that subsumes all individuals, for which it claims warrant from scientific ecology, Morton substitutes the “mesh,” which is more intimate, more subversive of common perceptions than the “web”:

Most words I considered to describe interdependence were compromised by references to the Internet—like “network.” Either that, or they were too compromised by vitalism, the belief in a living substance. “Web” is a little bit too vitalist and a little bit Internet-ish for my taste, so it loses on both counts. . . . “Mesh” can mean the holes in the network and threading between them. It suggests both hardness and delicacy. . . . The ecological thought stirs because the mesh appears in our social, psychic, and scientific domains. Since every-

41. Richard Dawkins, *A Devil’s Chaplain: Selected Essays* (London: Phoenix, 2004), p. 25. Wikipedia provides a useful illustration of the gull example; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring\\_species](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_species).

42. For an extensive review of *Ecology without Nature*, see Garrard, “Ecocriticism,” *The Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* 17 (2010): 9–13.

43. Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 12.

thing is interconnected, there is no definite background and therefore no definite foreground.<sup>44</sup>

Morton has nailed both my resistance to webbiness and the urgent need for a more scientifically sophisticated concept to replace it. The genius of “the mesh” is that it accommodates such staggering phenomena as the Hox genes common to *all* metazoans (i.e., multi-celled animals), by which body plans are organized in embryonic development, or exhibit C above (HERV-R), the endogenous retrovirus, or the graphs that look like plants but are produced by reiterated algorithms: “Material organization turns out to be sets of formal relationships, not squishy stuff.”<sup>45</sup> Morton rightly observes that “[a]t the basis of ‘life’ there is DNA, and it has no specific flavor. There is no chimp-flavored, no human-flavored DNA; we share 98 percent of our DNA with chimps and 35 percent with daffodils.”<sup>46</sup> Since “[a]ll food is Frankenfood,” objections to genetic modification have to be political, not metaphysical.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Morton points out that “Darwin’s world is about coexistence but not about harmony,”<sup>48</sup> a lesson of incalculable significance for ecocriticism. The mesh therefore is *less* than the web—things are less thing-like, less different from each other and from artificial life forms, than we supposed—but more uncanny, unavoidable, and uncomfortable.

Given the philosophical rush it periodically jacks you into, it is all the more disappointing that Morton is so cavalier (and even inaccurate) with biology: we are not “genetically descended” from “every single life form,”<sup>49</sup> although we are cousins with them all; we do not “drive around using crushed dinosaur parts”<sup>50</sup>—oil comes from fossil algae. While it is true that *some* biologists claim “hands, tools, laughter, and dancing . . . have been discovered in nonhuman beings,”<sup>51</sup> surely such claims deserve not only a mass of citations, but some careful qualification? Morton too often skims over a complex

44. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 86. Morton is here opposed to Bill McKibben, who argues, in *The End of Nature* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 153, that “creating new forms of life . . . changes the world [and] puts us forever in the deity business.” It does not, of course; it only puts us in the evolution business, but we have always been in that.

48. Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (above, n. 43), p. 66.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

argument with airy glibness: “Contrary to what some humanists think, it is not big news to Darwinism that ‘species’ don’t really exist.”<sup>52</sup> As we shall see, not only is that not true, but it *would* be big—and bad—news if it were.

Queer ecologists are vulnerable to over-excitement about problems with the species concept. In Eva Hayward’s transsexual/transpecies “Lessons from a Starfish,” for example, the shift from defensible claim to vacuous rhetoric is seemingly licensed by classic deconstruction of a classically crude Saussurean structuralism:

Species exist in taxonomic differences (*Homo sapiens sapiens* are not the same as *Octopus vulgaris*), but species are also always already constitutive of each other through the spaces and places we cohabit—this of course includes language and other semiotic registers. Indeed, species are relationships between species—relationality is world-hood. Matter is not immutable, . . . it is discursive, allowing sex and species to practice trans-materialisation. The meat and meaning for humans and starfish have no structuring lack, no primordial division, but are sensuously intertwined.<sup>53</sup>

The admission of taxonomic difference is subverted by the claim that species exist only in relationality (which, in turn, is “world-hood,” whatever that is—Hayward does not explain), an argument isomorphic with Saussure’s decision to consider language synchronically.<sup>54</sup> Yet if one considers a species (or a language) diachronically, it is, of course, lineage that matters—the inheritance of genes or memes—and for sexually reproducing species that lineage is unavoidably heterosexual.<sup>55</sup> It is true that evolution rules out theological distinctions

52. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

53. Eva Hayward, “Lessons from a Starfish,” in *Queering the Non/Human* (above, n. 9), p. 254.

54. Morton also says that “all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially, in an open system without center or edge” (*The Ecological Thought* [above, n. 43], p. 39), but this is untrue: I am related positively to my blood relations, in that I share genes with them—and, of course, all organisms are my “blood relations.”

55. According to the theory of “kin selection,” a nonreproductive organism can improve its own genetic fitness by helping to achieve improved reproductive success for its nonlinear relatives. Since human homosexuality is somewhat heritable, kin selection has been proposed to help explain the persistence of the genetic factors that may contribute to it—the “gay uncle” theory. Roughgarden proposes a broader socializing effect of homosexuality, but with similar effects. Glenn Wilson and Qazi Rahman present evidence that homosexuality is probably inherited polygenetically (i.e., not by a single “gay gene,” but by multiple genes), but also that the effects of maternal hormones on early neural development could play an important role in human male homosexuality; see Wilson and Rahman, *Born Gay: The Psychobiology of Sex Orientation* (London: Peter Owen, 2005). If true, there could be important genetic influences in the *mother*, rather than, or in addition to, her gay child.

between species, that humans and sea stars (so-called “starfish”) are made of roughly the same stuff, and that bacteria do not conform to classic species concepts, but evolutionary biology more generally is far from the sort of excitingly sloshy “liquid life” that Morton, Hayward, and Haraway enthuse about. The philosophy of biology, a discipline seemingly unknown to queer ecologists, grapples constantly with its relatively deficient “nomicity” (lawfulness), as in these reflections on ecology by Gregory Cooper: “the nomicity of ecological generalizations comes in degrees and with domain restrictions—one acknowledging that while there might not be anything in ecology to match the nomicity of physics and chemistry, it does not follow that everything in ecology is equally contingent.”<sup>56</sup> Too freely subverting the *Es muss sein* (“it must be”) of natural law with “anything goes” contingency, queer ecologists miss the intermediate position, which is widely (perhaps universally) applicable in biology: “it just depends”—not an exciting slogan, admittedly, but much closer to the truth.

#### “Coopetition” and “Conversatism” in Evolutionary Biology

What queer ecocriticism is really doing is building bridges over to biology via philosophy, an inherently exciting and worthwhile enterprise that should be seen as part of Edward Wilson’s project of “consilience.”<sup>57</sup> However, it would benefit from cognizance of philosophy of biology, an intellectual phylum quite distinct from Foucault’s and Butler’s cowboy constructionism, which sets out to demolish partitions it fails to recognize as structural. Much has been written on the species question, nominalist and realist, that attempts to account for conservation and lineage, as well as the fluidity in evolution (none of it cited in any discussions I have found by queer ecocritics), but what queer critiques tend to emphasize is only the inadequacy—familiar to biologists and philosophers of biology—of *phenetic* (or merely typological) species concepts.<sup>58</sup> How, as Darwin asks, is one to make sense of the embarrassingly large observed variation

56. Gregory J. Cooper, *The Science of the Struggle for Existence: On the Foundations of Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 19.

57. Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (London: Abacus, 1998).

58. Linnaeus originally classified species phenetically, using patterns of observable similarity. The problem is that there seems to be no objective criterion on which to base judgments of similarity. For the same reason, a “Saussurean” account of species as relationships of *difference* will not do—which traits are you measuring? As Kim Sterelny and Paul E. Griffiths point out, there is, in principle, no limit to the number of ways in which any two organisms can be similar, or different (*Sex and Death: An Introduction to Philosophy of Biology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], p. 196).

in *Rosa* morphology, for instance, and that is to say nothing of exhibit A above (bluegill sunfish), the three distinct types of sunfish? But modern biologists also define species *phylogenetically* (in terms of their lineage) and in terms of ecological, physiological, and behavioral isolation (varieties of the *biological species concept*).

While no extant species concept seems likely to prevail unchallenged, the relative preeminence of the phylogenetic approach is reflected in the way that the field in question is more often known today as “systematics” than “taxonomy.” Some theories, such as Niles Eldredge and Steven Jay Gould’s punctuated equilibrium, even treat species themselves as units of selection, with population-level characteristics that are “visible” to evolutionary pressures.<sup>59</sup> As Jody Hey suggests, perhaps the “species problem” itself is more a consequence of the varied and contradictory work biologists require of the concept than a strictly biological question: “The species problem is caused by two conflicting motivations; the drive to devise and deploy categories, and the more modern wish to recognize and understand evolutionary groups.”<sup>60</sup> Even the queer theorists’ favorite biologist Roughgarden is a strict adaptationist, despite her heterodox challenge to sexual-selection theory, and would agree with the conclusion of Kim Sterelny and Paul Griffiths’s critical survey of the question that “the division of organisms into species is an objective feature of the living world.”<sup>61</sup> As they point out, while *individual* differences within species, and within lineages, may be small and accumulated over long periods of time (“turtles piled on turtles,” as Haraway has it), *populations* can change very quickly due to a disease outbreak, dramatic topographic change, or a new predator. Since both biological and ecological species concepts assess the isolation of populations, the problem of gradualism in individual differences is irrelevant: populations demonstrably have properties that could not be ascribed to individuals, such as (ironically in this context) variability and sexual reproduction.<sup>62</sup> So the breathless enthusiasm among queer theorists for specially selected instances of maximum fluidity is at wild variance both with the routine assumptions of biologists and the closely interrogated concepts delineated by philosophers of biology.

The problem is, simply, that while first-wave ecocritics were apt

59. See “The Structure of Evolutionary Theory,” in Steven Jay Gould, *The Richness of Life: The Essential Steven Jay Gould* (London: Vintage, 2007), pp. 242–248.

60. Jody Hey, “The Mind of the Species Problem,” *Trends in Ecology* 16:7 (2001): 329.

61. Sterelny and Griffiths, *Sex and Death* (above, n. 58), p. 182.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 201–210.

to find corroboration of their organicist assumptions in Clementsian or equilibrium ecology, queer ecocritics are conversely too keen to identify instances of biological subversion of categories as typical, rather than the structure and stability<sup>63</sup> studied quite generally by ecologists and evolutionary biologists. In attempt to ward off organicism and cut-price holism, I have advocated a moratorium on the use of “symbiosis” in ecocriticism;<sup>64</sup> I am now tempted to suggest some neologisms that would underline the indissociability of competition and cooperation, conservation and subversion in biology: “coopetitive” and “conversive” anyone? Ugly words, but they might prove serviceable.

### Queer Ecology in Practice

The most serious problem, though, is that queer ecology is conspicuously threatening to conservation politics. In the United States, the species is, rightly, the taxonomic level protected by the Endangered Species Act, which is why there have been both complex scientific and legal arguments in particular cases and vituperative criticism of the act from the American Right. As Sterelny and Griffiths observe, “species have a very important role in biology as ‘score-keeping devices,’ as indices of the effects of evolutionary and ecological processes.”<sup>65</sup> The notion of biodiversity would lose all its considerable rhetorical force, as would the very meaning of an anthropogenic “extinction event,” were the queer subversion of the species concept to gain currency, while the figure of interspecies geniality that Morton proposes, the amorphous Levinasian ethical construct “the strange stranger,” would probably not stand up to cross-examination by oil and logging company lawyers.

Where clear conflicts occur, the queer commitment to transgression seems to outweigh concerns about conservation, as, for example, in the case of intersex animals thought to be affected by estrogenic pollution. Roughgarden states that “[a]lthough a recent report on intersexes among cetaceans raises the spectre of pollution causing genital deformity, the early reports on intersexes predate dangerous levels of pollution. Perhaps cetaceans are on their evolutionary way to the state that hermaphrodite fish have already attained.”<sup>66</sup>

63. The crocodylian order, for instance, includes species virtually unchanged over 84 million years.

64. Greg Garrard, “Ecocriticism and Consilience,” *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism* 2 (2009).

65. Sterelny and Griffiths, *Sex and Death* (above, n. 58), p. 183.

66. Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow* (above, n. 1), p. 41.

Since the St. Lawrence beluga report dates from 1994, however, her laudable determination to depathologize intersexuality wherever possible seems to have led to complacency in this instance.

Perhaps inspired by Roughgarden's attack on their "repro-centric" assumptions, Mortimer-Sandilands similarly chastises ecologists, accusing them of "insidiously" assuming "the absolute naturalness of bodily dimorphism, even in species that harbor a wide range of characteristics within members of the same sex. If male organisms are starting to become 'feminized,' it must be a very bad thing for nature (some environmentalists have been heard arguing that the greater visibility of the *human* transgender community must be the result of pollution too)."<sup>67</sup> Having critiqued the obsessive "disciplinary" maintenance of "bodily security" and purity of liberal environmentalism,<sup>68</sup> and the bodies conversely "abjected" as "leaky and excrescent,"<sup>69</sup> Mortimer-Sandilands clearly wants the reader to reject ecologists' stigmatization of intersexed or "feminized" bodies, even though endocrine disruption actually *is* "a very bad thing" whomever it happens to.<sup>70</sup> Certainly ecologists will need evidence that intersexed animals are appearing in larger numbers than before, but estrogenic pollution has also been shown to disrupt endocrine function in laboratory tests, as well as in field studies, so it seems unlikely that ecologists are merely dupes of heteronormativity for drawing attention to feminization as a consequence of pollution.

If queer ecocriticism is seriously hobbled by its origins in deconstructive and performativity theory, its potential political destinations currently hover somewhere between murky and seriously worrying. Extending Butler's preoccupation with drag into the ecological sphere, Mortimer-Sandilands proposes a green version, arguing for "an exaggerated performance of a normalized environmental body, a parodic repetition of the increasingly intrusive codes of eco-managerialism,"<sup>71</sup> although I suspect that only the privileged class that presently benefits from those "intrusive codes" will find it funny. More broadly, she advocates shifting "away from proliferating rituals of fortification and toward a more thoroughly *critical*

67. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Eco Homo: Queering the Ecological Body Politic," *Social Philosophy* 19 (2004): 27 (emphasis in original).

68. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

70. The logic of this argument might be that one should avoid exposing and campaigning against pollution that causes birth defects, because it perpetuates the stigmatization of disability.

71. Mortimer-Sandilands, "Eco Homo" (above, n. 67), p. 32.

ecological politics,"<sup>72</sup> and espouses the radical democratic decentralization of both environmental-knowledge production and decision making, raising questions of NIMBYism and the role of scientific expertise in the process.

More difficult to locate is Morton's "dark ecology," which on one level seems to advert to a sort of Gothic performativity politics: overcoming both self and nature (in the name of ecology), we are enjoined to "love the disgusting, inert, and meaningless. . . . We identify with the monstrous thing. We ourselves are 'tackily' made of bits and pieces of stuff. The most ethical act is to love the other precisely in their artificiality, rather than seeking to prove their naturalness and authenticity."<sup>73</sup> At the same time, Morton's enthusiasm for Slavoj Žižek's ecological turn allies him with one of the few neo-Stalinist intellectuals in the world. Žižek seems pleased that the ecological crisis is—at last!—one that capitalism cannot confront and resolve, and so it provides an opening for the retrieval of the "egalitarian terror" for which Robespierre, Stalin, and Mao Zedong are so widely admired:

the forthcoming ecological crisis seems to offer a unique chance of accepting a reinvented version of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The argument is thus that, while these phenomena [Robespierre, Stalinism, the Cultural Revolution, and so on] were, each in its own way, a historical failure and monstrosity . . . , this is not the whole truth: there was in each a redemptive moment which gets lost in the liberal-democratic rejection—and it is crucial to isolate this moment. . . . Better a disaster of fidelity to the Event than a non-being of indifference to the Event. To paraphrase Beckett's memorable phrase, . . . after one fails, one can go on and fail better, while indifference drowns us deeper and deeper in the morass of imbecilic Being.<sup>74</sup>

Žižek seems unaware of the recent examples of capitalist liberal democracies acting to resolve environmental problems. For example, he claims that "[t]he first thing that strikes the eye *apropos* this [ecological] fear is the way it remains conditioned by ideological trends. Two decades ago, everyone, especially in Europe, was talking about *Waldsterben*, the dying of the forests; the topic was present on the covers of all popular weeklies—now it has almost disappeared."<sup>75</sup>

72. *Ibid.*, p. 32 (emphasis in original). Although my response to this article has been mainly critical, it is worth noting that it includes some wonderful analytico-lyrical reflections on skin as "the integral body and its object at the same time" (p. 33).

73. Morton, *Ecology without Nature* (above, n. 17), p. 195.

74. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 7.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

International agreements to limit sulfur-dioxide emissions, economic incentives, and technological developments, not some “ideological trend” are the reasons why *Waldsterben* is old news (likewise CFC pollution)—although this is not to suggest that climate change can be addressed so competently. Žižek’s sheer ecological ignorance is reflected in his hilarious claim that “‘Nature’ on Earth is already so ‘adapted’ to human interventions, human ‘pollution’ is already so completely included in the shaky and fragile balance of ‘natural’ reproduction on Earth, that its cessation would cause a catastrophic imbalance.”<sup>76</sup> Of course, it is true that some species and habitats have adapted to our activities, pollution included, and that some are even symbiotic with us; but as a generalization it is absurd, and Žižek sees no necessity to provide any evidence for it.

One thing that one can say for Žižek: while the obligatory rhetoric of radicalism in some theory-inflected criticism is worse than stale, his is frighteningly persuasive. As he asks in conclusion, adapting Robespierre’s chilling speech to the Convention: “Does . . . the ecological challenge not offer a unique chance to reinvent the ‘eternal Idea’ of egalitarian terror?”<sup>77</sup> Apparently it is time for revolutionary justice, terror, voluntarism, and trust in the people (the latter demonstrated by widespread use of informers). That would be dark ecology indeed, beside which Morton’s genial and eclectic advocacy of ambient electronic music, Edward Thomas’s poetry, Dan Flavin’s fluorescent sculptures, and infinite openness to the “strange stranger” seems reassuringly pallid.

*No Future*, Lee Edelman’s possibly unwitting *extensio ad absurdum* of queer theory, by contrast, is a thoroughgoing rejection of the idea of the future itself. If the reader can survive its periodic blizzards of repetitive verbiage, the swirling minutiae of archaic Lacanian terminology, its ingenious readings of *A Christmas Carol*, *Silas Marner*, and a couple of Hitchcock films provide intriguing illumination of Edelman’s central contention: that queers should accept the position allocated to them by their most vitriolic enemies as figures of and for the “death drive,” and reject the very idea of futurity embodied in the Child. The rhetorical constitution of environmental politics around fears for “our children’s world,” though not mentioned by Edelman, would certainly be covered by his claim that “we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure

76. *Ibid.*, p. 442. And in any case, what could he mean by “the balance of ‘natural’ reproduction”?

77. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

of the Child.”<sup>78</sup> Having been defined as anti-procreative, life-denying and vacuously sexual, *No Future* urges queers to live up to their billing, saying “[f]uck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; . . . fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.”<sup>79</sup> Fuck also, then, the children’s voices on the climate-change consciousness-raiser *Age of Stupid*, intended to prod our consciences with proleptic anxiety. But never let that resistance ossify into anything like a political program—even an anarchic one—because that would betray the radical negativity of the queer. *No Future* is a depressingly nihilistic, yet still logical, terminus for queer theory.

### Conclusion

We have come a long way from the concerns and texts and objectives of the founders of ecocriticism. Edelman and Žižek, latter-day Lacanians both, can fortunately be left to their arcane differences, as it seems likely that Gaard and Mortimer-Sandilands’s relative inclusivity is much closer to the political center of gravity of queer ecology. The price of a green bailout for queer theory from its biophobic spiral toward oblivion, however, should be a demand for enhanced theoretical coherence and respect for evidence. Is gay liberation genuinely interdependent with environmentalism? What is the real relationship between the culture/nature and the hetero/homosexual dyads: metaphoric, analogical, homological, or causal? How can the patchy queer data of biology, and the vibrant culture of queer subversion, coexist or interact with the unavoidably sexual lineage of, at least, mammals and the theoretical and empirical resilience of Darwinian sexual-selection theory? What are the ecopolitical consequences of the critique of species? Really, how queer is green? Some aspects of these questions have already been addressed by analytical philosophers of biology who are unaffected by the devil’s bargain that purchased temporal intellectual bravura for continental philosophy in return for the soul of truth; their more modest habits of mind and intimate knowledge of biology are worthy of emulation. Other aspects, I submit, queer theory should have asked itself already.

Morton is wrong to assert that “fully and properly, ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology,”<sup>80</sup> because biology is not

78. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 11.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

80. Morton, “Queer Ecology” (above, n. 4), p. 281.

as queer as he hopes, and queer theory is too deeply compromised by its ancestral biophobia. That rejection of identity is actually, as queer theorists themselves might say, a “space of possibility” between the conversive and coepetitive “it just depends” of ecology and evolutionary biology, and the ambivalent reifications and anthropomorphisms we call (and will continue to call) nature. What biologists see always depends on how long they spend looking, and at what geographical and temporal scales. There is nothing relativistic or anti-materialist about this; as Steven Rose puts it: “Our world may be—is, I would claim—an ontological unity, but to understand it we need the epistemological diversity that . . . different levels of explanation afford.”<sup>81</sup> Our responsibility is to keep looking over ecologists’ shoulders, get accustomed to operating in that space, and use the best philosophy of biology (and even queer theory) to calibrate our critical faculties, then work to reform, as ecocritics always have, the cultural construction of nature by their lights.

81. Steven Rose, *Lifelines: Life Beyond the Gene* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 95.