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### Where is queer studies now? An interview with Annamarie Jagose

#### Abstract:

*Australia Queer* was a Special Edition of the Australian journal *Meanjin* and was a pioneering collection of queer Australian writing. It was published during a time (the 1990s) that saw the rapid rise of queer theory and politics. Annamarie Jagose was one of the editors of that special edition and her book *Queer Theory* (published by the University of Melbourne Press in 1996) was among the first to set the parameters for queer theory and queer studies. This brief interview with Annamarie Jagose focusses on where queer studies is now, nearly two decades after the release of *Australia Queer*.

#### Biographical notes:

Dr Jay Daniel Thompson teaches in the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. He is Book Reviews Editor for the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (JASAL)*, and has published widely in the fields of literary studies, gender and sexuality studies, Australian studies, and true crime writing. Jay is a member of the editorial collective of the peer-reviewed, queer creative writing journal, *Polari Journal*. He is also a freelance editor.

Dr Dallas J Baker is an academic in the School of Arts and Communication at University of Southern Queensland. His study and research intersect with a number of disciplines: creative writing, publishing, and media and cultural studies. Dallas is also a writer with creative work published in a number of journals and anthologies. His current research interests are memoir and memory, scriptwriting, publishing and ‘self-making’ in cultural practices such as creative writing, reading and popular music consumption. Dallas is also editor of the peer-reviewed, queer creative writing journal, *Polari Journal* (<http://www.polarijournal.com>).

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Creative Writing – Queer writing – Annamarie Jagose – Queer theory

In 1996, a special edition of the Australian journal *Meanjin*, was published titled *Australia Queer*. This was a pioneering collection of queer Australian writing and was published during a time (the 1990s) that saw the rapid rise of queer theory and politics. Annamarie Jagose was one of the editors of that special edition and her book *Queer Theory* (published by the University of Melbourne Press in 1996) was among the first to set the parameters for queer theory and queer studies. To this day, Jagose's work on Queer Theory is still among the most often cited and discussed. This brief interview with Annamarie Jagose (conducted in July, 2015) focusses on where queer studies is now, nearly two decades after the release of *Australia Queer*. At the outset, we ask Annamarie about the ways that writing and subjectivity intersect:

THOMPSON & BAKER: Scholarly writing can be a purely research practice or it can be a reflective practice that acts to queer the writer's subjectivity, a kind of Foucauldian productive ethics. How would you define your own writing practice?

JAGOSE: As your framing of this question suggests, scholarly writing can be all manner of things and register variously at the level of practice for different scholars. In terms of everyday practice, however, my own experience feels hilariously distant from any theorizable version of ethics or self-reflexivity. I write very slowly and find it mostly an excruciating encounter with the limits of what I can claim to know or understand at any time. Another way of saying this is to note how literally for me the production of scholarly writing measures the lineaments of my present-tense stupidities. As is true for many humanities scholars, for me writing is the way I work things out, the way I generate new ideas or lines of thought from the writing of others. So it is not surprising that it should be for the most part a gruelling task.

THOMPSON & BAKER: Please talk a bit about how your own interest in 'queer' developed?

JAGOSE: I was writing my PhD from 1988 to 1991 in an area that I then thought of as 'lesbian theory'. My doctoral thesis turned into my first book, *Lesbian Utopics* (1994) but when I began, my critical archive was a strangely cobbled together amalgamation of French feminism, lesbian/gay activism and ficto-criticism. In the very limited historical span of my three-year candidature 'the field', such as it was, changed decisively. Midway through my candidature, two books appeared within months of each other on the sparse New Books shelves of my New Zealand university library – Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). Arriving as an unheralded double act, this pair of books completely transformed how I was able to think about my project. If that sounds like an energizing experience, it was also a traumatizing one.

It is sometimes hard to remember – even harder to convey to our students, for many of whom 1990 is more likely these days to resonate as a birth year – the massive renovation and revitalization given to a then barely stabilized lesbian and gay studies by these two very different works and what a pre-queer moment freighted with queer imminence they differently augured. But these two books and the field of work they

both came out of, and inaugurated, excited my interest in queer theory when it started to be discussed in the early '90s.

Ken Ruthven, then the Head of the Department of English at the University of Melbourne where I was working, invited me to write an introduction for a series he edited, which was published as *Queer Theory* (1996). As the author of this book that has since been translated into multiple languages and is still being reprinted by New York University Press, I became known as a queer theorist, probably before I even identified with that category myself.

THOMPSON & BAKER: Is there a distinctly 'literary' history to queer theory? What are some of the contributions that literary theorists have made to the field of queer studies?

JAGOSE: Scholars with more of a social science bent sometimes fault queer theory for being overly literary, suggesting that it is too focused on the representational at the expense of grasping the material conditions of existence in late capitalism. I'm not convinced that such divisions can be that simply rendered. As someone who was trained in literary studies, moreover, I'm inclined to think best through 'literature' broadly defined.

THOMPSON & BAKER: To what extent could queer theories be understood as developing/following on from feminist theories?

JAGOSE: Well, I published what could be considered an essay-length response to this question a few years back in *Feminism and Psychology* (2009). Luckily, I think its title alone makes pretty clear my position on this matter: 'Feminism's Queer Theory'. In that essay, I read the critical afterlife of Gayle Rubin's famous essay, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', tracing the work it has been differently required to do for feminist and queer field formations. The question of the temporal relation between feminist and queer theories remains important. It is not only that feminist theories have been an important point of inauguration for queer theories but also that feminist and queer thinking are coeval. Feminism is both an historical source of inspiration for queer thought and its present-tense interlocutor. Since the latter point often gets overlooked, I'd emphasize queer theory's tangled, productive and ongoing relations with feminist theory. Rather than quarantine feminist from queer thought, seeing them as the before and after of some narrative of critical advancement, thinking feminist and queer theories together can productively refuse the lures of linear historical time with its implicit prioritization of the present and its reliance on heteronormative tropes of lineage, succession and generation.

THOMPSON & BAKER: In 2015, are we 'post-queer'? Or, as the late Jose Esteban Munoz put it, is queer something that has not yet come to pass?

JAGOSE: Almost since its inaugural moment, there have been plenty of people keen to note the passing of queer. A sense of queer theory's finitude has animated from the start attempts to specify quite what queer theory is or does. These anxious notings of the waning of queer theoretical vitality seem less diagnostic to me than an integral part of its critical development. This is why, I think, queer theory's death has been frequently anticipated in work that identifies with queer theory as a rubric and

attempts, often passionately, to convey some sense of its emergent critical coordinates.

THOMPSON & BAKER: What are some of the current major trends in queer/sexuality studies?

JAGOSE: I'm enjoying strong developments in places such as South East Asia and the Pacific that don't naturalize a United States perspective as a universal conceptual framework for thinking about sexuality. And there are plenty of exciting crossovers between queer studies and other areas of scholarship like race studies, ecocriticism, animal studies, new materialisms and so on.

THOMPSON & BAKER: Thank you for your time Annamarie. You have made it clear that there is a strong future for queer studies.

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