

On Queer Assemblages: An Overdue Conceptualization

Abstract [paper]:

Under the auspices of the Research Project “Reorientating Assemblage Theory in Anglophone Literature and Culture” (PID2022-137881NB-I00), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, this paper aims to demonstrate the many innovative ways in which Assemblage Theory and Queer Studies can be mutually beneficial, especially regarding the study of queer literary texts. Although Assemblage Theory was originally articulated by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their now seminal *Milles Plateaux* (1980), there has recently been a noticeable growth of interest regarding assembled thinking. This interest, however, seems to generally overlook the theoretical potential that combining Assemblage Theory and Queer Studies could offer to our critical understanding of LGBTQ+ (hi)stories.

In this sense, this paper intends to achieve its main aim in two different ways. First, it will examine the affinities between Assemblage Theory and Queer Studies by pointing out how both fields of research share a number of ‘points of contact’, both superficial and profound. I will pay special attention to the controversial origins of both theories, as well as to their rejection of essentialism and binaries, and their shared concern with multiplicity and political activism. After all, the potential implications behind the fact that Assemblage Theory rejects “essence in favour of events” (Nail 2017, 1), while Queer Studies, at the same time, sees sexuality as “culturally and historically specific rather than being something that exists in an essential sense” (Sullivan 2003, 81), has been largely unexplored up to this point.

Drawing from the parallels established between both fields in the previous section of the paper, I will go on to demonstrate their practical and analytical benefits when considered together through an analysis of Justin Torres’s recent novel *Blackouts* (2023). By applying ideas from assembled thinking as developed by Bill Brown in “Re-Assemblage (Theory, Practice, Mode)” (2020) and some of the main tenets of queer studies in a combined fashion, I hope to demonstrate how Torres’s novel can be paradigmatic of the many possibilities that this combination has to offer to achieve a better understanding of the ways in which queer culture and literature have been constructed through history. In this sense, I will contrast Brown’s notion that novels have an assembled mode of existence –as they combine a multitude of voices, impressions, and materials in a kind of literary collage (Brown 2020, 271-4)– with Torres’s innovative narrative technique. This technique, in fact, is composed by a collage of redacted pages from twentieth century sexology studies, ‘camp’ photographs of the same period, and other documents, create a sense of the non-linearity and assembled nature of queer history.

(428)

References

- Brown, Bill. “Re-Assemblage (Theory, Practice, Mode).” *Critical Inquiry* 46 (2020): 259-303.
- Deleuze, Giles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Nail, Thomas. “What is Assemblage?” *SubStance* 46, no. 1 (2017): 21-37.
- Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.
- Torres, Justin. *Blackouts*. London: Granta, 2023.

Keywords

Assemblage Theory; Queer Studies; Bill Brown; Justin Torres; LGBTQ+ Literature.

PLEASE NOTE:

In the event that the panel receives more proposals than there are available slots in the conference schedule, I am open to having my paper transferred to panel: Modern and Contemporary Literature