

Love, subversion, and perception: 60 years of queer anthropology with Esther Newton

Interview

Esther Newton^a, interviewed by Bobi Steel^b & Ash Morris^b

^a *SUNY Purchase, United States*; ^b *McGill University, Canada*.
esthernewtonwebsite@gmail.com; robert.steel@mail.mcgill.ca; ashley.morris@mail.mcgill.ca

Abstract For the second edition of CORA, we are proud to present an exclusive interview with Esther Newton, arguably one of the most important names in queer anthropology. In this interview, Esther discusses her distinguished career and the many roadblocks and setbacks she had to overcome to eventually find herself as a multi-published academic and Professor Emerita at SUNY Purchase. Esther's work spans almost 60 years, having begun her graduate studies (that would later become the book *Mother Camp*) in 1962, at a time when studying queer topics in anthropology was not only taboo, but could spell the end of an academic career before it even began. Today, Esther's work and lifelong dedication to the study of queerness in anthropology is celebrated in Jean Carlomusto's film *Esther Newton Made Me Gay*.

Résumé Pour la deuxième édition de CORA, nous sommes fiers de présenter une interview exclusive d'Esther Newton, sans doute l'un des noms les plus importants de l'anthropologie queer. Dans cet entretien, Esther évoque sa brillante carrière et les nombreux obstacles et revers qu'elle a dû surmonter pour se retrouver en tant qu'universitaire aux multiples publications et professeur émérite à SUNY Purchase. Le travail d'Esther s'étend sur près de 60 ans, puisqu'elle a commencé ses études supérieures (qui allaient devenir le livre *Mother Camp*) en 1962, à une époque où l'étude des sujets homosexuels en anthropologie n'était pas seulement taboue, mais pouvait signifier la fin d'une carrière universitaire avant même qu'elle ne commence. Aujourd'hui, le travail d'Esther et son dévouement de toute une vie à l'étude de l'homosexualité en anthropologie sont célébrés dans le film *Esther Newton Made Me Gay* de Jean Carlomusto.

Keywords queer Anthropology; kinship; love

When the CORA editorial collective landed on Love, Subversion, and Perception as the three keywords for its second edition, one of the first people to come to mind was Esther Newton. Her name is one that deserves far more recognition than it receives: her pioneering PhD thesis, which became the book *Mother Camp*, first published in 1972, is a groundbreaking ethnography of the world of drag queens (or female impersonators) undertaken in the mid-1960s at a time long before queer anthropology would stake a claim as a subdiscipline. The book is a loving and intimate display of queerness in full and laid the foundation for many other important names in gender and sexuality studies, both within and outside of anthropology.

In 1993, she published her second book *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, an account of the oral history and contemporary challenges of queer life in Cherry Grove on New York State's famous queer hotspot, Fire Island, as told by some of the island's longest-standing residents. The book raises several questions around the subject of love in anthropology, including loving relationships between anthropologist and informant, as Newton writes of her erotic emotional but non-physical relationship with Kay, her closest interlocutor during her fieldwork on Fire Island. Her essay *My Best Informant's Dress* delves deeper into this relationship, asking what it means to truly love the people with whom you work as an anthropologist, and exploring the ways anthropologists have both hidden and displayed acts of love during fieldwork from their readers.

Esther's work in queer anthropology, although foundational, has long been underappreciated by the anthropological canon at large. She often speaks of the frustrations she experienced during her academic career as peers dismissed her work on account of its open queerness, and her stories of the homophobic comments she's received throughout her career make it clear that she was not always welcomed by colleagues. In more recent years, she has finally been recognized for the truly unique nature of her work: she is the recipient of the 2018 Distinguished Achievement Award from The Association of Queer Anthropology, the American Library Association GLBT Roundtable Over The Rainbow 2019 recipient, and has twice been awarded the Ruth Benedict Award from the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists for *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, and her memoir essay collection *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*.

In 2022, director Jean Carlomusto premiered the film *Esther Newton Made Me Gay*, a loving portrait of Esther Newton's life, narrated by Esther herself and many of those who have known and loved her throughout her life. The Queer Anthropology Reading Group organized a screening of the film right here on the McGill campus last September and were joined by Esther to give a Q&A after the screening. When CORA announced the keywords for this second edition, two members of the Queer Anthropology Reading Group jumped at the opportunity to speak with Esther again about her life's work and the future of queer anthropology. As Esther reminds us during the interview, her work is about more than just queer anthropology – there are lessons about love, kinship, sexuality, and gender for anyone, and non-queer anthropologists stand to learn as much, if not more from Esther than those of us who identify as queer.

In true Esther Newton fashion (and maybe somewhat due to lingering ethnographic sensibilities) she was the one to ask the first question. What continued from there was a delightful, emotional, and hopeful conversation about love, subversion and perception. We hope you enjoy reading her words as much as we enjoyed hearing them.

Esther (E): So there's a question that I had for you, which is why are you so interested in love?

Bobi (B): That's an interesting question. Generally, with the journal, it's that we've chosen the theme to be centered around [love] for the second edition. It came up in a meeting, we were deciding what to do for the second edition and one of the first suggestions was love. But ever since we were reading your work prior to the screening in September we've had a lot of conversations between the four of us in the Queer Anthropology Reading Group about love, and I personally have been thinking about love and anthropology. Especially that relationship between the anthropologist and the interlocutor and the reasons why we don't talk about the feelings of love that develop in people's fieldwork. And it just seems strange to me the more I think about it, so I thought it'd be nice to have a conversation with somebody who has written about that openly in *My Best Informant's Dress*. I was listening to a snippet this morning from *My Butch Career*, and you were talking about it again. It's stuff that you don't get in a lot of other places in anthropology.

E: I mean that essay *My Best Informant's Dress* is the one where I really undertake that question around love. Except for an essay that is also in *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, which was a speech I gave on behalf of a committee I was on that was trying to assess what was going on with queer people and anthropology. But other than that. This was the only—well, of course, *Mother Camp*, that was my dissertation, so that was aimed at anthropologists. But even then, I wanted to write in a way that was accessible to the general public. You know, the average person probably isn't going to pick up work like [*Mother Camp*]. But to the literate public, especially queers, *My Best Informant's Dress* was the only one that I wrote specifically about an anthropological problem. I reread it to prepare for today and I have to say, I think it's great. I think it's a great essay. And actually, it's being translated into Spanish and Portuguese and it was the favorite of this younger anthropologist that I met—Shaka McGlotten—who was teaching at SUNY Purchase. They're great, you know, and their book was largely inspired by that piece, I think. So, I reread it and like I said, I think I was pretty inspired. In that essay I use love and erotic somewhat interchangeably, and one of your questions for me was “Why did you choose to write about love?”, and one thought I had was the revenge of the marked category. This is something that they taught us in graduate school, the difference between the marked and the unmarked category. I've used it throughout my life to help me think about power. Social and cultural power.

B: Could you just explain a little bit what you mean by the marked and the unmarked category? It's not something that I've come across.

E: The unmarked category is the one that goes without saying, like “man” is the unmarked category. That word stands for human being. Woman is the marked category. So in that essay the first thing I took on was heterosexual men—Malinowski in particular—and their take, if any, on eroticism and love within the context of the field. Heterosexuals, they're the unmarked category, that's the given and that's, to digress slightly, one of many reasons why the gay liberation movement adopted the strategy of coming out. Before gay liberation, coming out had a very different meaning.

Prior to gay liberation in America and probably in Canada as well, coming out didn't mean that you told straight people [about your sexuality]. I never told a straight person other than a therapist I had when I was sixteen and acting out. I never told a straight person until my late twenties that I was gay, because to do so would have meant the loss of my career in graduate school, and also when I started to teach. So coming out had two meanings. One meaning was you said to yourself, “I think I'm queer” or “I think I'm gay”, or “I think I'm a homosexual”, which is how I thought of it when I was sixteen. Well, it's actually three parts. The second part was you had sex with someone of the same gender to you, “coming out”. That person “brought you out”. The third meaning of it was that you entered gay life, the underground, forbidden gay life, and several aspects of gay male camp. This term came from debutantes, straight debutantes, who would come out and be introduced into upper class society by being debutantes, so it was this campy thing: oh, you're coming out, and hopefully you're this young, attractive thing and you're being introduced to the world. So it had those three meanings. Gay liberationists, however, adopted the idea of coming out and the word coming out to mean something very different, which was to declare to the straight world I am gay. Because of course the majority of pre-gay-liberation homosexuals could pass. My dear mentor in graduate school who supported me to write and study drag queens, and to write that book—he didn't realize I was a lesbian. I never knew that. And I thought he just didn't want to say it. But he didn't know. Which is incredible, really, when you think about it.

B: It's been said before that in *Mother Camp* you give so many clues, you give so many inferences that are picked up straight away by anyone who is queer themselves. We knew of you previously, but even if I hadn't known of you, I would have picked up on some of these clues. I'd like to. So it's almost like there are different languages. There is this language of inference.

E: Right, exactly. And he read the manuscript [of *Mother Camp*]. He thought it was great. He supported me and he got it published. First in 1971 and then it went out of print. He

got it published again at the University of Chicago Press, and he never realized I was a lesbian. So, in order to emerge from the marked category we had to come out, but of course we still are the marked category today.

B: That was going to be my next question: do you think that emergence has happened now? Because in some circles there is an element to which homosexuality is the unmarked category. But it's almost that within queerness itself there have become marked and unmarked categories. But if you're talking about queerness and gayness as a whole, to be, a white, cis gay man is the unmarked category, and others have become the marked category within those spaces.

E: Absolutely. And really within the gay world, before gay liberation and all that, gay men were the unmarked category and lesbians were the marked category, you know.

To go back to love and eroticism—I said it was the revenge of the marked category. In other words, I was calling those heterosexual men out. I was calling their number. You know, like, “Hey, wait a minute, what's going on here?” And the whole Malinowski thing I thought was fascinating. Really fascinating. I couldn't believe it when I read the diaries, and then the whole controversy about it and Clifford Geertz and what he had to say—he was also on my thesis committee. He didn't help me as much. We didn't hit it off personally at all like David [Schneider] and I did. But still, that was a big deal, you know, to have him on my dissertation committee. And the third one was an anthropologist named Julian Pitt-Rivers, and they knew Julian Pitt-Rivers' brother was involved in a huge homosexual scandal in Britain. David thought that Julian was going to be supportive of my work because of that, which was true. Not himself—none of the three of them were gay or knew much of anything about it but David was the chair of the department, that was huge.

So, back to why I write about love. It's predictable that women and gays—for whom matters of sexuality and gender can never be unproblematic—have begun to address these issues with the discipline. That was why I wanted to write that piece.

B: Yeah. And I think it blows the doors so wide open on this question of why we're not seeing or why we haven't seen more of that. What is it about love? Is it that people feel that there's an ethical responsibility to your interlocutors not to have feelings, not to have emotions towards people? You have to be this impartial researcher, because when you're doing quantitative studies or you're doing work with very empirical data, it's the height of importance to remove emotions. But when we're talking about culture, when we're talking about anthropology, it's such an invested subject and we're so aware of that, and there's so much writing out there that says, no, you should be putting yourself as the

ethnographer and your positionality into your work so that you understand the relationship you have to your interlocutor. But by relationship they mean the purely political, socially functional relationship, not the personal relationship, because that still somehow is this taboo subject. Do you have any thoughts on why this nervousness exists or whether that is something that is slowly melting?

E: Yeah. Well, first of all, in the hard sciences there are, again, women primarily who've taken that question up and said, "now, just a minute". The whole idea of the strictly objective, unfeeling, totally mental, A-brain-only-scientists, some women scientists are really going after that. But it's like this masculinist idea that research can't be true unless it's sort of universally true. And only men are universal, white men. That's who's universal. For gay people or any oppressed group to make our experiences stand for human experience—and this is something Toni Morrison said—it's so difficult. It's like an aside experience. It's never the big experience. We can never stand for human experience, and that's what she broke through, Toni Morrison. She was asked "Why are you only writing about black people?", and in parentheses "isn't that limiting?". And so she wrote that black people are human beings; I forget the exact words, but, you know, this is part of the human experience. It's not very mysterious why anthropologists don't want to deal with this dimension of field work, but also intellectual endeavors, because it's subjective and even with the whole reflexivity thing and they don't mind putting themselves in it, you know, in terms of their class identity or something like that. But in terms of what kind of sexuality were you grappling with, what kinds of feelings were you grappling with? How did you deal with your best informants? I don't know if it still is, but that was a concept in anthropology, your best informant, and this was the person who led you into and opened the world of this other culture to you. I had a best informant also in my first fieldwork, which was Skip Arnold, whom I loved deeply, profoundly. I mean, the sexuality aspect of it didn't come into it because we were both oriented the other way, and I was aware of that. But I didn't talk about it because I was already taking enough chances.

B: I think it's interesting that you say that you didn't ever write about the love between you and Skip. I do feel that it somehow resonated through the pages, because there's an intimacy between you and Skip. I don't know whether it comes down to the style of your writing, but there's intimacy between you and these drag queens in the way that you explore the inner sanctum of the world of the backstage, especially with drag, because there is this kind of performance facade. And then there's a, there's another person underneath that facade and you say, look, here's that. But when we're talking about best informants I'm so intrigued to hear also about your experiences with Kay and with the other residents of Cherry Grove that you wrote about in Cherry Grove, Fire Island. It just seems that there was a whole other level of intimacy and of feelings of love there.

E: Well, I was a more mature person at that point. It's funny, I was thinking about it when I reread that piece, it was strange to reflect that I am now the age that Kay was when I met her. I'm in much better shape than she was, but I hadn't really realized that about this interview: I'm at the age now that she was when I met her, 83. Maybe she was even a little younger, like 82 when I met her. And the age difference between us [on the Zoom call] is much greater than my age difference with Kay. I mean, at the time I was in my 40s. But I had found the age difference sexy. That wasn't the first time, and then as I got older, I had an affair with a woman who was 20 years younger than me. It lasted about three years. My current partner is 14 years younger than me, which is not the same as a 40-year difference or a 60-year difference, practically in our case. But I did write in that essay how much I revered the elders in Cherry Grove. They helped me construct that book. The people were somewhat different ages, there were people in their 50s, 60s, 70s, even 80s and I revered them, even the ones with shitty politics. There were plenty who would tell me to my face, "oh, there's too many lesbians here now," or they were all white and they would say racist things or anti-Semitic things. But it wasn't my job to correct them. It was my job to find out what they thought, how they felt. I can't believe the amount of fieldwork I did. I reread another piece [of mine] just for fun. *Dickless Tracy* and *the Homecoming Queen*. There's so much fieldwork, and I thought to myself "boy, you're really good, you're an excellent fieldworker and you can write".

B: I hope that's the way all of us feel about our field work once we've completed ours!

E: It's a fascinating thing, really.

B: How long did you spend in total in Cherry Grove while you were writing?

E: I was there for six years. It's only a summer community, so I was there six summers. The first summer I didn't do any fieldwork. I was just there because my partner and I had experienced this homophobia from teenage boys in the Catskills, so we thought, "we're going to a gay place." It was at the end of that summer that I realized, hey, there's really a story here. I wrote about this in the introduction to the book but there was a hurricane, Hurricane Gloria, and everyone had to evacuate and get off the island. This guy was yelling "people think this is just a vacation spot or it's just a place to go swimming. It's not. This is our home." I thought "there's really a story here." So I started the fieldwork the next summer and I started out with two group settings. There are pictures in the book of these older people together because they said to me—something that I now really appreciate—that if we get together, we'll jog each other's memories. When you get to be my age, you get very anxious about your memory, and there's big chunks of my life that I don't remember anymore. People will say, "oh, remember when we did..." and it's just sort of gone. I brought together these two groups of elderly Grovers and then I

interviewed almost all of them separately, and then, of course, they led me to other people. So I was there for six years. Five of those were very intense fieldwork, and then that piece, *Dickless Tracy and the Homecoming Queen*, that occurred in 1993, I believe, when Joan became Miss Fire Island. So those two summers I was there for like a month each time. I don't know if you've read that piece or not, but it was just such an amazing event that I had to write about it. But I didn't do anything past that.

B: I mean Cherry Grove, Fire Island is so comprehensive and I was shocked while reading through the book how comprehensive some of the stories were, that they had happened decades and decades before you were even conducting these interviews, but there were still things people remembered about something someone said. And there are intense reconstructions of intricate details about what people were wearing or who turned up at what time. It builds this incredible picture. My question was going to be how you managed to do that, but you're alluding to the fact that it's the experience of that kind of group collective memory, and where one person might have forgotten something somebody else is able to help reconstruct the memory.

E: And there wasn't that much in the way of an archive to deal with. So it really is primarily an oral history. I backed it up where I could with, you know, the local newspaper and stuff like that. I was very fortunate back then; for any gay project, you couldn't get funding. You couldn't get any funding. The reason I was able to do the drag queens [Mother Camp] was that I had a fellowship in grad school. I remember—I think this is a story I mentioned somewhere—that I mentioned to this colleague that I wanted to do [Cherry Grove, Fire Island], and I couldn't get any funding for it. I didn't even try. It was understood you wouldn't be able to. And this guy said, well, why don't you make a proposal and say it's about beach erosion? I was like, are you kidding me? It's not about beach erosion whatsoever. It's about a gay community. So I didn't have any money. But I did have an excellent gay male student, and he, for very little money, did some archival research in the local newspapers which was very helpful. But I really relied on oral data, and I trekked around with my little tape recorder and I had to record it all myself and take it from the sound to the written word. So, it was a huge undertaking.

Ash (A): I'm wondering how, having previously needed to conceal those personal matters in your first dissertation, and then going into this other fieldwork, how it was received by others? I know you wrote to your previous mentor about it either during or after your field work. It was in *My Best Informant's Dress*, a piece that you had written to him about the feelings you had with Kay or that kind of connection that you two had. How was that received by your peers when you were writing *Cherry Grove*?

E: Well people, I think, feel that I was discriminated against by straight anthropology, which is true. But the truth was [that they said] “we don't care.” It's not important, it's this minority. It's this marked category that's not really anthropology, and it's not really about real people. By the eighties I really wanted to get out of my teaching job and get a better job in academia, because I didn't know how to do anything else. At the University of Michigan I was a spousal hire because Holly, my partner got a job in the art and design department, and when they brought her on they said “are you married?”, and of course you couldn't get married then. She said, “well, I have a partner. She's an anthropologist”, and they kind of hinted that they would give us a spousal hire. But then time went by and nothing happened, and meanwhile I wanted to retire, I was burnt out. I was so angry. Not at students, but at the whole situation that I was in, not being recognized, you know, plus low pay and all these things. So after a couple of years she had been there, I said “what's happening with the spousal hire thing?”, and she said she was so angry because this guy was just hired, he was given a job offer and he said he's not coming unless they gave his wife a spousal hire. She was also an artist, and they did it. So I said to Holly “maybe if you go to the head, you know, the dean. Maybe he'll do something about it.” He liked her, and they brought me in for an interview—what was it that guy said? One of the people on the committee that met with me. He said something so off the wall. I can't remember what it was, but something very homophobic. But they did it anyway; I got a spousal hire. I was like an adjunct, which they call a lecturer at Michigan. The first year I was there, I was the lowest level, but the next year they bumped me up to the highest level. It was okay—it suited me because I was so sick of committees and stuff, so I did go to the faculty meetings, the big ones, but I didn't have to be on tenure committees anymore. I just loved being there. I had teaching assistants and I met with my student assistants once a week, and I really had a great time there. But I never had a tenure-track job at a prestigious university.

B: But now you have Yale knocking at your email inbox asking you to come and do talk for their new program!

E: Well, it's the film; they're going to show the film and they're bringing me and Holly and Jean the director and Shanti the producer. All four. Did you see the info from Yale about their new program [Anthropology of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies]? Boy, I almost flipped over when I saw that.

A: I'm considering it. I'm applying in the fall to grad school, so I'm considering that.

E: Well, I think I'm going to meet with those students and also a couple people that are in the program and so I'll give you a full report.

B: In light of these kinds of new programs and new approaches to anthropology that are emerging, what is your hope for the future of queer anthropologists who are coming through, like ourselves? Do you have any hopes for what queer anthropology is going to continue doing, or where you see it moving?

E: I'll tell you, I didn't [have hope] until I met you, and then I thought, maybe there's hope. After a lifetime of basically being ignored, it's hard for me to be hopeful about anthropology. I was speaking to this young woman—she's like thirty, thirty-one—whom I'd made friends with in New York. She said she thinks anthropology is dying, and what's the point of it? And I was shocked, even though I'm so alienated from the profession. Another person that I'm kind of in touch with posted online that she's at some university in the state system in Tennessee, and they've wiped out anything resembling gender studies and anthropology. It's an undergraduate program, and they had fifty-eight majors. That's a lot of majors for a state college. All the other programs that they wiped out were more obscure, except for gender studies—ancient pottery and stuff like that. But anthropology. Then I thought, well, maybe the other woman is right about that. She said, “what's the point of it now?” And I think that is somewhat up for grabs.

A: I think what we're seeing right now, especially when you talk about careers in academia, is very much a lean towards an interdisciplinary approach, if anything. I'm looking at programs, and just discussing McGill's program, we don't have anyone that wants to talk about queerness in the anthropology department. But our gender studies program is very interdisciplinary. So you can find yourself fitting in somewhere else, but if you're hooked on anthropology, there's not a lot of promise in these departments, from what I can see right now.

B: It feels bad, and this is what you were pointing to Esther, and what Ash is talking about; whether it's this feeling of precarity of the study of gender and sexuality always being the fringe subject that you add on to something in a secondary perspective, or a lens through which you do a particular thing. It goes back to the comment you made earlier about always being an aside, not being seen as the real experience of humanity. It's like queerness in science, and in research, and in academia is not seen as the real experience of doing academia. Or you're an academic, but you're a queer academic. And it's sometimes when we're talking about queer anthropology, I don't want to call it queer anthropology because it's just anthropology, it's a particular group that you're choosing to study that feels like it needs to have this name to justify its being. Yeah, it's, it's an odd precipice to feel like both gender and sexuality is on a ledge in a lot of universities because there's such a push back in education generally against having queerness being taught in schools, and anthropology being somewhat of a changing field that's hugely interdisciplinary as a kind of subject.

E: Well, higher education is in a bad way. The right wingers thought, “how can we take back higher education from the lefties?” That's what it's about, and gender studies as a way into that, anthropology also. But once I met you folks and the students—the film attracted so many students.

A: And all our classes are capping, the students are there. All of the queer-related classes are filled all the time.

E: Yeah, so I'm very fortunate to have lived long enough to see that. But what kind of future you two and the other two are going to have in anthropology remains to be seen. I am hopeful because I think highly of you. But I don't think highly of other people whom I won't specify.

B: It feels like anthropology has come a long way in terms of the incorporation, perception, and reception of queer stories. It feels like it has come a long way since the days of Mother Camp, in that you referenced drag shows as being this hugely underground thing that people don't attend because it's so ostracized. And now drag is on the opposite end where it's so it's ubiquitous, it's universal, but in a way that in some cases has commodified it and turned it into something that can represent a particular type of very palatable queerness. You can read a lot about drag now because it's become such a spectacle. Even Shaka [McGlotten] is teaching a class on drag and people watch *Drag Race* in the lectures, which is amazing. It's incredible. But it feels like there's a whole other side to queerness in the everyday, the mundane. We were talking about spaces of love, like homes; the queer home is something that we don't talk about a lot. It's always queerness in public spaces. But I think there's room for a much more intimate look at what queerness is outside of the public eye and what it looks like today in a place where it is more publicly acceptable but still feels like there's a shady side to it that's not.

E: It's not full out. Well, the actual subject, when I say I don't know where this is going sometimes it feels very gloomy. The actual subject of queer life is huge and has so many aspects, and in terms of anthropology, there's queers all over the world. It's not just us now. They have different configurations and may identify with our movement or not so much, but that was established by an earlier generation of anthropologists, that there's both gender and sexual queerness everywhere. So, there's plenty to study. The question is, will it be supported? Will it be considered important? I don't expect it to be on a par or with, you know, studies of race and class, which are also important. But will it be supported? I'll be very interested to see what happens. I hope you keep in touch with me so that I know how you're doing!

Acknowledgements We would like to thank Esther Newton for paving the way forward for many of us queer anthropologists to follow, and for the time, energy, and dedication she has brought to our ongoing conversations at a time where queerness feels as though it is once again at risk from certain political agendas.

Esther Newton is a cultural anthropologist, activist, and a founding scholar of queer studies. She is Professor Emerita at SUNY Purchase and taught at the University of Michigan and the University of Paris VII. She holds a BA in history from the University of Michigan and an MA and PhD in anthropology from the University of Chicago, where she wrote her dissertation, later published as her first book, *Mother Camp* (1982). Esther is also the author of three other books: *Cherry Grove*, *Fire Island* (1993), *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay* (2000), and *My Butch Career* (2018). Beyond ethnography, Esther is passionate about dog training, participating in agility and obedience sports with her furry companions.

Bobi Steel is a PhD Candidate and Leadership for the Ecozoic Fellow in Anthropology at McGill University, editor for CORA Journal and co-founder of McGill's Queer Anthropology Reading Group. His research seeks to understand the human values that drive non-market economic relations, and critically engages with the ethics of relationship building in the context of fieldwork from the position of a queer anthropologist. He is also an avid singer, writer, and photographer.

Ash Morris is a graduating BA student at McGill in Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, Feminist and Social Justice studies. As a co-founder of the Queer Anthropology Reading Group, they are passionate about making queer theory more accessible within and beyond academic settings. Her research interests lie in the intersections of health, care, and forms of intimacy in aging queer communities. Outside of academia, they can often be found baking birthday and wedding cakes, sewing costumes, or perusing their local bookstore.