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Abstract: This essay argues that the idealization inherent in the academic concept of "queerness" bears a resemblance to the notion (prominent in interdisciplinary contexts) that "the literary" is an object of singular critical insight. I trace this resemblance to the centrality of literary thinkers in early queer theory, arguing that we live in the shadow of the definitions of queerness and the literary emergent around 1993. I examine essays by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Joan Wallach Scott from that period before turning to the writing of Samuel R. Delany, which models a de-idealized critical stance on literary genres and nonnormative sex.

> When the task becomes wholly to construct an aesthetic, then the aesthetic becomes wholly ideological.
>
> —Samuel R. Delany

Who decides what counts as queer? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, arguably the theorist who did the most to make "queer" a term of academic art, gave divergent answers in two of her earliest pieces to employ the term. On the one hand, "queer" seems open to being occupied by anyone who might want to take up residence there. "What it takes—all it takes—to make the description 'queer' a true one," Sedgwick writes in 1993's "Queer and Now," "is the impulsion *to* use it in the first person."[1] But in another essay from the same pivotal year, Sedgwick suggests otherwise. "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" contains, in the midst of a discussion of how shame circulates in communities of sexual difference, the throwaway observation that "everyone knows that there are some lesbians and gay men who could never count as queer."[2] Here, queerness is a delimited zone, presumably excluding some lesbians and gay men who might wish to adopt the label for themselves. Left unspoken is the issue of who will adjudicate those marginal cases—but it seems clear that in this second

formulation a social category has morphed into something resembling an aesthetic one, subject to argument and perhaps to expert verification. The question of evaluation—the sense that "queer" is an honorific, to be bestowed or denied by an informed observer—lingers even in a contemporary academic context in which the concept frequently attaches to nonhuman entities or conceptual abstractions. Scholarship still routinely asks what entities, populations, phenomena, or ideas "count" or "qualify" as queer. My starting assumption is that this is a fundamentally metaphysical question, one whose political and intellectual utility is unclear. But how we came to talk this way remains an intriguing story.

This essay proposes that the story has to do with the relation of literary studies to the study of sexuality, and it offers three case studies of major intellectuals negotiating that connection. The first examines the appearance of "queer" in Sedgwick's work in 1993, which coincided with her reputational shift from literary critic (the author of three highly regarded books in that field) to queer theorist—one who would continue to employ literary texts as the occasion for theorization but whose audience soon outstripped the relatively restricted group of readers interested in fine-grained analyses of William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry James, Herman Melville, et al. The absence of the idea of "queerness" from the literary critical monographs that made Sedgwick's name, as well as the term's decisive emergence in 1993, suggests that that concept encodes unresolved literary business. I'll argue that while Sedgwick's early work offers an extraordinarily supple example of literary critical practice—balancing aesthetic intoxication, political skepticism, and an intense awareness of obligation to a specific set of audiences—the emergence of queerness in her work effected a sea change in each of these dimensions. As we'll see, Sedgwick's essays of 1993 invest academic queerness (at its birth, so to speak) with the nimbus of poststructuralism's destabilizations of meaning. This is not surprising, perhaps, for the holder of a 1975 Yale Ph.D. in English. More striking is that such destabilization was infused with a utopian ethico-political potentiality—a conflation about which Sedgwick had voiced doubts when expressed in the idiom of deconstructionist literary criticism but that seemed permitted or even urgently necessary when the object of analysis moved from the textual to the sexual.[3]

Sedgwick's work from this period construes queerness as radiating a formal and ethical allure, and in doing so offers an unlikely confirmation of Heather Love's recent claim that queer studies has "invested in a modernist aesthetic of ineffability"—unlikely because the features commonly claimed for that aesthetic (abstraction from audience and reference, an investment in the mystical power of formal experimentation,

an implied readerly posture of awed appreciation) are so remote from what I hope to show is the lifeblood of Sedgwick's criticism.[4] But precisely in moving beyond the literary, "queer" in Sedgwick's work indexes an unacknowledged tribute to a specific vision of the literary object and of literary appreciation. The term's evaluative aspect—queerness's condition as something we judge, endorse, and appreciate—is related to its status as a kind of aesthetic object demanding a pose of admiration from its analysts. If Sedgwick's earlier criticism is marked by a full-throated and animating ambivalence, the arrival of queerness in her work brings with it a strongly idealizing tendency, the implication that queer sexualities are lovely and lovable in an almost definitional sense. The abstraction of queer from recognizable social coordinates, its orientation to futurity and transcendence, and (perhaps most importantly) its programmatic positivity, function together as a kind of negative image of much of what is most compelling in Sedgwick's literary criticism.

This moment was consequential for literary studies because it deemphasized Sedgwick's early work and memory-holed some of its galvanizing features, in the process subtly coloring our understanding of the conceptual work and political posture of literary criticism generally. But this moment was (perhaps not coincidentally) also important for how the idea of "the literary" circulated beyond the discipline. My second section, focused on the historian Joan Wallach Scott's essay "The Evidence of Experience," argues that the idealizing of nonnormative sexualities in literary studies coincided with a parallel idealization and flattening of "the literary" in interdisciplinary contexts. Scott's essay was first published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1991 as part of a special issue (and later edited collection) on the topic of evidence across the disciplines. Reprinted in Routledge's landmark *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* of 1993, the piece became a key document in what was rapidly being institutionalized as queer studies. The essay is also one of the most prominent celebrations of the literary from beyond literary studies, and in that sense representative of a moment in which literary critical methods, and a certain notion of the literary, were migrating far beyond the discipline proper. Scott stages a remarkable self-correction over the course of the piece, first critiquing the epistemological presumptions of a memoir by the polymath science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany and then returning at the essay's end to acknowledge that her critique has in fact been anticipated by Delany's writing. Just as importantly, Scott credits this volta to the intervention of an English professor who offered her a more sensitive vision of Delany's formal and stylistic ingenuity and the conceptual work they perform.

These things are explicitly a parable in Scott's presentation: schooled by literary text and literary critic, the historian offers her story as an

object lesson in the superior insight offered by "the literary." But the version of the literary outlined here is so restricted that Scott's praise is also a form of quarantine, whereby literariness becomes not an object in the world but a way of looking at the world, an additive rather than a constitutive social phenomenon. Like queerness, this vision of the literary is modeled on a poststructuralist ethos of destabilization (here not of fixed meanings but of fixed identities). And like queerness, it is assumed to be inflected with political progressivism or even charged with a utopian energy. Scott's extradisciplinary borrowing from literary studies historically coincided with the moment when Sedgwick's work became maximally available for interdisciplinary uptake, and these scholars' work from this period can be seen, respectively, to construe queerness and literariness as related domains of metaphysical value: precipitated out of everyday experience, queerness in Sedgwick and the literary in Scott perform a salutary commentary on a world from which they have been abstracted. One powerful effect of these shifts has been to saddle these concepts with an unrealistic burden of millenarian expectation.

The pieces that focus the early sections of this essay cluster in a certain moment, what we might call the long 1993. The essay hangs out there on the theory that certain main lines in the style of argumentation of that time only become intelligible at a distance, and out of a feeling that in key ways we still live there. For all the transformations the field of sexuality studies has witnessed in the last thirty years—most notably via the institutional recognition of queer of color and trans critique—the notion that queerness is an ineffable quantity has remained tenacious in much writing in the field. Partly to assess the costs of such a conception and partly to explore alternatives to it, I turn in my final section to the writing of Delany himself. Deeply invested in nonnormative sexualities and in literary modes of thinking, and fascinated by the magnetism between them, Delany's work over nearly six decades has kept at bay the moralizing and metaphysicalizing imagination that creeps in when either term comes untethered from terrestrial reference. Put differently: nonnormative sex and the literary in Delany's work are not the *opposite* of anything, and they do not arrive in the world from some space beyond it to correct or ironize the failings of our politics or our positivism. They are instead richly complex social and imaginative facts, alongside others.

To describe Delany this way is to make him an ally in the projects of dedramatization animating some of the most searching recent writing in sexuality and gender studies. I'm thinking here of Kadji Amin's urging that queer theory adopt a "deidealized" conception of nonnormative sexualities, of Love's turn to descriptive sociology as a model for queer theoretical practice, and of Christopher Chitty's suggestion that the sense of queerness as marking a "utopian opening" be replaced by queerness

understood as a "narrower descriptive category" indexing historically specific forms of status deprivation—a project Chitty calls "queer realism" and that he acknowledges is "deflationary" by design.[5] The mood of his proposal mirrors that of a recent essay by Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager attempting to save trans studies from the ontologized idealization they claim has pushed queerness to "a point of analytic exhaustion." Their proposal shares not just Chitty's impatience with metaphysics but his generic disposition: when they praise recent work in trans studies that "refuses both the pomp of antinormativity and the circumstance of the posthuman for something slower, smaller, more tuned in to the ways in which ordinary life fails to measure up to the political analyses we thrust upon it," they offer what sounds very much like a form of realism.[6]

Delany's renown as a writer in nonrealist genres may seem to put him out of sympathy with such projects. But I understand his writing as something like such projects' precondition—not only because he has worked in a wide array of genres (mostly abandoning SF and fantasy in 1993, as it happens, even as he remains a fierce partisan of these modes' vitality and importance), but because he has insisted on understanding those genres as grounded in specific social contexts. My point is not then to claim that Delany is "really" a realist, but that his body of work taken as a whole has long practiced the kind of methodological realism at which these commentators have arrived: an effort to see various forms of writing and sex as taking up shared space on the terrestrial plane of culture—objects to be taken seriously in the wider world because they are part of it.[7] In Delany's critical work, imaginative writing is always conjugated through interpretive communities and spaces of reception. So too with sexuality, which is so pervasive in his work as to be hopelessly entangled with every possible mundane concern. This perspective is no doubt related to Delany's biography: he is not only a theorist but a devoted practitioner, so to speak, in the domains of both literature and nonnormative sex. But these facts have led him to claim neither identitarian authority nor access to transcendental energies. Rather, they have afforded him a deep familiarity with the institutions and social conditions conducive to certain kinds of sex as to certain kinds of literature. This master of the intergalactic models a worldly criticism.

I.

Proverbially, the advent of "queer" in Sedgwick's work, as in the field of sexuality studies generally, signals not just a new theoreticism but a move beyond the identitarian fixity of "gay-and-lesbian." Sedgwick's work in and

after *Tendencies*, the essay collection she published in 1993, does move beyond the male homosexuality that occupied her in 1985's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* and 1990's *Epistemology of the Closet*. But reading at this historical distance, other shifts become equally visible around 1993. Most dramatically, the tone in which Sedgwick writes about the identities that are her object of study undergoes a profound change. The Sedgwick of *Between Men* and *Epistemology* is scrupulous, even apprehensive, about identitarian terminology and self-positioning. "As a woman and a feminist writing (in part) about male homosexuality, I feel I must be especially explicit about the political groundings, assumptions, and ambitions of this study," she writes in *Between Men*'s introduction.[8] The paragraph that follows makes a series of fine distinctions: rejecting the idea that gay men and women are "natural" allies along with the notion that gay men are epitomes of misogyny; explaining that while homosocial desire circulates in homosexual and patriarchal milieux alike, the overlap is historically contingent, whereas "homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic, and perhaps transhistorically so," and so on (*BM* 20). One feels in this careful treading Sedgwick's awareness that there are potentially many people to offend here—particularly the feminist and gay male readers she is keenest to address.

Epistemology intensifies that precision, as Sedgwick worries over the fact that appropriating the right to name anyone else's sexuality is, as she memorably puts it, "a terribly consequential seizure."[9] This scruple palpably informs Sedgwick's account of the difficulties she faced in finding a vocabulary to encompass both nineteenth-century literature and contemporary sexual lexicons: "There is, I believe, no satisfactory rule for choosing between the usages 'homosexual' and 'gay,' outside of a post-Stonewall context where 'gay' must be preferable since it is the explicit choice of a large number of the people to whom it refers," she writes, before going on to explain her deployment of these terms over the shifting historical terrain her book covers (*BM* 16). She concludes the section by explaining that she has avoided using "gay" and "gayness" as nouns, out of a "sense that the association of same-sex desire with the traditional, exciting meanings of the adjective 'gay' is still a powerfully assertive act, perhaps not one to be lightly routinized by grammatical adaptations" (*BM* 17). Today, when sexuality studies is organized around the referential fuzziness of "queer," such exquisite alertness to the sensibilities of the existing communities about whom one speaks sounds positively exotic. One could hardly wish for a stronger demonstration of Joseph North's recent claim that "it really does make a difference to the character of a work produced by an intellectual formation when those involved feel strongly their responsibility to the needs of a fairly

well-defined larger formation outside the academy" (an insight North leverages to explain the intellectual energy of early queer theory but that could be applied to Black, trans, or disability studies, and many more).[10] Audible here is Sedgwick's powerful sense of *answerability* to a historical archive and to a living community.

And yet, notwithstanding the gravity and even anxiety animating such passages, the dominant affect informing the writing, by Sedgwick's own account, was "reckless pleasure."[11] The confession comes as a surprise to no attentive reader of these books, in which pleasure is constantly avowed in the discussion—openly besotted—of literature. Witness Sedgwick's observation in *Between Men* that the "peculiar genius of Tennyson" lies in his ability to animate ideological banalities with his "gorgeous lyric gift" (*BM* 119); or her claim that the "ravishing and peculiar eros of *Leaves of Grass*" (*BM* 205) created problems of cultural translation for Walt Whitman's English readers; or her description of how the speaker's "breathtaking" elision from the concluding tableaux of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 144" is what makes that poem "so disconcerted and moving" (*BM* 31). Or witness, in *Epistemology*, Sedgwick's insight that "many gorgeous effects in *Moby-Dick*" derive from the "sweeping Shakespearean" ability of Melville's narrator to transmute public into private space and back again (*E* 110); or her claim that "one of the main pleasures" of reading late Thackeray is his prose's "feline gratuitousness of aggression" (*E* 192); or her sense of the "magic, beauty, eerie atemporality" imbuing the scene of Charlus and Jupien's first encounter in Marcel Proust's novel (*E* 230). Witness even—witness especially—her description of re-reading her teacher Allan Bloom's notorious right-wing jeremiad of 1987, *The Closing of the American Mind*: "Now, reading [Bloom]," Sedgwick writes, "the splendid pedagogic charms of this great popularizer (i.e., of this great teacher) come flooding back to me" (*E* 55). It is as if the political concern evident in Sedgwick's careful metacritical self-positioning demands a hydraulic release of pleasure via her appreciation of literary texts.

The delighted gratitude that Sedgwick everywhere avows for the writing that is her object should have put paid to the widely held notion that academic criticism entails an animus to aesthetic pleasure. Sedgwick is not only a great critic but a great—inventive and specific—appreciator of literature. And as the last example above makes particularly clear, she is unapologetic about enjoying writing to which she is politically opposed. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's lyre plays a gorgeous song of female subordination; Melville's stunning stage management is in the service of a fantasy—homoerotic and genocidally homophobic—of the end of homosexual persons; Bloom's charming book argues that feminism was "gri[m]" and "unerotic" and compares Woodstock to the Nuremburg

rallies.[12] Indeed, Sedgwick's pleasure adheres so consistently to politically suspect objects that it becomes clear that one of the affordances of the literary in her work is the ability to make available as the occasion for intense enjoyment of even the most problematic—not to say *fucked up*—ideological material.

The frequency with which Sedgwick derives pleasure from ideologically objectionable writing amounts to a methodological principle that historical and political problems (maybe in particular pernicious ones) can make for aesthetic pleasure when they are worked seriously by a gifted writer—or when a serious writer allows those problems to work her gifts. The agential tangle is intentional: Sedgwick is getting at mysterious processes, made more convoluted when one recognizes that bad politics in gifted hands provokes in Sedgwick's work not an even-handed appraisal of this unfortunate cohabitation but an analytic drama of wellnigh Jamesian complexity, in which she describes specific artistic gifts being deployed to various, unstably intentional purposes, and in which ideological results and motives are alternately cloudy and clear both to literary maker and literary critic. I do not know how else to categorize the passage on Tennyson's narrative poem *The Princess* from which I have drawn the above quotation, which makes not the expected claim that the poet's lyric dazzle obscures the conventionality of his sexism but that his gift combined with his "fervent, . . . credulous, and . . . conflicted" artistic personality to create an unintentionally subversive—because so poetically intense—rendering of that orthodoxy, a rendering whose narrative line she describes as "frothing-at-the-mouth mad" (and so, one assumes, out of Tennyson's conscious control) and whose stylistic plane she characterizes as a technical problem with which the poet visibly (and thus more or less knowingly) struggles—the whole process thereby revealing the "enabling incoherences in his society's account of itself" (*BM* 119).[13]

The impossibility of rendering a thumbs-up or -down verdict on the aesthetic object here is less important than the pleasure that radiates palpably from the analytic exercise. But the object is by no means held cleanly apart from the analytic pleasure, either: *The Princess* cannot finally be cordoned off from the interpretive excitement to which it gives rise, and it seems clear that in Sedgwick's estimation the poem is not just a text to be held at a distance as "interesting" or "revealing" but something more intimately demanding: wonderfully bananas, deliciously offensive, a hot mess. That Sedgwick's dauntingly sophisticated criticism keeps contact with such lay aesthetic judgments—utterly common outside the academy if infrequently acknowledged within it—is one source of its vitality. More than that, it shows that such energies of

literary-critical judgment are indisseverable from scholarly claims: the interplay between reckless aesthetic pleasure, political sensibility, and sociohistorical argumentation animates the writing at every level. And as we have seen, this whole argumentative complex is itself held in a delicate cohesion by a vivid sense of obligation to an extratextual but palpably present community of imagined readers.

This specific arrangement of appreciation, analysis, and extramural obligation undergoes a seismic shift when "queer" arrives on the scene of Sedgwick's writing. All these elements—and their relation to one another—will be unsettled by the term's appearance. As a condensed emblem of these transformations we might take "Queer and Now," the lead essay in *Tendencies* and probably its most widely taught. Its opening section is famous for the moving explicitness with which it orients itself toward a subset of the social world. Titled "A Motive," it opens with the following lines: "I think everyone who does gay and lesbian studies is haunted by the suicides of adolescents. To us, the hard statistics come easily: that queer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others; that up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be gay or lesbian; that a third of lesbian and gay teenagers say they have attempted suicide; that minority queer adolescents are at even greater risk" (*T* 1).

Tough to imagine a starker announcement of (to cite North again) the critic's "responsibility to the needs of a fairly well-defined larger formation outside the academy." The rhetoric of empiricism—unusual for Sedgwick—is key to the effect of these words, and to their gravity: even accounting for what Sedgwick knows we know of the spurious reliability of statistics, this is a passage that wants its referential clarity. Sedgwick is talking, that is, about lesbian and gay kids, as she makes clear by using some version of the phrase several times. But she is also talking about queer kids, as that word's untrumpeted and repeated appearance signals: queer here just is a synonym for "gay and lesbian."[14] I belabor this obvious point to underline how unavoidably the paragraph's ethical intensity relies on referential exactitude and a willingness to traffic in the mundane work of social signification. If Sedgwick elsewhere heralds queerness as an "open mesh of possibilities," here it is wrenchingly dependent on the closure of census-style social denotation.[15]

By "elsewhere," I mean elsewhere in this same essay: the "open mesh" phrase kicks off a bravura paragraph a few pages later that might have been designed as a determinate negation of the logic of the essay's opening. We are in the section entitled "Christmas Effects," in which Sedgwick speaks of how depressing it can be when "all the institutions"—family, state, church, commerce—"are speaking with one voice" (*T* 5). "Queer"

arrives here as a word for "an interest in *not* letting very many of these dimensions line up directly" (*T* 6). "That's one of the things that 'queer' can refer to," she continues:

> the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedoes, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or . . . people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such. (*T* 8)

Kelly Roberts has aptly remarked these lines' Whitmanian quality, and these long lists indeed substitute a mood of bardic exuberance for the sober reportage of Sedgwick's opening.[16] If sexuality and gender retain a loose thematic centrality in the first list, the departure from "queer" as a word for a set of identities or human attributes is severe: these are abstractions ("possibilities, gaps, overlaps . . .") characterizing not a demographic group but a signifying process (". . . of meaning"). The "open mesh," in other words, recalls any number of deconstructionist descriptions of the endless weave of textuality. But just as notable as the intellectual provenance of these lines is their affective orientation: where classic poststructuralist criticism tended to regard the inevitable slippages of meaning with an air of rueful irony, Sedgwick adopts here a pose of ecstatic celebration. When the paragraph returns to the topic of sexual subjectivity, the passage through the poststructuralist gate has decisively loosened social reference. The list comprising the bulk of the second sentence has a puzzling relation to the "lesbians and gays" Sedgwick opened with, not quite letting them alone but no longer using them as a referential anchor. Some of the terms ("clones," "butch bottoms") are recognizable as designating subsets of that earlier group, while the racialized connotations of others ("Snap! queens," "aunties") summon the vision of subjects often violently ejected—or deliberately taking rhetorical and social distance from—blandly "gay and lesbian" communities; a related disruption in the *omnium gatherum* atmosphere is activated by terms ("bulldaggers," "transsexuals") denoting subjects whose gendered embodiment has frequently made them targets of exclusion from community with their list-neighbors here. But the giddily accretive syntax works to distract us from dwelling on those possible ruptures. The cornucopia-effect is purchased in part by inclusions that knowingly

court overreach ("feminist women"), silliness ("ladies in tuxedoes") or strenuous whimsy (has anyone ever self-identified as a "wannabe" or a "fantasist," and are there existing communities that willingly welcome people so doing?). The final clause renders queerness a genuine subjective universal, bestowing that honorific on anyone at all "able to relish" any member of the preceding list: an essentially mandatory status, in other words, one that no right-thinking reader of this essay will be in a position to refuse (and Sedgwick accordingly speaks of herself here in the first person—"the very many of us"—enfolded in this now-universal queerness). Doubts about whether these are the same kind of people in any meaningful way, or about whether some of these kinds of people even exist, are washed away in the list's assimilative pulsion, as if Sedgwick were saying, with Whitman, "what I assume you shall assume."[17]

To read this list this way is obviously to miss its spirit, which is not literally denotative—Sedgwick nowhere claims that every feminist is queer, or that all people who are amused by drag performers are queer, and so on. But the naively literalist question is not, if one has registered the mundane referential heaviness of the essay's opening, wholly impertinent. To put the point as strongly as possible: this version of "queer" has not earned the moral gravity that Sedgwick's opening has attached to the term. The paragraph on the "open mesh" leverages that gravity in the service of a new rhetorical and intellectual project but does not flag the intensity of its affective and referential shift. The sorrow and anger motivating the opening of "Queer and Now" are palpable, and one's sense of that emotional intensity deepens when we register that the deaths Sedgwick invokes there—kids removing themselves from our shared world before they can register fully as queer members of it—also figure the all-too-visible deaths inundating Sedgwick's world a decade into the AIDS epidemic. It is not, to say the obvious, a bad thing to find transformative uses for grief, to hit on the alchemical formula that will convert the paralysis of overwhelming loss into the movement of hope or excitement. But the oddity of that alchemy in Sedgwick's essay emerges with more clarity in comparison to the evolution of "queer" in the sociopolitical realm in the same moment. Deborah Gould's account of ACT UP, for example, tracks the volatile emotions traversing AIDS activism in these years: self-disgust over enjoying perverse sex and the defiant assertion of one's right to do so; shame about contracting a disease by means of that sex, and grief at the loss of loved ones; guilt over surviving, and fear that one won't survive long; blistering anger that both motivates action and threatens to shut off access to other feelings—and all of these constantly transforming into and out of one another. In Gould's telling, political emotions are born from and stay

tightly bound to specific acts, events, communities, and the real power of "queerness" as an animating term in that milieu derives from its emergence from that tangle. It is not primarily an oceanic feeling, or outward-tending, or a desire for transcendence.[18]

In this context, it remains remarkable that this moment of Sedgwick's work is oriented so insistently toward a heady vagueness, a programmatic beyondness. The move to make queerness abstractly weightless is even more explicit in the foreword to *Tendencies*, where Sedgwick attaches a host of ineffable, not to say mystical, qualities, to queerness: resisting the idea that queerness might be a passing fad, Sedgwick claims that "something about *queer* is inextinguishable . . . queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*" (*T* xii). This list of attributes includes an echo of the "motive" of "Queer and Now," but here the word bubbles up from an alliterative phonemic chain, its appearance after "moment" and "movement" suggesting motive less as ethical cause than musical ligature or *motif*. If one wanted to characterize the autotelic logic that produces "motive" here in literary-historical or generic terms, one might notice how redolent Sedgwick's list is of the incantations of *l'art pour l'art*. This hieratic, determinedly abstract version of queer has become routinized in our academic conversations. But these early pages of *Tendencies* offer something like an origin story of queer's metaphysicalization: its detachment from specific situations and its untethering from social reference, its investment with a glow of positivity and a sense of holding barely describable possibilities: its transubstantiation, in short, into a quasi-sacred substance or energy.

Previous commentators have of course noticed these aspects of queerness. Almost from its first emergence the term's vaporousness has generated critique, as has the way that blurriness can serve to erase lesbians, people of color, gay men, trans people, sex itself. But these complaints—and the weightlessness in "queer" they variously index—are connected in still underrecognized ways to academic queerness's emergence from the nexus of literary study. Amin, in his searching genealogy of queer studies' fantasy attachments, offers an account of queerness particularly useful in clarifying its vexed relation to that discipline. He focuses on three aspects of queerness that are vividly in evidence in these pages of *Tendencies*: we can schematically isolate them as queerness's peculiar temporality, its relation to voluntarism, and its positivity. Queer studies, Amin writes, is oriented "almost triumphally, toward futurity," and queerness itself is held to be "pregnant with the shape of a utopian future to come"—a millenarian emphasis audible in Sedgwick's attempt to locate queerness as at once of the "now" and "inextinguishable" (*DA* 33, 24). Amin notes further that queer studies often tacitly relies on an

ideal of "volitional resistance" (*DA* 37)—an ideal detectable in Sedgwick's quiet move from a focus (in her early books) on structures that interpellate subjects willy-nilly to the self-help-inflected discussion (in "Queer and Now") of how one might *engineer* a queer life by cultivating "a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other," developing a "productive strategy" of "disarticulat[ing]" and "disengag[ing]" from one another the logics of blood, law, labor, sex, and companionship (*T* 6). Finally, Amin notes the idealization (he calls it the "romantic antinomianism" [*DA* 6]) endemic in queer studies—a strain intensely pronounced, if not originating, in these pages of Sedgwick. "It *feels* queer, and good," she writes on *Tendencies*' first page, describing the way personal concerns dwindle among the gathered bodies at a Pride march (*T* xi). If any word captures the overall feeling-tone of queer, "good" is a strong contender.

Each of these values now seems axiomatically embedded in our notion of queerness, but it's remarkable that each also contradicts a key feature of Sedgwick's literary criticism, perhaps of criticism generally. Literary criticism is in some fundamental sense about the past—in ways obviously true of work in historical "period fields" but equally so of any interpretive effort that takes as its object an existing piece of human culture. Where Sedgwick's early books were works of literary and cultural history, "Queer and Now" takes for its object the present and imminent future: a temporality that summons the urging, manifesto-like tones we have observed. The pastness and given-ness of the object in Sedgwick's earlier work also clarifies by contrast the prominence of a form of voluntarism in the later work, its emphasis on the therapeutic. As we have seen, it would hardly be accurate to describe Sedgwick the literary critic as disempowered or disactivated in the face of the texts she reads. If anything, her style as a reader of texts is deliriously agentialized, charged up on the energy of its insights. But in the absence of a textual object's stabilizing externality, the critic herself increasingly becomes the arena and object of volitional action; in a tendency that would culminate in Sedgwick's 2003 "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," the description of the ethical orientation of the critic replaces an argument about an object, so that in place of a sensibility illuminating a text, "queer" increasingly becomes a word for a sensibility elaborating itself.[19] But the most salient shift is heralded by queer's definitional positivity. The thrillingly productive compound of political ambivalence and aesthetic exuberance characteristic of Sedgwick's criticism evaporates with the advent of "queer," which demands a default position of approval. Indeed, the powerful ethicalizing of queerness with which Sedgwick opens "Queer and Now" suggests that any stance other than enthusiastic affirmation risks alignment with the ugliest of motives.

If a certain tinniness attaches for this reader to the conception of queerness that results from these shifts, that is emphatically not because any of the projects I have described are themselves unworthy. I do not mean to disparage an orientation toward the future, the elaboration of a critical sensibility, or the cultivation of ethical optimism. But it's not clear why the study of sexuality need be definitionally attached to any of these endeavors.[20] To the extent that these values have become embedded in our notion of queerness, that concept has been costly for our understanding of the complexity of human sexuality. And insofar as the embedding of those values has relied on a forgetting of key aspects of literary criticism at its most rewarding, queerness has also been costly for our understanding of the complexity of literary objects and of the interpretive work that surrounds them.

II.

Here's another story about the literary and sexuality, also from the early 1990s. When the historian Joan Wallach Scott's 1991 essay "The Evidence of Experience" was reprinted in Routledge's 1993 *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*—the big blue book that occupied prime shelf space in many ambitious student libraries—its place as a foundational text in an emerging queer studies was ensured. The anthology's editors understood the concerns of Scott's essay as central enough to borrow its title to label one section of the collection, an honor only otherwise bestowed on Audre Lorde's then already iconic 1978 essay "The Uses of the Erotic." Scott's essay has been widely referenced in sexuality studies and far beyond it; at the time of this writing, its 4,729 citations are drawn from fields as disparate as history, critical theory, pedagogy studies, anthropology, sociology, business ethics, political theory, and performance, disability and science studies.

"The Evidence of Experience" is structured around a scene that one might have predicted would make it unlikely to become this sort of citational mainstay: six years before Stonewall, a twenty-one-year-old African American gay man on his first visit to New York's St. Marks Baths wanders into a dimly lit upstairs room and stumbles on "an undulating mass of naked male bodies," a vision that provokes in him "a heart-thudding astonishment, very close to fear."[21] The man is also a writer—in 1963, the date of this trip to the baths, Samuel R. Delany has published two science fiction novels; by 1988, when he writes this reminiscence, his catalog comprises twenty-five books, among them some of the century's most searching critical accounts of SF and its relation to what Delany

provocatively calls "mundane" (i.e., realist) fiction. So there is bibliographic weight behind the words when, a few sentences after he sets down the sight of massed flesh, Delany writes, "I have written of a space at a certain libidinal saturation before. That was not what frightened me. It was rather that the saturation was not only kinesthetic but visible. You could *see* what was going on throughout the dorm" (*MW* 292). (By 1988, Delany's work is replete with scenes of "libidinal saturation," but the most historically proximate reference here may be to 1984's *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*, a novel of intergalactic diplomacy featuring cross-species public-sex spaces modeled on gay urban cruising grounds). The visual clarity of the moment in the baths—distinct but not detachable from the sense of erotic surfeit—leads the young Delany to articulate to himself the following startling certainty: "that there was a population—not of individual homosexuals . . . not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex" (*MW* 293).

Scott's treatment of this moment is so widely known that virtually any subsequent discussion of Delany's 1988 memoir is at some level responding to Scott (just as, conversely, any citation of Scott's treatment of key historiographic issues finds itself involved, even if not-quite-avowedly, in this scene of anonymous, multipartnered gay sex). Scott's essay opens and closes with divergent readings of this moment. In the first, Scott focuses on Delany's privileging of the faculty of vision ("You could *see* what was going on") to critique the empiricist assumptions of recovery projects undertaken by "historians of difference": in holding up the supposedly foundational category of personal experience, Scott argues, such projects reify the social categories whose constitution they should be interrogating.[22] But at the essay's close, Scott rereads the scene, this time commending Delany's account for anticipating her critique: now, Scott notices how the dimness of the scene's lighting foregrounds the murky uncertainty of the visual medium—a self-referential quality she commends also in the memoir's title, *The Motion of Light in Water*. Delany's scene, Scott writes, in fact acknowledges the "necessarily discursive character" of experience (EE 398).

Two related points about Scott's presentation of Delany are pertinent here: first, her essay's preoccupation with the disruption of stable identities, and second, her association of that project with literariness and literary criticism. Early on, discussing the "frightening and exhilarating" moment of vision in the bathhouse, Scott writes that Delany "emphasizes not the discovery of an identity, but a sense of participation in a movement" (EE 364). This is exactly right: Delany does not use the word

"identity" in this sequence, and while there is a sense of cognitive and emotional discovery in the scene, there is no suggestion that Delany learns anything about *himself* here. And yet, despite Scott's opening caveat, the language of identity crops up with increasing frequency over the course of her essay. Using Delany's set-piece first as an emblem of naïve empiricism, Scott writes that historians of difference have tended to "take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented" (EE 367). A page later, Scott writes that such historiography "precludes critical examination of . . . homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as fixed immutable identities" (EE 368). The word thrums ever more insistently as the argument progresses. "Talking about experience in these [orthodox] ways," Scott writes, prevents us from asking "how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced" (EE 372). E.P. Thompson is critiqued for believing that the working class possesses an "unequivocal and uniform identity" (EE 375), and women's historians for tending to "universalize the identity of women" (EE 377). None of these projects sufficiently recognizes that "identity is a contested terrain" (EE 377).

These are now-familiar critiques of the coherence of identity. One feels they had an urgency at the time of Scott's writing that we no longer, thirty years on, experience so intensely. But it is striking that Delany himself, in the very memoir from which Scott is quoting, has already casually acquiesced to them, scare-quoting the notion of identity and shrugging off any notion of its coherence: "any 'identity'—semantic, generic, personal, or cultural," he writes, "is always . . . an accretive, associative, but finally disjunctive illusion."[23] As we've seen, Scott's essay early on recognizes Delany's lack of interest in extracting an identitarian significance from the orgy at the St. Marks. But because she has chosen Delany's anecdote to open her indictment of historiography's reliance on the notion of transparent identities, it is no surprise when, toward the end of the essay, Delany's "undulating mass of naked male bodies" returns, now wearing the garb of an identitarian epiphany. "For Delany, witnessing the scene at the bathhouse . . . was an event. It marked what in one kind of reading we would call a coming to consciousness of himself, a recognition of his authentic identity, one he had always shared, would always share, with others like himself" (EE 384). Scott will go on immediately to offer another kind of reading—and she will do so, importantly, under the tutelage of a literary critic—but before exploring that second reading, it is worth dwelling on how quietly tendentious this first proffered interpretation would be: all of its terms ("coming to consciousness of himself," "recognition of his authentic identity," "had always shared, would always share," "others like himself") are imported wholesale into

Delany's revelation, which mentions neither identity, authenticity, self-recognition, nor any intuition of likeness either immemorial or futural. Delany's key concerns and terms, which I'll say more about in a moment, are numbers, populations, social scale, and the difference between "gay" and "homosexual"—and the temporality he glimpses in his revelation concerns not the eternity of gay identity but the anterior construction of a set of institutions encouraging specific forms of sex.

Scott is not wrong that it's possible to imagine someone offering her hypothetical first interpretation—but it is a wholly ideological reading, riding roughshod over the text's contents. I draw attention to the inadequacy of this reading because the specific form of its inadequacy conditions the nature of the correction. That correction comes in the form of an extraordinary act of interdisciplinary diplomacy, as Scott hands the reins of her argument over to a literary critic, the Romanticist Karen Swann, who, a footnote informs us, responded to an earlier version of Scott's essay at a Wesleyan colloquium in 1991. Swann's reading of the passage, from which Scott quotes liberally, offers a wholly distinct interpretation of Delany's scene, paying acute attention to "the properties of the medium through which the visible appears—here, the dim blue light, whose distorting, refracting qualities produce a wavering of the visible" that troubles any idea that this is a scene about transparently available identities. Instead, Scott continues, riffing on Swann's insight, "the wavering light permits a vision beyond the visible, a vision that contains the fantastic projections ('millions of gay men' . . .) that are the basis for political identification" (EE 384). Swann's noticing has produced an undeniably better reading—one that attends to the philosophical implications of the episode's scenography, recognizes the note of the fantastic in the young Delany's epiphany, and sees that its narrative tropism is not inward, toward anyone's "authentic" self, but outward, toward the process of political imagining.

This climactic moment in Scott's essay might thus appear to represent the very best version of what interdisciplinary respect for literary studies would look like. Indeed, even before Swann's decisive appearance in Scott's essay, "The Evidence of Experience" has celebrated the literary critic as someone who (in the cited words of Gayatri Spivak) "unravels the text to make visible the assignment of subject positions." In Scott's gloss, Spivak's words raise the possibility that literature may help historians unlearn their habit of describing historical subjects "in terms of an essentialized identity" (EE 381). This is just the lesson Scott takes from Swann's intervention, claiming in the wake of the critic's reading to be able to see Delany's recognition that "the meanings of the categories of identity change" over time (EE 385). And in her conclusion, Scott

generalizes Delany's (and Swann's) lesson by offering "reading for 'the literary'" as a tool to challenge conceptions of experience that "essentialize identity and reify the subject"; thinking in literary terms will encourage historians instead to examine "processes of identity production" (EE 386–7). This is clearly sincere praise, and in its essentials convincing. And yet its elaboration has required a curious reversion—perhaps especially palpable for a reader with his mind on the baths—to the question of *identity* (a topic, we recall, absent from Delany's text). The lauding of "the literary," that is, coincides with a palpable flattening of the literary text under discussion, and a concomitant forgetting of what the literary critic has just spelled out about it. Delany's text is exonerated from the charge of exemplifying a naïve faith in identity, but only so that it can be celebrated for resisting, complicating, or historicizing . . . identity.

The possibility that Delany simply *isn't interested* in the question of gay identity's facticity or essential truth, that his text is about something else entirely (a possibility Scott articulates at the essay's opening), proves hard to keep in view. The source of this difficulty is Scott's determination to use Delany's memoir as an emblem in a disciplinary contest: her praise of the text (at once intense and inattentive) results from her insertion of it into an allegory about the "difference between history and literature" (EE 381). The consequence is not merely a failure to register the distinctive textures of Delany's writing but a constriction of what "the literary" can be perceived to mean. Here, as we've seen, "the literary" is essentially a stand-in for a critique of identity essentialism—a critique that associates literature *tout court* (and the work of the literary critic) with the task of undermining our fantasies of substance. If the aesthetic orientation of "the literary" thus construed is clearly modernist, the methodological lens it suggests is recognizably poststructuralist, with an emphasis on the referential instability of the literary medium: "The kind of reading I have in mind," Scott clarifies at one point, "would not assume a direct correspondence between word and things, nor confine itself to single meanings, nor aim for the resolution of contradictions. It would not render processes as linear, nor rest explanation on simple correlations or single variables" (EE 383). These are far from uninteresting affordances of some kinds of literature, and Scott uses them adroitly as tools in a historiographic debate—but they are specific ones, hardly exhausting the investments of literature as a field of culture or of literary criticism as a professional endeavor. They would serve imprecisely, for example, as a catalogue of classic features of urban reportage, or realism, or science fiction, or pornography. (These are all genres in which Delany has worked.)

Scott's essay, then, suggests that the designation of "the literary" is bound to a certain damaging inexactness, and that even when that

designation is also a celebration, it flattens or bypasses the myriad uses to which literature may be put. The consequent idealization is more than a little reminiscent of our current celebrations of queerness. Like queerness, "the literary" here partakes of a transcendent and metaphysicalizing energy: Scott's designation of the literary as having an "integral, even irreducible status of its own," for example, echoes Sedgwick's claims about queerness's "inextinguishable" nature (EE 409). Like queerness, the polemical energy of "the literary" is highly binarizing, and it is offered as a corrective to—implicitly the opposite of—some other negativized term: just as queerness conjures a vision of hegemonic straightness or terminal squareness, the literary arrives as a corrective to the epistemological naivete of positivist historiography. Like queerness, the literary here has a fundamentally modernist orientation that seems to demand a poststructuralist analytic, and like classical modernism and poststructuralism in certain theorizations it is understood as essentially critical in nature—even inherently progressive or "good": Sedgwick's claim that queerness is "recurrent, eddying, *troublant*," for example, is evidently not meant to invoke such recurrent and troubling phenomena as, say, attempts to curtail access to abortion, and Scott's presentation of Delany's literarily inflected politicization would read quite differently if his fantastic vision concerned not the omnipresence of gay sex but, say, a sudden conviction that Jews controlled the international banking system.[24] Finally, like queerness, "the literary" encourages an imprecision as to the difference between object and analyst: just as queerness permits a slide between the qualities of the literary object and the disposition of the critic, here the analyst of literature is hard to differentiate from the sensibility of "the literary" itself, so that a whole professional habitus becomes aligned with the salutary ineffabilizing work of the literary object itself.

III.

I'm suggesting that the invocation of "the literary" and of "queerness" can be preventative of attempts to get interested in the specific dynamics of either object. The risk is clearer in dealing with a writer like Delany, who so obviously demands analysis in terms both of literary ways of thinking and of sexual nonnormativity. Watch how rapidly "the literary" reveals itself as too blunt an instrument with which to parse his multifarious writerly engagements: Delany has published literary philosophical fables (2004's *Phallos*, 2018's *The Atheist in the Attic*); SF novels that veer from the cerebral puzzle of *The Einstein Intersection* (1967) to

the goofy space opera of *Nova* (1968) to the notoriously recondite postmodern Everest that is *Dhalgren* (1975); a magisterial sword and sorcery sequence entitled *Return to Nevèrÿon*—which itself contains a full-length Balzacian novel (1983's *Neveryóna*) and a disorientingly experimental third volume (1985's *Flight from Nevèrÿon*) incorporating reportage from the New York City of the early AIDS epidemic; urban sociology (1999's *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue*); reams of dazzlingly erudite criticism (on Richard Wagner, Ursula K. Le Guin, Hart Crane, Lord Byron, Isaac Asimov, Antonin Artaud, and many others) and literary theory, including a 1978 book-length line-by-line analysis (entitled *The American Shore*) of a short story by his friend the SF-writer Thomas Disch—a maniac endeavor evidently modeled on Roland Barthes's *S/Z* and rivaling it in the achieved ambition to make a sustained close reading stand in for a revelation of a whole generic logic. And pornography. Delany's career is marked throughout by explicit—and by most standards deeply gross and disturbing, if also often oddly upbeat and improbably tender—erotic fiction: most but not all of it gay, some so focused on violence or childhood sexuality that it languished for years in unpublishability (1995's *Hogg*) or faced legal challenges (*The Tides of Lust*, from 1973), often fascinated by father-son incest (2012's *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders*), most of its set-pieces awash in racial epithets and knee-deep in various excreta. In the words of critic Darieck Scott (discussing *The Mad Man*, from 1994), Delany's porn explores "degradation, racial power dynamics, political analysis, and sexual pleasure" through scenes "soaked and stained by those hallmarks of the abject, urine and feces."[25] Talk about *troublant*: if any aesthetic artifact could claim the status of the inextinguishably outrageous—the transcendentally queer—Delany's sex writing would qualify. And yet the connotations that term has acquired miss most of the textures we've just surveyed.

If this is right, one would need to turn not to the literary or to queerness to elaborate the meanings of Delany's texts, but to the specifics of genre and style and the particulars of sexual act and institution. If, for example, the scene in the St. Marks is not about identity (or "the literary," or queerness), what is it about? One way to approach it is via two recent considerations of Delany's work by Tavia Nyong'o and Love, each routed through a specific act of generic noticing (and each, as it happens, part of an attempt to renarrate the origins of queer theory). Nyong'o's *Afro-Fabulations*, remarking how crucial *The Motion of Light in Water* has been to critics of Black memoir, claims Delany's text as an underacknowledged origin point—"a dark precursor"—for the queer theory with whose emergence it coincided.[26] In Nyong'o's re-plotting, Delany's text emblematizes the missed opportunity to understand queer

studies as intersectional at its origins. Meanwhile, in her recent *Underdogs*, Love turns to Delany's moment in the baths to reveal what she argues is contemporary queer theory's disavowed reliance on the protocols of midcentury observational sociology. For Love, the general de-emphasis on the concretely visual and tangible elements of Delany's text (such as that performed in "The Evidence of Experience") slights his commitments to empiricism and his "contributions as a social historian."[27]

As these summaries show, both critics—perhaps because of their location in literary and cultural studies—are working with a generically precise sense of Delany's status as a writer. Rather than a synecdoche for "the literary," Delany in these accounts is a specific kind of literature-maker. For Nyong'o, it matters that Delany is a master of SF and fantasy, a worker in the tradition of "metaphysical thought experiment."[28] Delany's fiction, in this reading, tests sexual and racial norms with a generically inflected effort to imagine things radically otherwise: Delany's traffic with the fantastic makes him a key practitioner of the "afro-fabulation" that is the topic of Nyong'o's book. Love's alignment of Delany's text with empiricism, meanwhile, lays the emphasis in precisely the opposite place. But it too rests on an engagement with Delany's writing, in this case his criticism. Love cites Delany's influential argument that while so-called literary fiction orients readers to the "priority of the subject," encouraging us to interpret the narrative universe in terms of mind or psychology, SF and fantasy (along with many "paraliterary" genres) work according to an "object priority" that points readers not to psychology but to "the socially contoured organization of people's psyches."[29] To cite one of Delany's famous examples of this distinction: the sentence "Her world exploded," encountered in a piece of mundane fiction, directs readers to a scene of emotional turmoil; read according to the protocols of SF, it prompts us to ask after the social, economic, and technological conditions of a universe where planets may belong to individual women and can be destroyed in a moment's conflagration. Not the least interesting feature of this example is its upending of the usual association of realism with referential literalness: here, it is the realist text that tends to metaphor, the speculative one that boasts what Delany calls (in a moment cited by Love) "a very literal quality," something "quite the opposite of metaphor."[30]

Why do both Nyong'o's and Love's accounts seem right? How is it that the scene at the St. Mark's Baths can be as plausibly adduced for its fantastic as its documentary qualities? One answer is that Delany's epiphany in the baths is about the utterly mundane nature of the marvelous when it comes to the experience of sociality, the magical real that subtends the daily experience of imagining the substance and

extensivity of groups. What Scott (following Swann) acutely identifies as the "fantastic" multiplication animating the scene is, it should be clear, not about "recognizing" gayness. *The Motion of Light in Water* has by this point shown the young Delany engaged in any number of avidly pursued and mostly gay sexual adventures, including regular midnight cruising in the trucks parked along the West Side Highway; his proclivities are not in need of being recognized. Nor, by just this token, is this scene about querying that identity: happy as he is to concede its philosophical groundlessness, his sense of being homosexual is working well enough to bring him somewhere he wants to be. The scene is rather about the feeling of a collective's sociological density. The drama that Delany's own presentation is most at pains to highlight is the vertiginous apprehension of a specific practice's extensibility in social space. In attempting to make sense of the heart-stopping quality of the scene, Delany writes of the "fifties model of homosexuality" that had hitherto governed his sense of his erotic life. In that model, he writes, "homosexuality was a solitary perversion. Before and above all, it isolated you." He continues:

> Whether male, female, working or middle class, the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies. That I'd felt it and was frightened by it means that others had felt it too. The myth said we, as isolated perverts, were only beings of desire, manifestations of the subject . . . But what *this* experience said was that there was a population—not of individual homosexuals . . . not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex. (*MW* 292–93)

This is a movement from one way of conceptualizing male-male eroticism to another, and its main drama consists in seeing a numerical sequence effect a linguistic and cognitive transformation: from the solitary "homosexual" to a fantasized multitude of "gay men." In accounting for the moment's marvelous mundanity, it helps to notice the link between its language and that of Delany's literary theory. In his criticism, Delany's passionate partisanship on behalf of the non-"mundane" genres can sometimes make his distinction between these types of fiction look like an absolute, unbridgeable gulf—as if the "subject priority" of literary fiction can never meet the "object priority" of the paraliterary genres. It is noteworthy, then, that in the scene from his memoir Delany stages just such a trajectory from the "manifestations of the subject" (the individual homosexual) to those of the object (not only the "population" of gay men, but the "galleries of institutions, good and bad" that have grown up around them). That this passage narrates the distance between the subjective and objective orientations *as a movement* suggests that these

literary genres may be related to each other less as intractable opposites than as distinct vantage points on similar material.

This is the perspective argued energetically by Seo-Young Chu in her recent book on SF's representational protocols. Chu puts her argument about the relations between the realist and nonrealist modes this way: "All representation is to some degree science-fictional because all reality is to some degree cognitively estranging. What most people call 'realism' . . . is actually a 'weak' or low-intensity variety of science fiction, one that requires relatively little energy to accomplish its representational task insofar as its referents (e.g., softballs) are readily susceptible to representation. Conversely, what most people call 'science fiction' is actually a high intensity variety of realism, one that requires astronomical levels of energy to accomplish its representational task insofar as its referents (e.g., cyberspace) elaborately defy straightforward representation."[31]

The position provides a useful heuristic in its very extremity. Whether or not we follow Chu all the way in her nomenclatural argument, her account allows us to claim Delany's revelation at the St. Marks as "science fictional" in the strict sense offered here: a moment where "astronomical levels of energy" are brought to the task of capturing a referent that "def[ies] straightforward representation." That the referent in question is not intergalactic travel or the terraforming of Mars but the "direct sense of political power" that comes from the apprehension of a new social polity allows us to postulate that all social understanding—all group consciousness and consciousness of groups—is science fictional in this sense of straining referential protocols. "The group as such is necessarily an imaginary entity," writes Fredric Jameson. "No individual mind is able to intuit it concretely. The group must be abstracted, or fantasized, on the basis of discrete individual contacts and experiences."[32] Jameson's claim indicates one way literary analysis can serve a more than ancillary role in an exploration of collectivity: if all group identity is imaginary in this way, the protocols of imaginative fiction may have something specific to tell us about it. And Chu's work suggests this may be especially true not only of the flagrantly imaginary referential objects of speculative fiction but also of those moments where realist genres work mimesis at the peculiarly "high intensity" demanded by the representation of social abstractions.

Once we recognize the scene at the St. Marks as a meditation on the phenomenology of group imagination—a consideration of the way sensory data can seem to disclose social fact—we see its echoes everywhere in Delany's work. The attempt to grasp the contours of social abstractions through numericalized extrapolation is perhaps his most durable obsession. Across his work, "over any statistical array" is one of

his most consistently employed phrases—and it heralds not the citation of sociological studies but a discussion of some amateur endeavor of cognitive mapping.[33] Delany and his characters are forever conducting informal censuses and casual crowd-counts. Sometimes this is literally the case, as when, discussing the sexist assumptions built into everyday perception in a 1974 piece of SF criticism, Delany recommends that any reader who wishes to test how experience inflects the flat statistical fact that "women are shorter than men" get out on the street and observe heterosexual couples, contrasting first the heights of women to the men they're walking with, then measuring a man from one couple against a woman from another. "I did this on a London street corner for two hours a few weeks back," Delany tells us, providing figures on how drastically the degree of height difference varied in the two series.[34] In *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue*, he makes "an informal tabulation of six random commercial porn films . . . and six random legit movies," in an effort to see which genre represents women more regularly in professional roles.[35]

Delany's "findings" are laughably easy to disqualify, so much so that such exercises seem best understood as sympathetic parodies of the positivist confidence they seem to embody. But the sympathy remains central: Delany is speaking to the attempt to bridge what is sensorily at hand with what we abstractly may be said to know. Sometimes he counts in order to gauge the prevalence of a political feeling in the face of official disavowal, as when he recalls attending a demonstration during the Cuban missile crisis "at which a minimum of five thousand people—and quite possibly ten—packed U.N. Plaza," only to return home to a TV news program showing a "group of eight or nine picketers."[36] His characters count too—as when, in an instalment of his fantasy series, the formerly enslaved freedom-fighter Gorgik addresses his followers in an underground hideout, inferring their movement's society-wide strength by their present quantity. "It reassures me that . . . I can gather you together so that my voice reaches all of you at once," Gorgik begins, before acknowledging that "soon, our growing numbers may abolish that informality . . . The difference between the number of you here yesterday and the number of you here today tells me of the growing power that informs our cause."[37] Constantly in Delany's fiction, characters ponder the difficulty of perceiving number in what amounts to a background hum of social quantification. "The surge of people moved somewhere to the right," the narrator and intergalactic diplomat Marq Dyeth observes at one point in *Stars in My Pocket*. "Five hundred? Five thousand? When you are simply unused to crowds, it's difficult to evaluate their number."[38]

These scenes, set everywhere from a bunker in Nevèrÿon to the streets of Midtown East, reveal a phenomenological desire running through

Delany's work: the wish to suture sensory perception to the abstractions of number and population, a desire to *feel* the social. If on occasion the desire spins out to the broadest existential questions—"What is the exact human population of the universe?" one character wonders, taking a swing at the big one—more frequently, what is being gauged is the social footprint of a specific political or cultural grouping.[39] Pertinently for my purposes here, the most frequent counting in Delany concerns the subsets of the social world in which he is most immersed: the world of SF and the world of men who have sex with men. The number of occasions on which Delany compares the print-runs of SF to those of literary fiction and speculates therefrom about the relative cultural pervasiveness of either form, or marvels at how many of his fellow writers have crammed into a tiny space for a workshop, or tries to gauge the strength of a writer's reputation by counting how many fans have shown up to see her at an SF convention, are, well—too many to count.[40] In one moment that can stand for many, he illustrates the esteem in which Thomas Disch was held by his readers by describing the intense applause that greeted Delany when he mentioned his friend's name at an SF convention: "During the seconds of applause the extent of their appreciation of Disch ceased to be a fact known in isolation by a number of individuals and became in their minds a *social* fact. The intensity of that transition was signed by the volume and intensity of the applause."[41] In scenographic terms, the moment is virtually identical to the one at the St. Marks—only instead of the social extensivity of gay sex, this scene makes sensorily available the fact of an author's renown, as private readers palpably become a reading public.

Not that Delany is hesitant to document numerically the social extensivity of gay sex. As even a casual reader of his nonfiction will know, this is probably the data he most assiduously collects: men cruised, cocks sucked, loads swallowed (his preferred sexual sequence). In many of his books of the 1980s and 1990s, such calculations are undertaken as part of an effort to wrap his head around the devastation of AIDS, to canvas the likelihood of infection, and to compare the evidence of his experience to the official story. As representative of many such moments of back-of-the-envelope math, we might take the scene from the New York section of *Flight from Nevèrÿon* where Delany speaks to a friend who expresses doubts about the media reports that many gay men in the city have up to 300 sexual contacts a year. Running through a hypothetical week in which his friend might go to a Times Square porn theater on Tuesday and drop into a cruisy subway john on Friday—both locations where one might "easily have three contacts involving semen"—Delany multiplies by fifty-two and confronts his friend with his 312 annual contacts: "You know

as well as I do, you can keep up an eight-hour-a-day job, an active social life, have your three hundred contacts, and not even be late for dinner. Thousands of men in this city live that way."[42] The proximate cause of this conversation may be a desire to gauge the riskiness of different sex practices (and such calculations here lead Delany to the controversial opinion that oral sex is not a major vector of HIV transmission),[43] but in its consonance with the other numerically inflected moments we have surveyed it participates in his general project of cognitively substantializing the experience of specific groups. "To be a minority," writes Joan Lubin in a discussion of quantification's relation to the history of sexuality, "is to articulate a relationship to population-scale social description. Minority is in this way an inherently quantitative construct."[44] For Lubin, the affective and cultural affordances of quantification are multiple, among them the ability to "animate a collective vitality."[45] Her account helps us see that Delany's numbers, far from leeching group experience of its dynamism, are a route to intensifying and concretizing that experience, of rendering palpable its occupation of social space.

The unavoidably specific nature of Delany's preferred sites of numerical seeing is just their interest for considering the sometimes grubby and dank locatedness of "the literary" and of "queerness" alike: the carpeted hotel convention rooms where SF fans gather, like the parks and porn theaters where Delany and his characters meet sex partners, are the concrete spaces through which sexuality and literature are conjugated as lived practices. Delany's insistence on that concretization is constant, part of what Teagan Bradway has recognized as his preoccupation with "dates, locations, and context."[46] The math Delany runs in the conversation about sexual contacts is meant to demonstrate the social pervasiveness of a certain style of gay promiscuity, but it also wants to capture the difficulty of making that lifeworld intelligible to those outside it. "The fact is," Delany concludes that peroration, "the straight people who're dealing with AIDS . . . simply have no notion of the *amount* of sexual activity that's available to a gay male in this city!"[47] Delany's work strikes this note with remarkable consistency: time and again, at sometimes exhausting length, he lays out the social and material facts that make a specific cultural game well-nigh unintelligible from without—and again, gay sex and SF are the games whose conditions he most frequently finds himself clarifying.[48] "Your own 'experience' is still your basic model, and you are trying to read what I say against a model that's wrong from the start," he writes to his friend James Bravard in 1984.[49] Bravard is straight, and a few paragraphs earlier Delany has insisted (to what one imagines is Bravard's skepticism), that fellating "50 men to completion in one afternoon [is] difficult, yes, but not unthinkable."[50] One might

assume in this context that the faulty "model" Delany is referring to is his correspondent's vision of sexual normality, but in fact with those words Delany is trying to make Bravard, who is compiling a bibliography of the writer's work, understand the conventions governing SF reprinting under 1970s copyright law.

The twin obsessions of gay sex and science fiction are so intensely elaborated, contextualized, and explained in Delany's work that they can come to seem images of one another: passionate games, passionately played in social space. Over and over, Delany buttonholes readers and interviewers with the facts he understands as necessary to comprehend a group's situation: so he offers CDC statistics and the dates of specific medical breakthroughs to convey what he calls "the feel of the gay community" in the early 1980s, or he insists on clarifying the publication policy of a British SF magazine with which his work has been mistakenly associated, explaining that his vehemence reflects "simply love and respect for the history of my genre, science fiction."[51] In both cases Delany's insistence embodies an ethos of extreme answerability, of responsiveness to the mundane social referents of his language.

In this, as in his refusal to suggest that these commitments will be universally celebrated, his work departs sharply from some of the suppositions undergirding much work in sexuality and literary studies in the long 1993. An uncanny ability to keep hold of one's passions while recognizing the parallel investments of others characterizes Delany's literary criticism as it does his writing on sex. He has been eager, for example, to correct the impression that his advocacy for the paraliterary genres means he finds them superior to mundane fiction. "I've argued that SF is of *equal discursive interest* with the literary genres, and that it is potentially of equal *aesthetic* interest," he clarifies in the same 1984 letter to Bravard. "But to argue that it was 'superior' in any way seems both dumb and quixotic."[52] Elsewhere Delany easily concedes that the notion that classical civilization represented the pinnacle of aesthetic endeavor—a notion with which he vehemently disagrees—is nonetheless "a venerable tradition and it has organized much beauty."[53] Such distinctions would of course be impossible in any conversation about "the literary" as such. And this aesthetic pluralism recalls nothing so much as Delany's extreme ecumenicism in matters sexual and behavioral, as when in *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue* he repeatedly engages in friendly conversation with men struggling with what appears to be psychosis. "I've said that odd behavior intrigues me," he affably writes at one point, explaining his striking up a chat with a young white man at a porn theater whom he has watched repeatedly strip naked, stand on his theater seat, crawl along the floor, and re-dress himself—in the grips, Delany learns, of a

conviction that he requires the repeated "shock" of exposing his buttocks to the world to keep himself from "drifting away."[54] This young man's trip is emphatically not Delany's, but he receives Delany's patient, interested attention regardless (and not, one notes, on condition that his behavior can be recuperated as "queer"). The ability to be a partisan of one's own preferences without hierarchizing the evaluative field is one of the most characteristic, and disconcerting, features of Delany's writing. His is a fundamentally worldly approach to cultural analysis. It recognizes the specificity of language games and of sexual practices, and indulges a wide array of them, but claims transcendentally critical status for none. It cultivates and demands a rich empirical curiosity about the science-fictional object that is social life. And it acknowledges the degree of fantasy built into the most ordinary experiences of collective existence yet refuses the making-metaphysical of any specific subset of it.

The "queer" in queer studies—in part because of its vernacular origins—was meant to be worldly in just this sense, to allow academics to connect their work to the world beyond. But the metaphysicalization of academic queerness frequently has the opposite effect of erecting an unmarked barrier between our language and that of the wider world. In 1993, Sedgwick voiced the still widely bruited idea that the epithet itself could never be "detached from the childhood scene of shame"—in fact "it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy."[55] But even if this was true of the slur "queer" in 1993 (and the claim seems debatable), that energy supply has clearly run low today, when students are no more likely to bat an eye at the word's presence on my syllabi than they are to register the learning goals ("Understand the nature of human languages and their speakers"; "Engage critically in the process of creative expression") my university recommends I put there.[56] These goals—worthy if colorlessly expressed—might be usefully applied to a queer studies that sometimes speaks as if its titular adjective were a transcendental signifier of permanent scandal, progressive politics, and positive feeling. Queer studies of course knows of the overlapping functions of "queer" in the extra-academic world—as a loose but referentially useful name for the aggregate of gender and sexual nonconformists, as a way to designate countercultural credibility (or the aspiration to it), or to signal distance from the presumptive whiteness or gender normativity of "gay and lesbian" communities, and much else. Less often discussed is the relation these various uses bear to those in the academy, where the term has for almost thirty years also been an evaluative one, invested with the world-altering claims that once upon a time were made on behalf of the literary. Can the sociology of that meaning of queer—its association with the school and with access to it,

and so with a particular class training—become a conscious part of our sense of the term? Can we keep the passage of queerness through the academy in view as a discussable fact about it?[57]

The failure to do so threatens to make "queer" a classic exhibit of what John Guillory has called "our failure to understand the place from which we speak, as though the school were the world." Guillory argues that this failure is what allows literary academics to indulge the fantasy that their work gives them access to an "Archimedean lever," a tool to move the world without standing in it.[58] A science fictional notion if ever there was one—but one, Delany might help us see, articulated by people with specific and nameable terrestrial coordinates. Claiming that queerness and the literary have been invested with such fantasies of otherworldly force is not to diminish the power or interest of the fantasies: sexuality and imaginative literature are in some basic definitional sense *made of* idealizations, comprised of overcathexes. But such dreams are also things of this world.

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NOTES

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1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 9 (hereafter cited as *T*).

2 Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the* Novel," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 13.

3 For Sedgwick's skeptical comments on the utopian potentials of a deconstructive approach to binary thinking, see *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1990), 10.

4 Heather Love, "In Actual Fact: Realism and Sexuality," in *Realism and the Novel: A Literary History*, ed. Paul Stasi (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, forthcoming).

5 See Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2017) (hereafter cited as *DA*); Love, *Underdogs: Social Deviance and Queer Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2021); and Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2020), 26, 28.

6 Andrea Long Chu and Emmett Harsin Drager, "After Trans Studies," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (2019): 105, 113.

7 My phrasing echoes Aaron Hanlon's in a recent essay advising literary scholars to embrace our participation in knowledge-production if we want "to be taken seriously in the wider world." Hanlon urges us to acknowledge that interpretation is only one facet of the discipline's work, which includes "explanation" of where texts fit in traditions of culture. This approach is resonant with Delany's habit, discussed below, of showering readers and correspondents with contextual detail that will help explain the texts (and

sex cultures) that concern him. See Aaron R. Hanlon, "The Ends of Literary Studies," in *The Ends of Knowledge: Outcomes and Endpoints Across the Arts and Sciences*, ed. Seth Rudy and Rachael Scarborough King (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 45.

8 Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992), 19 (hereafter cited as *BM*).

9 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), 26 (hereafter cited as *E*).

10 Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2017), 171.

11 Sedgwick used this phrase to describe the writing of *Between Men* in her 1992 preface to the book's second edition (vii). The 2007 preface to *Epistemology* tells readers that she found the experiment of writing that book without disclosing her own sexual orientation "educative and oddly funny" and hoped that it might "make a few heads explode"—a fantasy she describes as representing the very limit of "pedagogical desire" (xviii).

12 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 100.

13 In another scenario, equally complex, bad politics in less gifted hands lead to aesthetic pleasure through the critic's unravelling of the weave of ideology and form. Sedgwick's bravura off-the-cuff analysis in *Between Men*'s introduction of the racial and sexual imaginaries of *Gone with the Wind* is for my money still among the best three-page defense of the political insight and readerly pleasure to be gained from close textual attention. See *Between Men* 8–11.

14 The US Department of Health and Human Services study Sedgwick footnotes refers unsurprisingly to "Gay Male and Lesbian Youth Suicide" (1).

15 The study Sedgwick cites no doubt included many youth who today would be considered trans. Had trans-specific studies been available to her, Sedgwick could have offered a still more numerically compelling motive for this area of study. Here too, though, the power of the exercise would depend utterly on our ability to read clearly the constituted social groups referred to by the term. The earliest study of transgender suicidality I have been able to locate postdates Sedgwick's essay by almost a decade. See Robin M. Mathy, "Transgender Identity and Suicidality in a Nonclinical Sample: Sexual Orientation, Psychiatric History, and Compulsive Behaviors," *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2002): 47–65.

16 Kelly Roberts, "Queer Theory's Grammar and the Matter of Form," unpublished seminar paper, December 2018.

17 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 26.

18 For a distilled presentation of how such intensities were canalized by what she calls "the emotion of queer," see Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), 160–65.

19 Despite its large influence in literary studies, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" does not model what a reparative reading of a text might look like, a paradox I unfold in "A Few Lies: Queer Theory and Our Method Melodramas," *ELH* 87, no. 2 (2020): 349–74. Amanda Anderson, noting Sedgwick's focus on affect and mood, has argued that in the essay "pathos is favored over ethos"—a move, Anderson notes, that obscures the ground for moral and political judgment. See Anderson, *Psyche and Ethos: Moral Life After Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018), 93.

20 Not all queer-theoretical endeavors have been so oriented. Especially prominent departures from these entailments occur in the work of Leo Bersani (whose "Is the Rectum a Grave?" claimed sexuality as "anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving") and Lee Edelman (whose *No Future* famously inveighed against "reproductive futurism"). If

these writers' followers have sometimes promoted their stance into an equally metaphysical inversion of the weightless positivity I am critiquing here, Edelman and Bersani's own key terms and neologistic coinages (Edelman's "*sinthom*osexual," Bersani's "homos") announce a tie to social reality even as they work a theoretical deformation on it. This determined strain of social indexicality is one reason this theoretical tendency is ill-captured by the moniker "anti-social": notwithstanding its devotion to theoretical abstraction and affective negativity, this school has always remained semantically tied to a worldly reference it also tirelessly troubles. See Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 215; idem, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1995; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2004, 33ff.

21 Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village* (1988; Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004), 292 (hereafter cited as *MW*).

22 Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 366 (hereafter cited as EE).

23 Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water*, 232.

24 The implicit but strict requirement that queerness be admirable was clear in the online kerfuffle around the so-called 2015 "queer drones" article in the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. In fact the phrase appears nowhere in the article, which argues not that drones "are" queer but that their remote piloting undoes the phenomenology of embodied masculine agency presumed to orient killing in war. The conceptual claim here, in other words, was the kind that has routinely allowed any number of less politically volatile objects and practices to be labelled "queer." But the author had missed the memo specifying that queerness needed to be *good*. In that sense, the furor sparked by the grotesque claim that "killing with drones" could become a "productive site for queer politics" helpfully clarified that the socially referential meaning of queer remains central even in the academy, however disavowed. The most depressing aspect of this spectacle derived less from the sense that someone was hijacking queerness for nefarious purposes than from the feeling that a nonproblem had been created by the idiolect of the academy: why were we talking about this? See Cara Daggett, "Drone Disorientations: How 'Unmanned' Weapons Queer the Experience of Killing in War," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 3 (2015): 361–79.

25 Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2010), 207, 206.

26 Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2019), 158.

27 Love, *Underdogs: Social Deviance and Queer Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2021), 121.

28 Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 165.

29 Delany, "The Semiology of Silence: The *Science Fiction Studies* Interview," in *Silent Interviews*, 31, 47.

30 Delany, "The Second *Science Fiction Studies* Interview: *Trouble on Triton* and Other Matters," in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Wesleyan, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1999), 317; quoted in Love, *Underdogs*, 121.

31 Seo-Young Chu, *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sheep? A Science Fictional Theory of Representation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010), 7.

32 Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2019), 385–86.

33 For a sampling, see "Sword & Sorcery, S/M, and the Economics of Inadequation: The *Camera Obscura* Interview," in *Silent Interviews*, 137 (where Delany claims that "over any statistical range," cross-class relations become subversive); "To Read *The Dispossessed*," in *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan

Univ. Press, 2009), 149 (where Delany asks how, since a commitment to equality commits us to a notion of the interchangeability of persons, we are to make laws that, "over any statistical array," will not curtail individuality); or "Reading and the Written Interview," in *Silent Interviews, On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics—A Collection of Written Interviews* (Wesleyan, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 2012), 6 (where he outlines the paradox that only a submission to a rigorous course of reading issues in readerly liberation, because "over a statistical range," sophisticated readers have more freedom than beginners).

34 "Taken as couples, it would appear that in 94 percent, men are taller than women. Taken by cross-couples, the figure goes down to 72 percent." The discrepancy, Delany hypothesizes somewhat wildly, "is more likely governed by the sad fact that, in Western society, tall women and short men often try to avoid being seen in public, especially with the opposite sex." See Delany, "Shadows," in *Longer Views: Extended Essays* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1996), 299.

35 Delany, *Times Square Red/Times Square Blue* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1999), 79.

36 Delany, *Silent Interviews*, 147.

37 Delany, *Neveryóna* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1983), 70.

38 Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (Middletown, CT : Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1984), 262.

39 Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, 68.

40 But see for starters a tribute to Judith Merril in which Delany recalls an SF workshop where he was "confronted by more and more of my fellow SF practitioners than I'd realized could occupy a single room." See Delany, "A Tribute to Judith Merril," in *Shorter Views*, 374.

41 "Russ," in Delany, *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 2012), 85.

42 Delany, *Flight from Nevèrÿon* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1994), 215.

43 Delany would include a *Lancet* study on oral HIV-transmission rates in 1994's *The Mad Man*. As Steven Ruszczycky observes, that novel's interest in making safe-sex proposals occasioned confusion as to book's genre. Was it "pornotopic fantasy," as Delany insisted, or something closer to realism, as many early reviewers thought? See Steven Ruszczycky, *Vulgar Genres: Gay Pornographic Writing and Contemporary Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2022), 97–8.

44 Joan Lubin, "Quantifying Sex," in *The Cambridge History of Queer American Literature*, ed. Benjamin Kahan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2024), 789. Lubin discusses Delany as one among many twentieth-century novelists fascinated by quantifying approaches to sexual minority.

45 Lubin, "Queer Formula," *Post45*, issue 5 (January 2021). https://post45.org/2021/01/lubin-queer-formula/.

46 Teagan Bradway, *Queer Experimental Literature: the Affective Politics of Bad Reading* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 63. Bradway focuses on how AIDS shapes Delany's understanding of audience in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" and *The Mad Man*, arguing that the epidemic led Delany to a new emphasis on "reading, reference, and truth" (57). Bradway's analysis has deepened my sense of this stretch of Delany's career; I'd supplement it only by noting that Delany's insistence on the "dates, locations, and context" of AIDS continues his decades-long emphasis on the mechanics of SF publication and fandom. For a related discussion of *The Mad Man*'s documentary impulse, see Kelly Roberts, "Generic Queer: Literary History After Visibility, 1980–2020," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers Univ., 2023.

47 Delany, *Flight From Nevèrÿon*, 215.

48 On Delany's preoccupation with "the inability of the majority population to imagine, in even the most general way, the experiences of a minority population," see Matthew Cheney, *Modernist Crisis and the Pedagogy of Form: Woolf, Delany, and Coetzee at the Limits of Fiction* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 89ff.
49 Delany, *1984: Selected Letters* (Rutherford, NJ: Voyant, 2000), 20.
50 Delany, *Selected Letters*, 19.
51 Delany, *Flight From Nevèrÿon*, 335; Delany, *Silent Interviews*, 68.
52 Delany, *Selected Letters*, 20.
53 Delany, "The Politics of Paraliterary Criticism," in *Shorter Views*, 269.
54 Delany, *Times Square Red*, 61.
55 Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity," 4.
56 See Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences, "Core Learning Goals," https://sasoue.rutgers.edu/core/core-learning-goals.
57 For a rare instance of academic writing that acknowledges the social locatedness of "queer," see the dialogue among Owen Daniel-McCarter, Erica R. Meiners, and R. Noll, Chicago-based scholar-activists working on transformative justice in and around prisons. All three respond to a question about their "queer work" by clarifying that the term is not typically used by the people they work with. See Owen Daniel-McCarter, Erica R. Meiners, and R. Noll, "Queer Disavowal: 'Controversial Crimes' and Building Abolition," in *The War on Sex*, ed. David M. Halperin and Trevor Hoppe (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2017), 177–78.
58 John Guillory, *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2022), 79, 46.