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Queer Experimental Literature

The Affective Politics of Bad Reading

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PREFACE

A predominant question for queer literary criticism has been: How can we “queer” a text by reading it aslant of its manifest content? *Queer Experimental Literature* asks instead: How do the affective relations of a text “queer” its readers and the social relations of reading itself? In short, this book argues that literature does not await a *critical* reading to activate its queerness. Rather, I trace a genealogy of writers that turn to experimental aesthetics to queer the affective relations among readers, texts, and their publics. I call these affective relations experiments in *bad reading* because they are infused with affects that do not conform to the protocols of critical reading and other hegemonic, institutionally sanctioned, and socially approved modes of “good reading.” Indeed, these texts elicit masturbatory fantasy, perverse titillation, exuberant sentimentality, and other affects that have failed to signify as “critical” within the domains of literary and cultural theory. They appear naïve, solipsistic, and politically retrograde, often leading critics to apologize for or bracket the text’s investment in affect. Yet it is precisely through its solicitations of bad reading, I contend, that queer experimental literature contests and redraws the social relations that underpin the heteronormative public sphere. Rather than oppose aesthetics to politics, or affect to the social, then, *Queer Experimental Literature* reveals their complex imbrication within the affective politics of bad reading.

Queerness has often been conceived as a force of subversion—a performative demystification of apparently natural norms, an anti-social drive toward incoherence, or a shattering of the illusory structures of subjectivity and meaning.¹ While I do not dispute the value of queer negativity, its

exclusive claim to criticality has tended to eclipse other forces of queerness and other modes of queer critique. When queerness presents itself in an affirmative mode and draws on corollary affective idioms—joy, happiness, love, ecstasy, optimism, or sweetness—it is often collapsed into the politics of “homonormativity.”² It is perceived as non-oppositional, as either a symptom or an enabler of neoliberalism’s narrowing the zones of political life to the realm of consumption.³ It will not simply be enough to show that queer deployments of positive affect exist or that they might have oppositional force, if they are only to be measured in terms of subversion. We must go further and meet them on their own ground. To glimpse the affective politics of queer experimental literature, we require a conception of *queerness as a creative experiment in relationality*. Following critics such as José Esteban Muñoz and Elizabeth Freeman, I understand the relations of queerness as unfurling into futurity; they are unfinished, open ended, and rife with untapped potential for becoming.⁴ At the same time, queer relationality is a historically contingent social form, inextricably bound up, as Michel Foucault teaches us, with the institutions and relations of power.⁵ Yet an attention to the creativity of queerness makes it possible to see how queer aesthetic objects are, through their own terms and forces, reconfiguring relational potentialities in excess of the existing codifications of sexuality as identity.⁶

Situated against contestations over queer sexuality in the postwar period, queerness often appears as a figural crisis in relation. This is due to the discursive, representational, and ideological pressure to conceive and narrate queerness as an individual rather than a collective body, as a body politic. All of the writers in *Queer Experimental Literature* contest this reduction of queer relationality, and they utilize the affective relations of reading to experiment with and provoke collective forms of queer belonging. Thus, the crisis in queer relationality should not solely be understood as an example of queer “trouble” or intrinsic destabilization; it is also, as the etymology of crisis implies, a turning point, a moment of becoming pregnant with potentiality. The affective relations fostered through queer experimental literature must therefore be understood as *incipiently social*—pitched between the “merely” affective and the “properly” political. This is due to the representational prohibitions that prevent the figuration of queerness as collectivity, forcing a displacement of this figuration into the ineffable idioms of affect. The incipience of these social imaginings is not “utopian” in any traditional sense, despite their investment in the horizons of queer potentiality that Muñoz has taught us to

see. The relations that they configure have been prohibited, destroyed, or gentrified, and thus, these texts meditate on the paradoxical distance between their viscerally immediate intimations of queer relationality and the inability for these relations to become collectively materialized in the text's temporality of reception. Their emphasis falls less on a horizon of futurity, then, and more on experimentations with affective relations in the present, in advance of any idiom that could conceive of them as socially meaningful. The relations of queer experimental literature are incipiently social precisely because they are emergent, or becoming-fomented, in the event of reading.

Clearly, "reading" in this book signifies far more than the subject's interpretive act of decoding. Reading, for my purposes, is not a phenomenology of the reader's consciousness as it processes meaning; it does not refer to a subject position or an existing collective that will be named and studied for their reception practices. Indeed, I tend to stress "reading" rather than "the reader" to preserve the present participle of the affective relation to literature. Reading is virtual—an encounter composed through a text that is not entirely under its own control and is not reducible to a single affective referent. By thinking of affect as a relation unfurled by aesthetic objects—a relation that is as much a part of the object as its content and form—we can sidestep a perennial problem in the convergence of affect theory and literary criticism. At one end, critics think of affect as a purely visceral and unarticulated wave of sensation, which tends to diminish the ability to read qualitatively specific configurations of affect composed within and through a text.⁷ In this framework, affective qualities are equivalent to subjective capture—they are codified, personalized, and lacking in potential for becoming. At the other end, critics think of affect as a subjective property the reader or critic brings to the text; they may debate which affective orientation is most appropriate—suspicion or empathy, for example—but the text's own affective coordination is diminished or occluded.⁸ In both cases, the affective relation—the qualitatively inflected scene composed by the text and actualized in the event of reading—is overlooked as its own space of potentiality. More recent scholarship on affect and aesthetics has begun to address both the relational dimension of the aesthetic and the possibility of "reading" affect as a form without reference to subjective reception.⁹ *Queer Experimental Literature* shares both of these goals. Yet the stakes that it proposes for this theoretical and methodological approach to affect center specifically on understanding the affective politics of queer aesthetics, the way that

aesthetic objects configure affective relations within and against the existing relations of power that fuse scenes of reading into the production of heteronormative subjects and collectives.

In making this argument, my goal is to forestall the reduction of “queer reading” to paranoid reading or reparative reading, the two modes famously identified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁰ *Queer Experimental Literature* reveals the limitation of heuristically mapping the many affects of queer reading into this narrow dichotomy. The dichotomy tends to miss weak, minor, or simply illegible affective relations that fall to the side of either of these codified orientations. But more importantly, the dichotomy prioritizes the critic as the agent of queer reading, as the locus of both affect and critique. Instead, I trace how queer experimental literature solicits its own singular relations for affective reading, which do not presume the critical reader (or the literary critic) as the primary hero in the dramatic scene of reading. While other literary traditions may also participate in this project, queer experimental literature makes its affective agencies visible by drawing attention to literary form’s capacity to work on and through the bodies of readers, immanently restructuring our felt relations to the aesthetic object.

Thus, it is important to resist a methodology for reading queer experimental literature that dictates, in advance, the embodied orientation that readers must bring to these texts, whether distance or closeness, empathetic care or paranoid suspicion. As Barbara Johnson observes, “[T]he question is not whether to be or not to be philological but how to read in such a way as to break through preconceived notions of meaning. . . . To know whether this requires more closeness or more distance, a leap or a crawl, may very well *itself* be part of the challenge.”¹¹ Similarly, the question is not whether to be or not to be affective in our reading but how to read in such a way as to break through entrained and hegemonic affective relations of reading. Note that, in Johnson’s description, the reader becomes an immanently embodied figure—leaping over and crawling through the surface of the text, mindful that the necessary posture cannot be known in advance. *Queer Experimental Literature* follows Johnson’s cue, and it begins with the challenge that the affects for queer reading cannot be determined transcendently above or before the text. In these pages, reading becomes less an *ethical choice* made by a critic than a *social encounter* engendered by the text. We may not know how much closeness or distance is required, whether to leap or crawl, to fantasize or faint, but the optic of bad reading makes the text’s provocation of these postures

both thinkable and meaningful as strategies for contesting the historical conflicts over and representational prohibitions on queer relationality that pre-condition the reception of its queer aesthetics.

The primary historical and representational conflict that cuts across *Queer Experimental Literature* might be called “postmodernity,” but as each chapter shows, this context requires more specificity to understand how it inflects the local circumstances of each author and how it intersects with emergent forms of institutionalized hetero- and homonormativity throughout the period. At the outset, however, it is important to stress that “queer experimental literature” is not reducible to postmodern fiction, although it converges with it in several formal and ideological respects. The reason for this caveat is that queerness and postmodernism are often equated to one another, and in many readings of postmodern fiction, queerness—particularly its fragmentation, demystification, and dispersal of identity—is positioned as merely exemplary of a more general postmodern condition. This move eclipses the specifically queer contexts that motivate putatively “postmodern” authors such as Kathy Acker, William S. Burroughs, Jeanette Winterson, Samuel R. Delany, and Chuck Palahniuk. But more problematically, it assimilates queer writing to the postmodern canon and, consequently, makes it difficult to perceive how, precisely, queer writers contest, resist, and even radically reject “postmodernism” as such, particularly postmodernity’s atrophied capacity for social imagination.¹² For this reason, this book’s archive draws primarily on authors that have been central to debates about postmodernism among scholars of contemporary fiction; it works to repatriate the zones of queerness in these works to make legible their agonistic and, indeed, excitingly fresh aesthetic challenges to postmodernity, which have otherwise been ignored or subordinated as less radical because of their imbrication with affect. This is not to imply that one can no longer read these authors as postmodern or value their use of postmodern aesthetics such as deconstructive resignification and metafictional intertextuality. However, I hope to displace the centrality of those forms as the only index of “critical” aesthetic politics for contemporary literature, thereby drawing attention to formal practices that articulate their social agency through affective idioms.

Queer Experimental Literature also contributes to the recent reconsideration of experimental writing. Long discounted as abstruse and formalist, a number of scholars have turned to experimental writing to reconsider its political and philosophical relevance.¹³ Of particular note is Anthony

Reed's incisive *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing*, which shares a similar goal to my own. Reed traces a genealogy of "black experimental writing" in the postwar era and reveals the complex role that formal experimentations plays in a critical politics of race.¹⁴ Much like race, sexuality has been subordinated in scholarly accounts of experimental writing, and *Queer Experimental Literature* seeks to redress this marginalization. At the same time, I do not claim to offer a definitive survey of queer experimental literature. Rather, my purpose is to look to a small archive of writers—and, more specifically, to a handful of works that lie at the literary margins—to chart the para-academic politics of queer reading solicited through formal experimentation.

To see this politics, however, will require a displacement of the predominant affective narrative about experimental writing—namely that its "difficulty" alienates and aggressively attacks the reader. In her survey of postwar experimental literature, for example, Kathryn Hume characterizes these works as "aggressive fictions" that break the conventional author–reader contract, which promises pleasure and edification as the proverbial carrot on the stick for reading.¹⁵ Instead, these texts attack, offend, disturb, and disgust, and in her view, "The reader does not like the feeling of being unable to follow the text and hence of having lost control of it."¹⁶ When Hume speculates about readers that *do* enjoy the feelings stimulated by experimental writing, she imagines a specialized coterie of professional critics that have learned to access pleasure from the interpretative mastery of the text's difficulty. I propose an alternative view. First, I trace how queer experimental literature appeals to neither a mass public nor a special coterie but seeks to conjure new readerly publics that outstrip the existing landscape for the texts' reception. Second, I show that queer experimental literature refuses a pleasure principle for reading, opening up a number of queerer affective relations to the event of reading that do not move toward mastery. Most importantly, these texts do not forsake pleasure but actively solicit it, particularly through figurations of eroticism, sex, and intimate contact. They do not, in other words, equate pleasure with difficulty or primarily seek to alienate and attack readers. Rather, queer experimental literature creates an erotic relationality among texts, readers, and publics that redefines the difference that pleasure can make in the politics of experimental writing.

By encountering the affective relations of these texts on their own terms, *Queer Experimental Literature* partakes in what Rita Felski calls "postcritical reading."¹⁷ I attend to the aesthetic surface of the text rather

than rewriting the surface as a symptom of an underlying ideological cause, thereby moving beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion as the privileged index for queer critique and critical reading. Unlike some variants of postcritical reading, however, I do not oppose affect and aesthetic form to political reading. Rather, I show that the affective dimension of the aesthetic compels a rethinking of what political interpretation looks like: where the operative agencies of reading take place, who (or what) deploys the agencies of critique, and what “counts” as critical reading. *Queer Experimental Literature* thus locates the politics of aesthetics in their affective relations, and it traces how the disruptive, seductive, or adhesive relations of reading respond to and intersect with the history of sexuality in the postwar era. To do so, each chapter considers a specific obstacle to the figuration of queer relationality in the postwar period. These obstacles include the obscenity laws governing the literary representation of queerness in pre-Stonewall America; the “epidemic of signification” that shapes the discourse of the AIDS crisis; the neoliberal gentrification of the queer avant-garde and the commodification of its intellectual discourses about radical aesthetics; the convergence of homonormativity and biopower to narrow queerness to a consumer identity; and the entrenchment of suspicion as a disciplinary norm for queer and critical theory. Each chapter traces a writer’s turn to queer experimental literature to contest these obstacles and to reimagine the social relations of queer belonging through the affective relations of reading.

Chapter 1 argues that William S. Burroughs innovates an experimental aesthetics of “queer spectrality” in *Naked Lunch* (1959) to challenge the reduction of queerness to an individual pathology. I demonstrate that the stylistic shift from Burroughs’s prior figuration of queer spectrality in his long-unpublished novel *Queer* (1985) to his experimental novels hinges on affectively enfolded the reader within the text’s perverse fantasies. Although interpreted at the time as the uncritical hallucination of a drug addict, I argue that the aesthetics of queer spectrality enable Burroughs to figure queerness as an erotic and political collectivity in a historical moment when such a representation would otherwise be censored as obscene. Whereas Chap. 1 expands the agency of queer critique by looking to the stylistic manifestation of affect, Chap. 2 displaces the priority of academic genealogies for queer reading to glimpse the proliferation of queer hermeneutics that emerge in response to the AIDS crisis. To do so, I examine Samuel Delany’s turn to experimental writing in his AIDS novels, *The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals* (1984) and *The Mad Man* (1994).

I argue that experimental writing affords Delany a “para-academic” mode to elaborate a queer hermeneutic that does not seek paranoid mastery but, instead, attends to the affective history of the crisis, particularly the singular convergence of uncertainty, anxiety, and erotic pleasure. Delany ultimately offers queer hermeneutics as an affective inheritance, a means for readers to remain attached to the enduring and unfinished histories of AIDS. Chapter 3 extends the analysis of how queer experimental literature contests academic discourses of reading, focusing in particular on Kathy Acker’s rejection of the discourses of deconstruction and poststructural theory. The chapter follows Acker’s turn from deconstructive aesthetics toward a sensuous “language of the body,” which she hopes will make her work “unreadable” within the increasingly commodified hermeneutic frameworks for postmodern fiction. Looking to *Bodies of Work* (1997) and *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), where Acker makes this turn, I argue that the languages of the body—in which literature stimulates a masturbatory encounter with queer becoming—strive to recover the critical agency of queer aesthetics within the context of the gentrification of the queer avant-garde. Through her provocation of an affective *becoming-unreadable*, Acker hopes to clear a space for a future community of radical readers and artists to emerge.

In Chap. 4, I move from the margins of cult and para-academic queer experimentation to an experimental writer that has achieved mainstream success, Jeanette Winterson. While often critiqued for her unrepentant sentimentality, I argue that Winterson’s “queer exuberance” presses back against the homonormative reduction of queerness to a privatized, consumer identity. Focusing in particular on *Art and Lies* (1994) and *Art Objects* (1995), I demonstrate how Winterson develops a concept of visceral aesthetics, in which the transmission of affect disrupts the identitarian consumer categories (i.e., lesbian fiction, queer writing) that have been mapped onto her fiction. By dynamizing positive affects, Winterson refuses the stigmatization of exuberance as a degraded form of false consciousness or a capitulation to normativity. Instead, Winterson queers exuberance in the hopes of provoking the desire for a more radically relational conception of queerness in her readers. Chapter 5 looks to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s experimental memoir *A Dialogue on Love* (1999) as the locus for her development of new practices of queer reading, revealing the unacknowledged influence that queer experimental literature has on queer theory’s rediscovery of affective reading. I argue that the memoir’s formal composition of permeability illuminates the ethical values that inspire

Sedgwick's late-career shift away from "paranoid reading" to "reparative reading," leading her to redefine queerness as a mode of relational care. In contrast to the idioms of "paranoid" criticism, queer experimental literature offers Sedgwick a pliable form for figuring queer relationality as a mode of agency and becoming that pertains in the face of collective mortality. Finally, in a brief conclusion, I analyze Chuck Palahniuk's controversial performance piece and short story "Guts" (2004), tracing the incipiently social relations that emerge through his figuration of reading as sex. Through this text, I contest the recent equation of affective reading with a "new modesty" in literary criticism, arguing that queer experimental literature immodestly dreams up new forms of belonging, albeit in idioms that will rarely appear critical enough to count as political imagination.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
2. For an alternative approach that embraces the queerness of positive affect, see Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
3. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
4. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). For an overview of the debate around the "anti-social thesis" in queer theory, see Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean, "The Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–28. For an approach to queer relationality that shares my investment in affect and becoming, albeit from divergent methodological perspectives, see Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).
5. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. (New York: Vintage, 1990).

6. For a critique of the logic of representation that posits sexuality (and homosexuality in particular) as identity, see Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
7. See, for example, Brian Massumi, *The Parables of the Virtual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
8. See, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). I engage with Sedgwick and this debate at length in the introduction.
9. On relational aesthetics, see, for example, Adam Frank, *Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); and W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). On affect as a readable form without reference to the subject, see especially Eugenie Brinkema, *The Form of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
10. Sedgwick, *Touching*, 123–51.
11. Barbara Johnson, “Philology: What is at Stake?” in *On Philology*, ed. Jan Ziolkowski (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 29.
12. My claim is that queer experimental literature contests postmodernity from within rather than positing a break or new sequence beyond its social condition. For approaches that explore the aftermath of and new horizons beyond postmodernism, see Irmtraud Huber, *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Lee Konstantinou, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); *Postmodern/Postwar and After: Rethinking American Literature*, eds. Jason Gladstone, Andrew Hoberek, and Daniel Worden (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016); and the special issue “After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary American Fiction,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 53, no. 3 (2007): 233–393.
13. See, for example, Carter Mathes, *Imagine the Sound: Experimental African American Literature After Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Paul Grimstad, *Experience and Experimental Writing: Literary Pragmatism from Emerson to the Jameses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alex Houen, *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing Since the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Writing*, eds. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale, (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Natalie Cecire, “Experimentalism by Contact,” *Diacritics* 43, no. 1 (2015): 6–35.

14. Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).
15. Kathryn Hume, *Aggressive Fictions: Reading the Contemporary American Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012). See Chap. 3 below for a discussion of queer approaches to the author–reader contract. For a queer re-signification of the carrot-on-the-stick narrative of readerly pleasure, see the conclusion.
16. *Ibid.*, 9.
17. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

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Gilles Deleuze once said that “we write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other. Only in this manner are we resolved to write.” Resolve is an important affect, to be sure, but it is unsustainable without community, without relations of support, virtual and real, that can make the thresholds of ignorance bearable, let alone pleasurable and even joyful. I am very grateful for the communities that have enabled me to learn in the transitional space of writing this book.

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INTRODUCTION: UNCRITICALLY QUEER—BAD READING AND THE INCIPIENTLY SOCIAL

At one time or another, everyone has been a bad reader. We have all, in countless ways, faced shame, mockery, or derision for what we read or the way that we read. Such a generalization is warranted because reading is defined through so many proscriptions. Immanently linked to context, the norms of reading idealize “good reading,” permissible modes of reading that legitimate us as certain kinds of readerly subjects—cosmopolitan or provincial, juvenile or highbrow, scholarly or trashy, radical or naïve, and so on.¹ The norms of reading correlate to acceptable content: the kinds of books you can display on your coffee table and those you must tuck away under the mattress; the kinds of texts you can cite in a classroom and those you can only whisper about in bed. Although less apparent than subjectivity and content, the norms of reading also circumscribe legitimate modes of interpretation—they establish what practices of reading will get to count as *critical* and under what conditions. These norms operate constantly to condition a text’s field of reception and to delimit its horizons of social engagement.² Even before we adjudicate an interpretation of a text, these norms precede us, demarcating disciplinary objects, generic boundaries, analytical methods, and relevant sets of data; they presuppose what style or form a text must possess to become readable and, crucially, they dictate how readers should affectively and corporeally relate to the text before them: whether it is acceptable to get lost in reverie, to identify passionately and irrationally, to read with our feet up, so to speak; or whether we must read attentively with sober precision and pencils in hand. The reader’s felt relation to the text is often thought to be a subjective response or perhaps a personal choice. Yet affective relations are foundational to the

norms of reading. Affect is a visceral means of entraining these norms as unconscious habit, and it is also a metadiscourse for describing the political significance of the event of reading. Indeed, readerly affect stands in for a critical or uncritical orientation to the social world more broadly. An unspoken social imaginary lies behind our felt relations to texts, charting the modes of belonging that must inhere among bodies of texts and the bodies of readers and, by extension, the body politic at large.

When we break the rules of good reading, when we become bad readers, we are labeled queer, stupid, or ill-mannered. Such moments are not individual failures of reading; they signify moments of social transgression. Indeed, these epithets constrict the field of reader relations and the social relations they imply. Allow me to provide an example. Before we descend to the academic basement, where queer experimental literature has so often been marginalized, let us look up momentarily to that canonical bad reader, Victor Frankenstein. Early in *Frankenstein* (1818), Victor arrives at university only to discover that the texts he has read with obsessive interest are hopelessly out of date. When Victor “carelessly” admits his affinity for the alchemists, his professor is shocked.³ “The professor stared. ‘Have you,’ he said, ‘really spent your time in studying such nonsense?’”⁴ In his professor’s eyes, Victor has “wasted” his time.⁵ His failure to be a good reader marks him as queerly disjointed from progressive time, a non-modern subject seduced by mysticism “in this enlightened and scientific age.”⁶ Thus, his professor laments, “Good God! In what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies which you have so greedily imbibed are a thousand years old and as musty as they are ancient?”⁷ The bad reader is stuck in a Dionysian reverie, ignorantly drunk on ancient texts, wasted in mind and body.⁸ The writers in *Queer Experimental Literature* will exploit this very description of bad reading; indeed, they subversively appropriate the discourse of “fancy” to mock the sober rationalism of good reading. Not only do they encourage readers to greedily imbibe their texts, they refuse an economy of reading that discounts the value of delirium. Of course, the professor presupposes this economy to shame his student, lamenting that a “desert land” could exist without a gentle voice of critique to kindly redirect Victor to legitimate fields of knowledge. If the professor stands as a proxy for the modern social world, and a way of belonging to it as a rational subject, then Victor embodies a queer alternative. Indeed, his gluttonous attachment to dead knowledge is, famously, tied to his attachment to dead flesh.⁹ In this precise sense, Victor’s reader relations are a metonym for his transgressive

orientation to social relations. His unrepentant attachment to bad reading, to decayed ideas and musty texts, intimates modes of belonging that, in the eyes of the modern subject, will appear to be uncritically queer.

As the professor's shaming attests, narratives about critical reading derive their authority, at least in part, by legislating the appropriate affective relations that must inhere between texts and readers. Victor's reading is not bad solely because it is out of date—he has been affectively seduced into a solipsistic, non-utilitarian scene of fantasy. In this narrative, we can hear the echoes of future configurations of bad reading, from pornography and pulp fiction to video games and social media. Given the recent reconsideration of critical reading within literary studies, it is surprising that more attention has not been paid to the vexed intersection of affect and the proscriptive norms of reading. To be sure, many critics have proposed new methodologies for reading that contest, rethink, or displace the hermeneutics of suspicion as the *de facto* mode of cultural interpretation within literary studies.¹⁰ Yet these methodologies tend to overlook their own implicit establishment of affective norms for reading, and they rarely acknowledge their relationship to social contexts beyond the disciplinary history of the humanities.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick stands alone in her path-breaking argument that the affective relations of critical reading, as conceptualized by queer theory, are fundamentally shaped by their relationship to sexual politics. Indeed, Sedgwick located the emergence of paranoid reading alongside the structures of feeling that predominated for queers and activists during the AIDS crisis. Her turn to reparative reading is inextricable from her concerns about paranoia becoming entrenched as an affective norm within queer theory, detached from the lived experience of a younger generation of queer activists and scholars emerging in the aftermath of AIDS. Sedgwick's own affirmation of reparative reading was thus attuned to its agonistic, even dissident, relationship to academic codifications of critical reading, and it sought to open up new relations of affective and historical belonging among queer communities through a contextually specific turn to positive affect. Unfortunately, Sedgwick's heuristic distinction between "paranoid reading" and "reparative reading" has since ossified into a decontextualized binary. When we debate the relative value of suspicion or empathy in the abstract, we miss the specific meaning that paranoid and reparative reading had (and has) for queer communities. But more importantly, we perpetuate a debate over good and bad modes of

reading without attending to the historical relations of power that made paranoid or reparative reading *queer* in the first place.

This book draws inspiration from Sedgwick's move to locate the affective relations of queer reading within their social and historical contexts. However, I largely put aside Sedgwick's dichotomy of paranoid and reparative reading. I do not reject paranoia and reparation so much as see them as two affective orientations for queer reading among many more that have yet to be acknowledged or explored within literary criticism. Indeed, we will discover a host of queer reading practices that have failed to count as critical within the idioms of critical theory due to their unrepentant investment in affect. To discover these modes of reading, *Queer Experimental Literature* looks beyond academic and disciplinary genealogies of critical reading, turning to the para-academic and non-academic contexts that motivate writers to reconfigure the affective relations of reading.¹¹ I break, then, with scholars such as Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, who narrate the turn from symptomatic to affective reading as a largely disciplinary affair. For example, they begin their introduction to surface reading by noting that symptomatic reading enabled "exchanges between [academic] disciplines" and was particularly formative for "a relatively homogeneous group of scholars who received doctoral degrees in either English or comparative literature after 1983."¹² By focusing narrowly on the disciplinary context of literary studies, we miss a heterogeneity of aesthetic experimentations with critical and uncritical reading alike, which have developed alongside of and even in contestation with academic discourses of reading.¹³ We have missed these experimentations because, as François Cusset argues, academic culture brings "harsh judgment to bear on any strange or foreign readings" of theoretical discourse.¹⁴ To preserve our authority over "legitimate interpretations," we ignore "felicitous misreading[s]" and "creative, even performative misprision[s]" that constitute a "vast zone in which both political *and* cultural values can be discovered."¹⁵ This book argues that the "felicitous" zones of bad reading in queer experimental literature are acutely responsive to their social contexts and that they work to redraw the parameters of what counts as a critical politics of reading in the postmodern public sphere.

As much as my methodology moves beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion, I do not reject interpretation *tout court*. I agree with Rita Felski that "We should avoid conflating suspicious interpretation with the whole of interpretation, with all the sins of the former being loaded onto the shoulders of the latter."¹⁶ Similarly, we should resist conflating academic

modes of interpretation with those fostered by aesthetic objects. Even when an aesthetic object elicits suspicion, we must attend to the specificity of its configuration of and investment in suspicion. Second, and more importantly, I worry that the turn away from interpretation obfuscates the power relations that underlie the affective relations of reading. For example, sociological turns to descriptive reading purport to approach the literary object outside of the narrow gateway of subjectivity. As Heather Love argues, the “depth” of depth hermeneutics derives “not only [from] the hidden structures or causes that suspicious critics reveal” but also from the affective “dimension that critics attempt to produce in their readings, by attributing life, richness, warmth, and voice to texts.”¹⁷ Love sees suspicion and empathy as dialectically entwined within literary hermeneutics, not opposed to one another. Taken together, these affective relations attest to what Love calls “an unacknowledged but powerful humanism—that defines literary studies.”¹⁸ Not only does this approach share Marcus and Best’s privileging of academic formulations of hermeneutics, it also assumes that suspicion and empathy are the only affective relations available for interpretation. Moreover, Love attributes affect to the critic, whose interpretative acumen is either inspired by suspicion or meant to engender empathy. By contrast, *Queer Experimental Literature* asks that we suspend the institutionally sanctioned critic as the originator of the affective relations of reading. Instead, we might attend to the aesthetic object’s affective agency—its capacity to foster new relational models for reading. To glimpse this agency, *Queer Experimental Literature* heeds Felski’s call to “place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible.”¹⁹ As we will see, the relations that queer experimental literature calls forth cannot, ultimately, be reduced to the dialectic of suspicion and empathy; this dichotomy fails to account for stupefaction, anxiety, masturbatory pleasure, exuberance, shameless immodesty, and so many other minor affects called forth through queer experimental literature. Rather than impose an affect theory from above, I share Adam Frank’s understanding of poetic forms as offering distinct modes of affect theory. His approach enables us to see that the relays of affective and aesthetic “contact can take many forms.”²⁰ This book seeks to be drawn into many different scenes of contact, learning new modes of relationality from the aesthetic object itself.

My other motivation for resisting the turn to description is that it assumes, as Love suggests, that the affective relations of reading are necessarily aligned with humanism. As we will see, queer experimental writers

such as William S. Burroughs and Kathy Acker turn to affect to contest humanist models of subjectivity. For them, affect is an asubjective and anti-human force that reveals the irreducible animality of the human.²¹ But more broadly, all queer experimental literature rejects the humanist paradigm of reading because it buttresses a heteronormative social imaginary. As Michael Warner argues, liberal humanism privileges a “hierarchy of faculties” that, particularly in the case of critical reading, “elevates rational-critical reflection as the self-image of humanity.”²² This hierarchy of faculties restricts the affective range of reader relations and, by doing so, limits the modes of social agency that are available to queers. For example, Warner observes,

All of the verbs for public agency are verbs for private reading, transposed upward to the aggregate of readers. Readers may scrutinize, ask, reject, opine, decide, judge and so on. Publics can do exactly these things. And nothing else. Publics—unlike mobs or crowds—are incapable of any activity that cannot be expressed through such a verb. Activities of reading that do not fit the ideology of reading as silent, private, replicable decoding—curling up, mumbling, fantasizing, gesticulating, ventriloquizing, writing marginalia, and so on—also find no counterparts in public agency.²³

Note that the degraded affects of reading extend far beyond suspicion and empathy. The faculties of good reading disavow these queer textual relations and the social bodies that enact them. Reading with feeling might be disclaimed as an uncritical way of relating to culture and society, stripping us of the agency that accrues to rational-critical forms of participation in the public sphere. But, from another angle, it might provide a way to challenge the formation of that public sphere and, moreover, to elaborate alternative, embodied modes of social agency. Indeed, bad readers might purposely *amplify* their affective relations to texts, thereby contesting the hierarchy of faculties that fuses subjects into the public sphere. For Warner, such practices constitute counterpublic discourse—a counterpublic, in his view, implies an alternative social imaginary, wherein public agency is detached from the state.²⁴ While bad reading undoubtedly implies a non-heteronormative social imaginary, it is crucial to foreground the circuitous and heavily mediated relationship between such interpretative practices and their alternative social horizons. The distance between these affective acts of resistance and their intimations of other forms of belonging is relative. But that distance is always there, built into a text of bad reading, felt deeply and negotiated in complex ways. This distance conditions what

I will refer to as the *incipiently social* dimension of queer experimental literature. These texts actively elicit new structures of relation through the forces of affect; in this sense, the social is literally and viscerally *incipient* in these texts, not simply figured or represented. At the same time, these texts recognize the representational and political strictures that obstruct the wider flourishing of their queer relations beyond the textual encounter. The concept of the *incipiently social* thus foregrounds the conditions of power that make affect viable as a means to contest the heteronormative relations of the liberal-humanist public sphere.

Of course, the distance of bad reading from the legitimately public sphere also enables it to become a meaningful source of nourishment and self-creation for queer communities. Sedgwick hints at this affective agency long before her more famous discussions of paranoid and reparative reading. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick variably labels her interpretative practices as “perverse” and “ardent” reading, terms that foreground the strikingly erotic investments of bad reading.²⁵ “[B]ecoming a perverse reader,” Sedgwick explains, enabled her to locate “sites where the meanings didn’t line up tidily with each other” and to “invest those sites with fascination and love.”²⁶ Sedgwick depicts bad reading as an active means of “smuggling” texts, such as “genre movies, advertising, comic strips,” and other forms of popular culture.²⁷ Smuggling means remaining attached, like Victor, to texts degraded as uncritically queer within the public sphere, investing them with affect and value. Arguably, one of the primary successes of queer literary criticism has been to smuggle a range of texts, including many of the ones discussed in this book, into intellectual discourse, enabling them to matter even as they are received as obscene, silly, ephemeral, or marginal.²⁸ At the same time, Sedgwick stresses that bad reading enables “survival” in a homophobic culture because the affective relations to a text’s meaning are strangely queer. She writes,

The need I brought to books and poems was hardly to be circumscribed, and I felt I knew I would have to struggle to wrest from them sustaining news of the world, ideas, myself, and (in various senses) my kind. The reading practices founded on such basic demands and intuitions had necessarily to run against the grain of the most patent available formulae for young people’s reading and life—against the grain, often, of the most accessible voices even in the texts themselves.²⁹

Sedgwick’s impacted phrasing here, especially in the first sentence, points up the mediated, complex distance between bad reading and social agency.

“I felt I knew I would have to struggle to wrest” is such a bizarre grammatical construction precisely because it signals a confused relationship between public and private, self and other, affect and knowledge, certainty and uncertainty, present and (conditional) future. Reading has become a “wresting” of news, and it partakes in the classical formula for the hermeneutics of suspicion, reading “against the grain.” Yet, Sedgwick observes that “becoming a perverse reader was never a matter of condescension to texts, rather of the surplus charge of my trust in them to remain powerful, refractory, and exemplary.”³⁰ Even as Sedgwick herself performs a mode of hermeneutic agency, the text possesses its own power of refraction. Indeed, the event of reading cannot be easily circumscribed to either the reader or the text because both are figured as permeable and plural. Here, Sedgwick offers a figure for a mode of bad reading that places itself *in relation* to the text, not insisting on the critic’s interpretative mastery or priority over the text.

Sedgwick does not historicize her experience of bad reading beyond gesturing in to its general importance to her “generation” of queer critics.³¹ *Queer Experimental Literature* picks up this unexplored terrain by locating bad reading within key conflicts around the representation of queer relationality within the postwar period. By doing so, I provide more specificity to Sedgwick’s suggestion that bad reading challenges heteronormativity. Undoubtedly, heteronormativity is a motivating cause and critical target for all of the constructions of bad reading in this book. Yet, heteronormativity complexly intersects with the power relations of race, class, and gender, as well as emerging forces of biopower and homonormativity throughout the postwar period. Thus, I offer a more contextually bound approach that locates singular formations of bad reading against the specific configurations of power that queer experimental writers confront. Such an approach provides a sharper sense of how and why reading has been—and continues to be—a volatile site of symbolic contestation for queer culture. Indeed, this book demonstrates that hetero- and homonormativity naturalize themselves, at least in part, through a discourse of reading that fuses interpretative relations into legitimate forms of erotic contact and political collectivity. By eliciting uncritical affective responses in readers, queer experimental literature thus strikes at the disembodied model of critical reading and its heteronormative social imaginary. They use experimental form to position readers and texts in a viscerally relational circuit, in which the transmission of affect engenders alternative modes of social belonging. To lay the conceptual groundwork for this

affective politics, I will now turn to recent debates over affective reading to demonstrate why literary affect must be seen as a creative and visceral force of becoming, not merely a rhetorical trope or a psychological projection of the reader.

THE POLITICS OF LITERARY AFFECT

How does reading make us feel? For some time, literary studies has avoided this question. New Criticism famously divested itself of the problem of readerly feeling by rejecting the “affective fallacy.”³² The critique of the affective fallacy discounted the experience, feelings, and responses of readers to a text, thereby protecting literary criticism’s apparent objectivity in its aesthetic evaluations. Reader-response criticism made a provocative challenge to the orthodoxies of New Criticism. As Jane Tompkins argues, reader-response directed scholarly interest back toward the reader’s engagement with the text. Reader-response critics “examine[d] authors’ attitudes toward their readers, the kinds of readers various texts seem to imply, the role actual readers play in the determination of literary meaning, the relation of reading conventions to textual interpretation, and the status of the reader’s self.”³³ Yet, as this research agenda suggests, reader-response criticism never foregrounded affect as a central facet of the reader relation. For example, Stanley Fish prioritized the way the reader’s response to the text produces its meaning. Despite his use of the phrase “affective criticism,” Fish conceived of the reader’s response as “more than the range of feelings (what Wimsatt and Beardsley call ‘the purely affective reports’),” encompassing “*any and all* of the activities provoked by a string of words.”³⁴ If the critic must “take into account all that has happened (in the reader’s mind),” how can affect be distinguished from or related to the semiotic production of meaning? Insofar as affect is a force that inhabits a threshold between subjective and objective, can we conceive of the *text’s* affect without attributing it solely to the reader’s mind or body? Because Fish characteristically included all cognitive events within the category of response, affect remained an opaque and undertheorized aspect of reader relations.³⁵

The advent of affect theory and the broader “turn” to affect in the humanities has subsequently created new opportunities for understanding literary and cultural affect.³⁶ Scholars such as Martha Nussbaum, Brian Massumi, Charles Altieri, Derek Attridge, and Sianne Ngai resuscitated affect as a dynamic aspect of the event of reading, and each has argued for affect’s social significance, refusing to circumscribe aesthetic feeling to the

realm of the merely subjective.³⁷ However, there remains an unacknowledged tendency among some affective critics to prioritize a specific literary form as the ideal mode for transmuting literary affect into a socially valuable force. My conception of bad reading redresses this problem by foregrounding the norms of reading as well as their implicitly heteronormative social imaginary. Yet bad reading also pluralizes the types of becomings that readerly affect can be said to elicit. As such, it presses back against the tendency to idealize a single mode of social relation or political responsibility as the endgame of affective reading. Moreover, it does not idealize a sole literary form as the objective correlative for affective reading or queer reading more generally. As such, bad reading clears a conceptual space for us to confront queer experimental literature on its own terms, attending to the becomings unleashed by its singular compositions of affect and form.

The work of Martha Nussbaum provides an apt example of the tendency to map affect onto the norms of good reading and a specific literary form. Drawing on philosophies of emotion from Adam Smith and Aristotle, Nussbaum valorizes empathy in readers because it leads us to “form bonds of identification and sympathy” with characters that express “certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns.”³⁸ Nussbaum subsequently champions the nineteenth-century realist novel because it elicits an appropriate combination of sympathetic identification and impartial judgment that is “highly relevant to citizenship.”³⁹ Given her investment in sympathy, Nussbaum calls for the field of affect to be “carefully circumscribed,” praising the “cultivation of *appropriate emotions*” to form an engaged citizenry.⁴⁰ Here Nussbaum discounts the possibility that inappropriate emotions and ugly feelings might, in some contexts, have visceral, subjective, and social value.⁴¹ But more importantly, she does not account for how literature stimulates affects outside of subjective identification. Only narratives that represent concrete worlds with realistically individuated characters signify, in her model, a productive fusion of literary affect with social imagination. This claim results from Nussbaum’s privileging literary forms that can be mapped onto the ideology of liberal humanism. For example, while Nussbaum admits that music possesses an “emotional expressiveness” akin to the novel, she claims that it is “dreamlike and indeterminate in a way that limits its role in public deliberation.”⁴² By discarding non-representational, experimental, and postmodern aesthetics (those that are “dreamlike and indeterminate”), Nussbaum concomitantly ignores how writers might elicit queerer modes of relation that counter liberalism and its self-image of public deliberation.⁴³

To combat the liberal model of readerly sympathy, one might argue that the event of literature is properly understood as a deconstructive event that undoes codified categories of political meaning.⁴⁴ This is precisely the model championed by critics such as Attridge. While following in the footsteps of reader-response's vision of reading as an event, he instead conceives of this event in terms of Levinasian and Derridean ethics.⁴⁵ For example, Attridge argues that

the formally innovative work, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, makes the most sharply challenging (which is not to say the most profound) ethical demand. ... To respond to the demand of the literary work as the demand of the other is to attend to it as a unique event whose happening is a call, a challenge, an obligation: understand how little you understand me, translate my untranslatability, learn me by heart and thus learn the otherness that inhabits the heart.⁴⁶

Estrangement, disorientation, and surprise—these are the affective jolts that otherness engenders, thereby breaking open the codified structures of identity and relationality that are presupposed by liberal humanism. The reader does not imaginatively empathize and thereby understand; instead, readers are overtaken by the other and must respond by confronting the limits of their understanding. Note that Attridge maps the untranslatable demand of the other onto the “formally innovative” literary object, which similarly challenges “all those carefully applied codes and conventions” that readers typically bring to a work.⁴⁷ As much as I share Attridge's investment in the immanence of reading, I am concerned about the correlation of estrangement with a privileged set of aesthetic protocols. Not only does this move limit the field of affect to one tone (estrangement), it enshrines modernist aesthetics as the most ethically demanding of literary forms.⁴⁸ But more problematically, the emphasis on deconstructive estrangement leads Attridge to assert a binary between so-called “literary instrumentalism” and the singularity of literature's ethical demand. Critiquing feminist and Marxist criticism, among other politically-oriented methodologies, Attridge claims that literary instrumentalism approaches a text “with the hope or the assumption that it [a text] can be instrumental in furthering an existing project, and responding to it in such a way as to test, or even produce, that usefulness.”⁴⁹ Putting aside his reduction of these modes of criticism and their own considerations of these issues, Attridge does not provide a way of thinking about literary texts that might actually desire to provoke so-called instrumental political effects—how,

in other words, such texts might utilize affect to elaborate the politics of feminism or queerness.

Despite their attentiveness to the dynamic imbrication of reading and affect, then, these approaches define themselves as good reading in opposition to a degraded mode of bad reading. They subordinate the queerness of the reader's body, particularly its perverse openness to becoming in the event of reading, and they circumscribe the event of reading to appropriate affects—only certain compositions of feeling and aesthetic form signify as critical. Is there, then, a theoretical precedent for bad reading that would enable us to explore the possibilities enabled by less respectable affects, including those that touch on the abject pleasures of queer eroticism? Psychoanalysis would seem to provide an affirmative answer. After all, Freud famously theorized that culture sublimates unconscious desire, and contemporary queer and feminist critics, in particular, have turned to Freud to theorize the queerness of desire.⁵⁰ Despite my respect for these approaches, I part with Freudian psychoanalysis precisely because it tends to collapse the qualitative specificity of affects into the instinctual drives. As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis note, Freud conceives of affect as the “qualitative expression of the quantity of instinctual energy and of its fluctuations.”⁵¹ Indeed, Freud insists that the “instincts are *all qualitatively alike* and owe the effect they produce only to the quantities of excitation accompanying them.”⁵² In other words, an affect is simply the “subjective transposition” of a certain amount of physiological energy.⁵³ This conceit necessarily draws attention away from the qualitative specificity of an affect—whether happiness, sadness, annoyance, or anger—because the feeling is a surface effect of a more fundamental (and apparently more interesting) libidinal conflict. In Sedgwick's words, “The nature or quality of the affect itself, seemingly, is not of much more consequence than the color of the airplane used to speed a person to a destination.”⁵⁴ Following Sedgwick and Frank's work on Silvan Tomkins, I similarly disarticulate affect from the drives to foreground the qualitative singularity of affects.⁵⁵ Rather than reducing affect into a symptom that must be decoded, we can encounter the affective relations composed through an aesthetic object on their own terms.⁵⁶

At the same time, my approach to bad reading does not solely draw on phenomenological descriptions of affect because phenomenology misses the dynamic, asubjective becoming fomented through reader relations.⁵⁷ Because it presumes an intentional perceiving subject, phenomenology misses the unconscious and non-conscious forces of affect. For this reason,

my primary theoretical reference points in *Queer Experimental Literature* are the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and philosophers, such as Elizabeth Grosz, that have fostered an encounter between Deleuze and Guattari's concepts and feminist and queer theory.⁵⁸ This constellation of thinkers enables us to reframe reader relations as affective events or becomings. As Grosz argues, art unleashes a "pure intensity, a direct impact on the body's nerves and organs."⁵⁹ In Deleuze and Guattari's words, art is "a being of sensation and nothing else."⁶⁰ Like many post-structural thinkers, Deleuze and Guattari disarticulate art from subjectivity. Yet they are unique in conceiving the work as an autonomous field of sensation that is neither an expression of an authorial subject nor the projection of a perceiving reader.⁶¹ These sensations exist autonomously in the materiality of aesthetic composition, and they cannot be reduced to the human subject. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari see art as a means to "wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another: to extract a bloc of sensations."⁶² This bloc of sensations subsequently "undoes the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions," which constitute a perceiving subject as a unified entity.⁶³ In art, then, "Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them."⁶⁴ Here Deleuze and Guattari echo their more famous concept of the body without organs insofar as aesthetic affect points toward a non-centralized and non-hierarchical body, a body at the threshold of becoming. In Deleuze's words, art intimates this "more profound and almost unlivable" power—namely, the chaotic affective forces that underlie, constitute, and dissipate the "lived body" that phenomenology assumes as its center.⁶⁵ Literary affect thus pre-exists the reader's organization into a formalized subject, and it composes (and recomposes) the reader's body in a dynamic becoming.⁶⁶

This conception of affective becoming enables us to redress two problems of reader-response criticism. First, we can now prioritize affect as a unique force in the event of reading, irreducible to the signifier. As Brian Massumi notes, "Reading, however cerebral it may be, does not entirely think out sensation."⁶⁷ He argues that reading enfolds "muscular, tactile, and visceral sensations of attention [which] are incipient perceptions. ... In the experience of reading, conscious thought, sensation, and all the modalities of perception fold into and out of each other."⁶⁸ Here reading becomes synesthetic contact, cross-hatched by visual, auditory, and tactile sensations that are not simply attributable to a representation

within the text.⁶⁹ In Grosz's words, "Artworks are not so much to be read, interpreted, deciphered as responded to, touched, engaged, intensified. Artworks don't signify (or, if they signify, they signify only themselves); instead, they make sensation real."⁷⁰ Now we can also radically expand the affects catalyzed by the literary object as well as the range of legitimate "responses" that readers might have to them. Indeed, we cannot privilege empathy or estrangement or suspicion because the artwork foment its own bloc of sensations, which demand to be engaged as forces in their own right. In fact, as Grosz suggests, the artwork's sensations may not even exist yet, except as virtual or incipient possibilities to be materialized and made sensible. Thus, we cannot circumscribe, in advance, which affects will be the most "critical" or even the most "queer" because the radical potentiality of aesthetic affect is always immanent. Second, we can dispense with the presumption that the reader precedes the text. Indeed, many queer experimental writers imagine the text and reader as inhabiting a pre-formalized relational field—a plane of immanence—where neither has fixed boundary, transcendental identity, or hierarchical priority. The plane of immanence offers a view of reader relations that cannot presume an ideal telos for becoming, particularly a telos that culminates in a good reader. On the contrary, as Deleuze writes, "To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form."⁷¹ Note here that becoming is *specific* insofar as it implies a singular convergences of forces within the zone of proximity. To grasp the interventions and relational potentialities fostered within queer experimental literature, then, we must trace the specific zones of proximity that each text elaborates through its own composition of the affective relations of reading.

I must make an important caveat, however, about this conceptual tradition because it is a recurrent site of confrontation throughout the subsequent chapters. In my view, some interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari lay too much stress on affect as a necessarily radical force of deterritorialization. Deleuze himself declares, referencing D. H. Lawrence, that the "highest aim of literature" is "to escape ... the wall of dominant significations" that "[w]e are always pinned against."⁷² For Deleuze, the most problematic of these strictures is the subject: "[W]e are always sunk in the hole of our subjectivity, the black hole of our Ego."⁷³ The consequence of

this view is often that any association of affect with subjectivity—particularly terms such as feeling and emotion—is perceived as an obstacle, rather than a potential contributor, to becoming. The subjective/non-subjective binary is particularly striking in Massumi’s work when he argues, for example, that

emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized.⁷⁴

In Massumi’s narrative, emotion is the qualitative glue that affixes us to convention whereas affect escapes subjectivity and, by extension, its social inscription. Although emotion “*capture[s]*” affect, the latter “has always and again escaped.”⁷⁵ The rhetoric of “capture,” “escape,” and “[re]confinement” establishes a sharp dichotomy between emotion and affect, placing them in a kind of Gothic plot, and it returns us to a view of affect as an unqualified disruptive force, akin to the Freudian instincts. Indeed, to discuss actual(ized) affects such as enjoyment, interest, or rage seems to sap the radical challenge the affect poses to subjective codification. But more importantly, Massumi’s language implies that affect lies outside of signification rather than relationally enfolded with it. Affect undoubtedly puts pressure on the orders of grammar and syntax—but not simply to destroy them. Rather, queer experimental writers seek a range of new idioms for affect to be spoken, and these affective idioms feed forward into new relations between words, bodies, and the social field. Therefore, I foreground the permeable and non-dualistic thresholds that modulate between affect and signification.⁷⁶

For this reason, I also part with Deleuze’s emphasis on subjective “escape” as the aim of literature. As much as queer experimental literature contests the category of the subject, its investments lie elsewhere. In particular, it turns to affect to stimulate new relations of queerness, relations that might ultimately become inhabitable or realizable as a future. As Grosz suggests, “Unlike politics, sensation does not promise or enact a future different than the present, it en-forces, impacts, a premonition of what might be directly on the body’s nerves, organs, muscles. The body is opened up now to other forces and becomings that it might also affirm in and as the

future.”⁷⁷ In other words, the affects of art do not represent or signify the future so much as open the body to a number of potential and incipient futures.⁷⁸ José Esteban Muñoz similarly touches on the conjunction of queer relationality and futurity when he affirms “Taking ecstasy with one another, in as many ways as possible, can perhaps be our best way of enacting a queer time that is not yet here but nonetheless potentially dawning. Taking ecstasy with one another is an invitation, a call, to a then-and-there, a not-yet-here.”⁷⁹ Recalling the intoxicating delirium of bad reading that leaves Victor Frankenstein “wasted,” Muñoz’s call to take ecstasy stresses the intrinsic relationality of queer affect—the joy of taking ecstasy *together* and becoming taken with one another (and another, and another) in an endless social horizon. While I share the Deleuzian conception of affect as a force, I tend to use the phrase *affective relation* instead because it captures the queer relationality of affect—its perverse tendency to spread beyond the subject’s calculation or control—that Muñoz so evocatively highlights.⁸⁰ At the same time, I intend for *affective relation* to highlight the complex imbrication of affective and social relations. After all, as Antonio Damasio observes, “There is growing evidence that feelings, along with the appetites and emotions that most often cause them, play a decisive role in social behavior.”⁸¹ I do not offer a master theory to define this decisive role. Rather, I track how and why queer experimental writers see affect and sociality as related and how they hope to relate these forces otherwise.

I will now explain why queer experimental literature is an apt archive for us to launch this inquiry into the affective relations of reading. I argue for a queerer and more historically located conception of experimental writing. This approach will enable us to see how the fantastical aesthetics of queer experimental literature intimate incipiently social modes of queer belonging against hetero- and homonormative reductions of sexuality to the sphere of the subject.

THE QUEERNESS OF EXPERIMENTAL LITERATURE: FANTASY AND ADHESIVE EROTICISM

More than any other domain of criticism, French feminism has been attentive to experimental writing as an archive that expresses and dynamizes the affects of the sexed body. Theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig famously articulated and debated the concept of *écriture féminine* to signify how, in Nancy K. Miller’s words, “the female *body*, with its peculiar drives and rhythms, inscribes itself as

text.”⁸² As Miller’s word “peculiar” suggests, *écriture féminine* sought to define the sexual difference of women’s writing—to understand how, precisely, women’s writing inscribes the corporeal specificity of the female body and how, in so doing, this writing breaks apart phallogocentric models of signification. As French feminism was challenged by poststructural feminist and queer theory, *écriture féminine* came under increasing scrutiny for its essentialist presumption of a biological foundation for sexual difference, which many rightly saw as ignoring the historically and politically constructed category of “woman.” It was also subsequently critiqued, as Miller notes, for “privileg[ing] a textuality of the avant-garde” as the primary signifier for women’s writing.⁸³ This privileging obscures the plurality of women’s aesthetic traditions across time, but it also betrays an elitist bias toward *difficulty* as the basis of a radical feminist aesthetics.⁸⁴ *Queer Experimental Literature* undoubtedly follows in these critiques: I hope to expand the range of bodies and sexualities that experimental aesthetics can be said to “express”; I stress the historical and political construction of queerness and affect alike; and I insist that, in the postmodern era, experimental writing cannot be reduced to the aesthetics of the avant-garde. However, I want to acknowledge my debt to the philosophical ground that French feminism charted in its effort to conceive of signification in anti-patriarchal and affective terms. Not only has this tradition been a forerunner in theorizing the volatile forces of corporeality, it has also been a source of abiding interest and explicit reference—however ambivalent—for many of the writers I discuss below.

Given that experimental writing has been read as a paradigmatic mode of *écriture féminine*, permit me to qualify how this book reframes experimentalism in relationship to the politics of queer aesthetics. First, I do not presume that the affects “expressed” by experimental writing are necessarily anti-patriarchal. For Kristeva, the semiotic temporarily liberates the sensuous pre-Oedipal body from its suturing into the phallogocentric symbolic order.⁸⁵ While William S. Burroughs’s delirious stylistics could be read as a pre-Oedipal language, for example, his fictions are avowedly patriarchal; indeed, Burroughs hopes to activate a homoerotic libido untethered from sexual difference, and he does so through a misogynistic narrative that eliminates woman and femininity altogether. We will discover a queerer politics of form in Burroughs’s work that operates in tension with this ideology, but it is important to acknowledge that experimental stylistics are not inherently anti-patriarchal, even if they unleash anti-Oedipal affects. Second, I break the linkage of experimental writing with the avant-garde.

In my view, the concept of the avant-garde should not be conflated with a style but reserved for signifying a community of writers and artists operating within specific historical circumstances. To be sure, some of the writers in *Queer Experimental Literature* are in conversation with one another, such as Burroughs and Acker, Acker and Winterson, and Delany and Acker.⁸⁶ But taken together, queer experimental literature does not constitute an avant-garde in any traditional sense. In fact, we will see writers, particularly Acker, distressed at the *absence* of a queer avant-garde, which has been gentrified by the forces of commodification and homonormativity in the neoliberal era. Finally, I resist the equation of experimental writing with a specific set of stylistic moves that can be identified transhistorically.⁸⁷ Rather than define “experimental” in formalist terms, then, I use the term as a heuristic to construct a genealogy of writers that share a common conception of form—namely, that deformations of narrative prose can expose reading as a social construction and an affective discipline.⁸⁸ The obstructions to sense making in these texts thus call for a contextual approach that locates a writer’s turn to experimentation against the social norms that legislate the protocols for representing and interpreting sexuality in a given context.⁸⁹

This historical approach helps us to suspend the narrative that experimental writing primarily offers a politics of anarchism.⁹⁰ Exemplifying this view, Kathryn Hume criticizes Acker for expressing “anguish over patterns of oppression” while offering “few suggestions for changing them, other than letting our impulses rip and refusing to obey social rules. . . . Revolution may be an ultimate goal, but she offers no blueprint.”⁹¹ While queer experimental literature refuses or cannot represent blueprints, this does not mean that it fails to offer any intimation of new social relations. Indeed, as Elizabeth Freeman argues, queer experimental aesthetics engender “glimpses of an otherwise-being that is unrealizable as street activism or as blueprint for the future.”⁹² In this sense, the affective relations forged through experimental aesthetics are not directly or mimetically realizable as politics. Yet they nonetheless create what Anthony Reed calls a “hiatus of unrecognizability [that] can spur new thought and new imaginings, especially the (re)imagining of collectivities and intellectual practices.”⁹³ In queer experimental literature, this hiatus is paired with a thoroughgoing commitment to the most degraded of affects. Thus, these texts will often appear to be insufficiently concerned with the social world. Their flights into fantasy may read as a debased narcissism or a solipsistic withdrawal into the personal. However, as Jennifer Doyle argues, “The rhetorical deployment of the personal and the emotional should not be assumed

to be a retreat into an ahistorical, apolitical self; such explicit turns to emotion may in fact signal the politicization, the historicization of that self and of the feelings through which that self takes shape in relation to others.”⁹⁴ At the very moments, then, when queer experimental literature appears to retreat from the legibly social world, its ineffable relations of bad reading might also be advancing outward, in a newly politicized threading together of affective and social relations.

As a corollary to expanding the politics of experimental literature beyond anarchism, I also wish to broaden the aesthetic politics of queerness itself.⁹⁵ Scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis, Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Tim Dean, and Kevin Ohi argue that the force of queerness can be most palpably felt through its disruption of representation.⁹⁶ For example, Ohi identifies the queerness of Henry James’s style in terms of a “radical anti-sociality that seeks to unyoke sexuality from the communities and identities—gay or straight—that would tame it, a disruption that thwarts efforts to determine political goals according to a model of representation.”⁹⁷ Echoing the imagery of Edelman, Ohi describes this disruptive force as the “*corrosive* effect of queerness ... on received forms of meaning, representation, and identity.”⁹⁸ I share the resistance to thinking of queerness as identity, and my approach to aesthetic becoming converges with Ohi’s Deleuzian-inspired critique of mimetic conceptions of literary form. However, I part with the emphasis on anti-social *corrosion* as the primary or most critical force of queerness. In addition to corrosion, queerness also offers an *adhesive* modality.⁹⁹ In the next chapter, for example, we will see the queer adhesion of bodies as they become dispersed, recombined, and stuck together in ecstatically spectral blobs. In the final chapter, we will explore what Sedgwick calls the “dissolvent relationality of [Buddhist] pedagogy,” which unglues the fixed identities of master and student and diffuses them into newly permeable relations of bodies, affects, and surfaces.¹⁰⁰ Given queer experimental literature’s adhesive compositions, I prefer to stress its investment in the queerness of *eroticism* rather than the queerness of *desire*, which has been so influential for queer theory. Elaborating the distinction between these terms, Freeman explains that

desire is a form of belief in the referential object that the subject feels s/he lacks and that would make him or her whole. ... Erotics, on the other hand, traffics less in belief than in encounter, less in damaged wholes than intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility (will this part fit into that one? what’s my gender if I do this or that to my body?)¹⁰¹

Note the *experimental* nature of queer eroticism—its suspension of the subject’s grasping for meaning to open up an event of corporeal contact and transformation. In queer becoming, as Freeman depicts it, the body is more a collection of bodies and body parts whose connective possibilities can be played with and curiously reimagined. Likewise, this assemblage of bodies is not subordinated to a dialectic of subject and object or self and other. This speculative dialectic gives way to a different kind of speculation—a playful imagination or fabulation of non-exclusive potentialities. As Freeman insists, “*artifice is part of the pleasure*: the fetishistic belief in the lost object is less important than the titillation of ‘but all the same...’”¹⁰² Here the aesthetic is irreducibly enmeshed in the scene of queer eroticism—the aesthetic is not only an agency for figuring and coordinating eroticism; it is also available to be erotically invested and drawn into surface contact with the assemblage of bodies. The titillation of “but all the same” is a visceral registration of the pull of queer relationality, of a body’s potential to become differently stuck together with other bodies, body parts, and body politics.

Throughout *Queer Experimental Literature*, I conceive of “fantasy” as an aesthetic idiom for the “but all the same” of adhesive becoming. In this respect, I break with the predominately Lacanian understanding of fantasy within queer theory.¹⁰³ This tradition tends to model fantasy on the paradigm of the subject, and it critiques fantasy for mystifying the subject’s incoherence, thereby preserving a normative social order. For example, Edelman argues that fantasy is “[t]he *central prop and underlying agency of futurism, fantasy alone* endows reality with fictional coherence and stability, which seems to guarantee that such reality, the social world in which we take our place, will still survive when we do not.”¹⁰⁴ Here fantasy is invariably a fantasy of the future, a single and monolithic future, which is, in fact, an image of an “Imaginary past” that promises to satisfy the subject’s narcissistic desire.¹⁰⁵ In Edelman’s narrative, fantasy is the *sole* agency of social reproduction, and it offers no resistant or queer possibilities; indeed, queerness is radically opposed to fantasy, a force that rends apart the figural coherence of the subject and its concomitant desire for reproductive futurity. By contrast, queer experimental literature does not model fantasy on the subject and it does not offer its fantastical figurations as promissory notes of desire. In Deleuze’s words, “[F]abulation—the fabulating function—does not consist in imagining or projecting an ego. Rather, it attains these visions, it raises itself to these becomings and powers.”¹⁰⁶ For these texts, fantasy functions more as a figural scene to experiment with

and usher in new relations of the possible and the impossible.¹⁰⁷ To borrow Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, these texts use the idiom of fantasy to "express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility."¹⁰⁸ As they note in their analysis of Franz Kafka, a minor literature is often "affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization," which for Kafka "marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible—the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise."¹⁰⁹ In this sense, the use of fantasy within queer experimental literature is neither a means to salve the wounds of subjective incoherence nor a license to imagine desire liberated from any censure, law, or social order. On the contrary, fantasy is an idiom to grapple with the relations of power that demarcate the social possibilities of queerness—that, in some contexts, make queerness altogether impossible. These texts do not arrest the relations between fantasy and reality, between the virtual and the actual, because to do so would falsely close the gap between what exists, and what could exist, and what is not allowed to exist, let alone be collectively desired. The oscillation between these temporal states—or, more precisely, the aesthetic performance of that oscillation and our affective contact with it—expresses a fidelity to a becoming that queer experimental literature hopes to engender in readings yet to come.

Of course, fantasy is easy to dismiss as narcissism. Many of the texts that I consider have been labeled as uncritical precisely because of their unrepentant investment in staging queer reading as an encounter with solipsistic fantasy. Therefore, it is important to recall that, as Valerie Rohy explains, queer reading is "always ambivalent: what can appear as narcissistic mirroring or self-affirmation in fact contributes to the production of queer subjectivity, and the queer subjectivity that may seem self-invented is never free."¹¹⁰ Here the readerly subject operates in a productive relation to power, but, as Rohy notes, queer reading also branches out beyond the subject into a perverse circuit of relation. In her words, "[T]he solitary business of queer research touches circuits of seduction and exchange. ... The scene of reading helps one know oneself in part, it seems, through knowing others."¹¹¹ This horizon of virtual contact broaches the incipiently social dimension of bad reading that queer experimental literature hopes to materialize. In the final section, I underscore how the literary imagination of queer sexuality in the postwar period emerges through these affective intimations of relationality.

THE LITERACY OF SEXUALITY

This introduction began with an exemplary bad reader who enters the university and meets shame for his readerly attachments. It seems appropriate, then, to conclude with a reader who also attends the university but, unlike Victor Frankenstein, discovers incipiently social attachments, which are intimated through the affective relations of her bad reading. In Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006), Alison attends literature courses that permit the analysis of sexuality in canonical works such as *Heart of Darkness*.¹¹² Yet the professors insist that a good reading is a psychoanalytic reading, modeled on the Freudian interpretations of symbols (see Fig. 1). Of course, this interpretative method restricts reading to a strictly heteronormative model of sexuality. But more importantly, Alison finds it boring—good reading, in this context, is reading for correspondence, in which only one type of reference is acknowledged as legitimate. Regarding her professor's similar interpretation of Joyce, Alison wonders, "Once you grasped that *Ulysses* was based on *The Odyssey*, was it really necessary to enumerate every last point of correspondence?"¹¹³ Reading for past correspondence obstructs reading for future connections; it arrests the generative indeterminacy of the text, leaving no room for readers to encounter the text immanently on its own terms or to practice reading as a creative or even an irreverent activity.¹¹⁴ As an act of resistance, and in search of an alternative archive of eroticism, Alison becomes an increasingly bad reader. Indeed, she procrastinates reading *Ulysses* and trolls the library

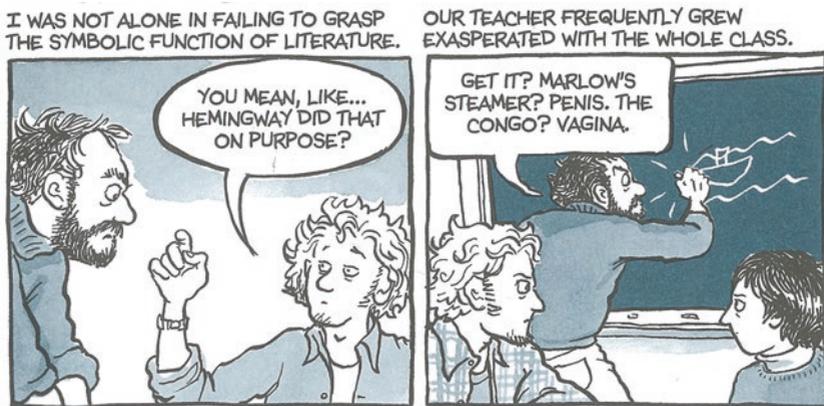


Fig. 1 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)



Fig. 2 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)

for texts on homosexuality, lesbianism, and feminism. When her father, Bruce, asks if she is reading anything “good,” she demurs (see Fig. 2).¹¹⁵ Retrospectively, Alison jokes, “If only I’d had the foresight to call this an independent reading. ‘Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Homosexuality’ would have had quite a legitimate ring.”¹¹⁶ Here Bechdel underlines the historically contextual distinction between good and bad reading, which is defined by its relationship to institutions of power and their codification of hermeneutic legitimacy. Now, these books would count as good reading, particularly in an academic context of gender and sexuality studies. But then, these texts were shameful and inadmissible within the scene of the classroom.

Yet through her contact with bad reading, Alison’s relation to the university shifts, and she begins to experience queerness as a mode of relationality. In this respect, *Fun Home* restages the coming-out narrative as a literacy narrative, in which the affects of reading provoke new possibilities for belonging. Initially, Alison notes, “My realization at nineteen that I was a lesbian came about in a manner consistent with my bookish upbringing. A revelation not of the flesh, but of the mind.”¹¹⁷ Here the acquisition of a sexual identity derives from a putatively rational and disembodied practice of reading. But *Fun Home* immediately undermines the distinction between revelations of flesh and mind. For example, we see a number of images of Alison masturbating while reading, which suggests that the textual and sexual are not merely entwined through discourse but also through the experience of pleasure. Alison qualifies her masturbatory

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reading, joking that “My researches were stimulating but solitary. It became clear I was going to have to leave the academic plane and enter the human fray.”¹¹⁸ Note that the academic has been radically redefined as an erotic (“stimulating”)—but not yet social (“solitary”)—experience. In this respect, the image of masturbatory reading must be understood as a capacious affective relation—to the text, to the self, to the body, to a collective past, to a possible future. Yet this relation is incipiently social, an intimation of potentiality that is emergent (but by no means guaranteed) in the event of reading. This is why, in the very next frame after the image of her masturbatory reading, we see Alison attend her university’s Gay Union (see Fig. 3). Although she sits in “petrified silence,” Alison has found the courage to materialize her yearning for a community where the

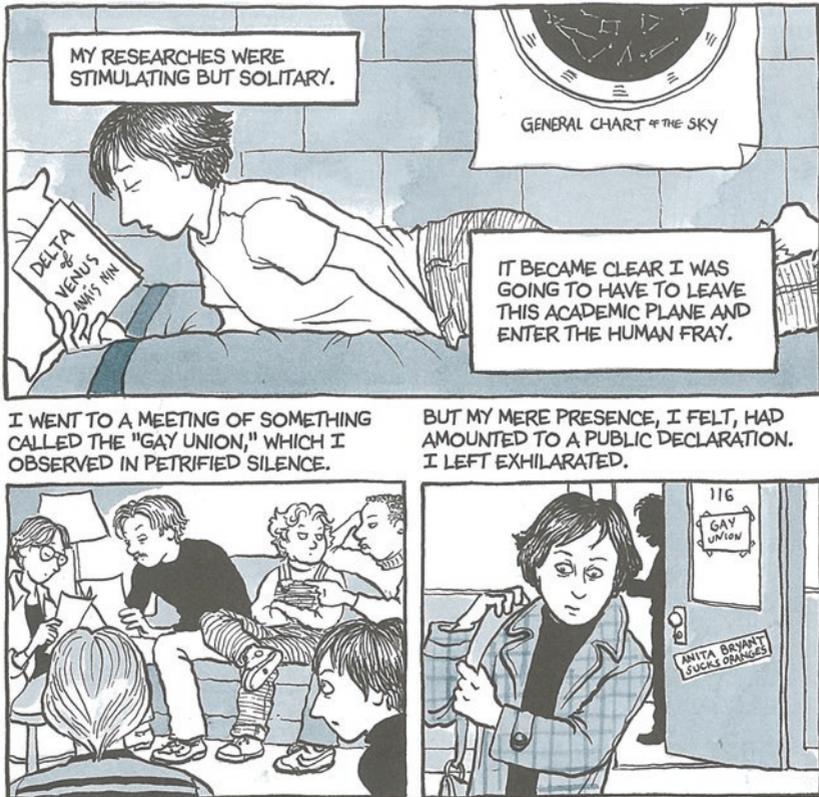


Fig. 3 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)

intimations of queer belonging could be realized.¹¹⁹ Of course, the realization of queer belonging means *both* sexual and political contact; indeed, the memoir refuses to disarticulate these two and, instead, fuses them in the incipiently social relations of Alison's bad reading.

Part of the tragedy of *Fun Home* is that Alison's father cannot submit himself to a similarly queer becoming. Indeed, Alison wonders, "How could he admire Joyce's lengthy, libidinal 'Yes' so fervently and end up saying 'No' to his own life."¹²⁰ The answer lies, at least in part, in the absence of a social world that would say "Yes" back to Bruce's yes, that would provide a double affirmation of his queer desires and thereby give him opportunities to experiment with alternative modes of belonging. After all, Alison's bad reading leads her toward a social collective because there is a culture available to her, a set of material relations enabled by second-wave feminism, gay liberation, and the postwar university. These conditions make possible the realization of her desires for relation and, crucially, mark queerness as a mode of belonging to a political collectivity. Bruce does not have access to these material conditions. *Fun Home* thus underscores that bad reading is always an historical affair. Whatever possibilities it intimates cannot be annexed from the relations of power that either enable or obstruct their realization. This is why it is so significant that when Bruce reads Kate Millet, he *does* experience the affective jolts of queer potentiality. "I'm flying high on Kate Millet," he writes after Alison shares this text with him.¹²¹ He admits, "I really prefer Millet's philosophy to the one I'm slave to. But I try to keep one foot in the door. Actually I am in limbo. I ... oh, hell. I don't know what I mean."¹²² Bruce's "flying high" recalls Muñoz's taking ecstasy and Frankenstein's imbibing of fancy—the delirious encounter with the text opens a door to another mode of relationality. Yet Bruce cannot let his feet off the ground, keeping one stuck in the door and feeling uncertain about what he "mean[s]." From Alison's perspective, it is precisely Bruce's sense of himself as a "slave" to textual meaning that prevents him from reading himself into an alternative economy of relation. Earlier in the memoir, she jokes that Bruce misreads Camus's claim that "suicide is a solution to the absurd," taking the phrase far too literally.¹²³ "If he'd read carefully," Alison states, "he would have gotten to Camus' conclusion that suicide is illogical. But I suspect my father of being a haphazard scholar."¹²⁴

But perhaps the problem is not that Bruce is a careless and "haphazard" reader. Perhaps *he cannot read haphazardly enough* so that he can detach from what he experiences as fixed truth—to put aside the question

of meaning altogether in favor of relational contact. After all, in Alison's hands, the queer scholar reads herself into a new network of queer belonging, and once she is affectively immersed in this world, reading badly becomes a radically addictive proliferation. Normative culture, read by the queer scholar, becomes erotically and politically palpable in surprising ways. When Alison begins a sexual relationship with a fellow student, for example, it is

strewn with books, however, in what was for me a novel fusion of word and deed. I lost my bearings. The dictionary had become erotic. Some of our favorite childhood stories were revealed as propaganda ... others as pornography. In the harsh light of my dawning feminism, everything looked different.¹²⁵

Even *the dictionary* has become erotically invested—a book of correspondence and apparently objective reference has become an affective vector of seduction and relational creation. Thus, bad reading affords an agency—however partial—to redefine the hierarchy of faculties that underpin reading in queer terms. By doing so, bad reading not only opens up new modes of interpretation; it also contests the economy of relation that fuses reading and heteronormativity together, forestalling a queerer panoply of erotic and social relations. To be sure, *Fun Home* underscores the historical conditions that can bridge—or fail to bridge—the affective relations of reading and their intimations of queerer futurity. Yet the memoir nonetheless affirms bad reading as a meaningful site of symbolic contestation, subjective nourishment, and collective agency in the queer literary imagination. Bad reading can provoke us to make contact with radical social possibilities that seem to exist merely as flickerings of feeling.

Insofar as the works we will now encounter are “experimental,” then, they are experiments in the most rigorous sense of the word—tests to see what might emerge; tests whose very purpose is to redefine the meaning of the known and unknown; tests based on gut feelings, with hypotheses rooted in vague sensations of the possible. A bad reader might, on the basis of this definition, be tempted to call all such experiments “queer.” In the following pages, we will explore the perverse horizons that may yet emerge through such an embrace of queer experimentation.

NOTES

1. See especially, Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2004), 13–38, whose work deeply inspires my approach. For a historical analysis of good and bad reading, see Michael Millner, *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012). For a history of reading that also privileges the discourses of affect and corporeality, see Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies, and Bibliomania* (Malden: Polity Press, 2006).
2. As François Cusset argues, "The mission of the scholarly institution is to produce readers that meet certain standards, and, in the name of professional competence, to impose not only a list of required texts but also the various modes of reading appropriate to them" (223). See François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
3. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 47.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. I take the metaphors of Dionysian intoxication from Gilles Deleuze's discussion of minor literature that produces an undecidable hesitation between dream and reality. This fantastical state is one way that minor literature eludes systems of Apollonian judgment. See *Essays Clinical and Critical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 126–35.
9. On Victor's carnally queer relationship to knowledge, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 95–135.
10. See, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 123–51; Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21; Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Donald E. Hall, *Reading Sexualities: Hermeneutic Theory and the Future of Queer Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009); Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371–91; Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013); Jonathan Culler, "Critical Paradigms," *PMLA* 125, no. 4 (2010): 905–15; Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (New York: Routledge,

- 2004); and Warner, “Uncritical.” For the classic text in this debate, see Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1969), especially 13–23; also relevant, but less often cited as a touchstone in the debate, is Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).
11. For convergent approaches to the conception of the para-academic, see Cusset, *French Theory*; Judith Halberstam’s conception of “low theory” in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X,” *PMLA* 110, no. 3 (1995): 343–49, which critiques the “panicky defensiveness that many queer and non-queer-identified humanists express [which] has to do with the multiple localities of queer theory and practice” (344–45). I agree with their insistence that “no particular project is metonymic of queer commentary. Part of the point of using *queer* in the first place was the wrenching sense of recontextualization it gave, and queer commentary has tried hard to sustain its awareness of diverse context boundaries” (345, original emphasis). For incisive analyses of the subsequent institutionalization of academic knowledge, including queer theory, see Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
 12. Marcus and Best, “Surface,” 1.
 13. To be clear, I do not accept the monolithic equation of critical reading with symptomatic reading (and vice versa) because it collapses divergent academic definitions of critical reading into one common rubric, flattening the distinct methodologies and histories of academic, para-academic, and non-academic reading. I also do not equate critical reading solely to deconstruction, psychoanalysis, or Marxism, nor do I conflate all of these modes with “good reading.” Rather, my concept of good and bad reading beckons for a contextually specific genealogy of the relations of power that pertain to any mode of reading marked by an institution as “critical.” On this problem, see especially Chap. 2.
 14. Cusset, *French*, 338.
 15. *Ibid.*, 338, 337, original emphasis.
 16. Felski, *Limits*, 10.
 17. Love, “Close,” 388.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Felski, *Limits*, 12. For a wonderful exemplification of this critical practice, see Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
 20. Adam Frank, *Transferrential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 3.

21. For a convergent approach to the non-exclusivity of human and animal emotion, see Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2003).
22. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 123.
23. Ibid.
24. Warner argues that public agency in liberalism is specifically tied to the state form (Ibid., 124).
25. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 4.
26. Ibid., 4, 3. Note that Sedgwick stresses the affective nature of this mode of queer reading: “The demands on both the text and the reader from so intent an attachment can be multiple, even paradoxical. For me, a kind of formalism, a *visceral* near-identification with the writing I cared for, at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, rhyme, was one way of trying to appropriate what seemed the numinous and resistant power of the chosen objects” (Ibid., 3, my emphasis).
27. Ibid., 3, 4.
28. As Berlant and Warner write, “Queer commentary has also distinguished itself through experiments in critical voice and in the genre of the critical essay. Along with queer experiments in pedagogy and classroom practice, it marks a transformation of both the object and the practice of criticism” (“What” 349). For a path-breaking exemplification of such a transformation within queer theory, see José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
29. Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 4.
30. Ibid.
31. For a historical view of bad reading that moves beyond the twentieth century, see Millner, *Fever*.
32. See W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy,” *Sewanee Review* 57, no. 1 (1949): 31–55.
33. Jane P. Tompkins *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), ix.
34. Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980), 27, my emphasis.
35. As reader-response criticism waned in popularity, its questions migrated to other fields, particularly history of the book criticism and interdisciplinary approaches to literature based in cognitive science.
36. See *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, eds. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Within queer studies, see Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York:

- Routledge, 2004); Ann Cvetcovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Nick Salvato, *Obstruction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). For a critique of the affective turn, see Ruth Leys, “The Turn to Affect: A Critique,” *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434–72; and “Facts and Moods: A Response to My Critics,” *Critical Inquiry* 38 (2012): 882–91.
37. See Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Attridge, *Singularity*; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).
 38. Nussbaum, *Poetic*, 7. On her Aristotelian ethics, see Nussbaum *Love’s*, especially 3–53; on the influence of Adam Smith on her thinking, see *Poetic*, 74–75. For an incisive critique of Nussbaum, see Charles Altieri, “Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience” in *Mapping the Ethical Turn*, eds. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 30–58. For a relevant critique of Adam Smith’s conception of impartial spectatorship, see Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
 39. Nussbaum, *Poetic*, 10. For an incisive critique of the “affective hypothesis” and its convergence with neoliberal ideologies of personal property, see Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
 40. *Ibid.*, xvi, 74, my emphasis.
 41. See especially Ngai, *Ugly*.
 42. Nussbaum, *Poetic*, 6. Hence, Nussbaum values Walt Whitman’s poetry only to the extent that it provides a “concrete depiction of different ways of life” (*Poetic* 7). “Dreamlike and indeterminate” is also an apt descriptor for the “waning of affect” that characterizes the postmodern structure of feeling. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1990), 15. Jameson argues that

- postmodernity dissolves the “bourgeois ego, or monad” dispersing affect into free-floating intensities, “since there is no longer a self to do the feeling” (*Postmodernism* 16). On the potentially ethical and political value of this dispersal, see Chap. 4. For two differing approaches to the value of impersonality, see Smith, *Affect* and Bersani and Phillips, *Intimacies*. On the specific affective economies of postmodernity, see Steven Shaviro’s “The Life, After Death, of Postmodern Emotions,” *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2004): 124–41.
43. As Loren Glass notes, many postwar and postmodern experimental writers are “not invested in making us better people, and there should be ways to teach and read them that recognize and respect this basic fact” (203). See “Contemporary Fiction and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination,” *Contemporary Literature*, 54, no. 1 (2013): 197–203.
 44. For keen and relevant surveys of the ethical turn, see Dorothy J. Hale, “Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel,” *Narrative* 15, no. 2 (2007): 187–206; and Michael Eskin, “Introduction: The Double ‘Turn’ to Ethics and Literature?” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 557–72. For a highly illuminating account of the “event of literature” from a number of different post-structural viewpoints, see Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
 45. Attridge makes clear that this attachment to absolute otherness is the locus of his divergence from Fish. See *Singularity*, 144.
 46. *Ibid.*, 130–31.
 47. *Ibid.*, 131.
 48. On his understanding of modernism and the ethics of reading, see Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). While I part with his tendency to characterize postmodern form as lacking an engagement with otherness and the aesthetic (6, 69), I share Attridge’s concern about allegorical reading as potentially overlooking the literal or material solicitude of literary form (38, 48).
 49. Attridge, *Singularity*, 7.
 50. See, for example, Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud’s Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Tim Dean, *Beyond Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, eds. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); and David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). For a relevant analysis of the relationship

- between affect and language, see Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). For insightful accounts of psychoanalytic reading that contest the hermeneutics of suspicion, see Adam Phillips, *Promises, Promises: Essays on Psychoanalysis and Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); and Anne A. Cheng, “Psychoanalysis without Symptoms,” *differences* 20, no. 1 (2009): 87–101.
51. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 13. What Freud calls “affect,” Massumi labels “emotion” and Damasio names a “feeling.” Despite their terminological differences, their common point is the same—the mind perceives and interprets bodily and physiological sensations, and these perceptions are experienced as subjective emotions, which we label in qualitative terms.
 52. Sigmund Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” in *General Psychological Theory* (New York: Touchstone, 1963), 88, my emphasis.
 53. Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language*, 14.
 54. Sedgwick, *Touching*, 18.
 55. *Ibid.*, 18–20. For Sedgwick, the problem is that the psychoanalytic reduction of affect to desire excludes the ways that affect is relatively autonomous from the drives (hunger, thirst, sexual desire, etc.) and thus possess more freedom with respect to object, aim, motivation, and temporality. Also see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins,” in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 1–28.
 56. The autonomy of affect from the drives also enables key possibilities for agency. See Chap. 5.
 57. For a queer theory of phenomenology, see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
 58. This tradition has been particularly attentive to possibilities and limitations of Deleuze’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts for minority subjects, such as the meaning of “becoming-women” for subjects that are already culturally marked as “women.” See, for example, Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994); *Space, Time, and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995); “A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics,” in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, eds. Constantin V. Bondas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), 187–212; Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in*

- Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, eds. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Mel Storr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); and Claire Colebrook, "Queer Aesthetics," in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, eds. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: State University of New York, 2011).
59. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 22.
 60. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 164.
 61. Here Deleuze and Guattari exemplify the challenge to what Rei Terada calls the "expressive hypothesis," or the conceit that "emotion requires a subject" to express it, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11.
 62. Deleuze and Guattari, *What*, 167.
 63. *Ibid.*, 176.
 64. *Ibid.*, 164.
 65. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 39.
 66. On the partitioning of the senses as a political act, see especially Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). On the "distribution of the sensible," see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).
 67. Massumi, *Parables*, 139.
 68. *Ibid.*
 69. For an accessible elaboration of this point, see Bruce Baugh, "How Deleuze Can Help Us Make Literature Work," in *Deleuze and Literature*, eds. Ian Buchanan and John Marks (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 34–56. For an overview of Deleuze's theory of literature, see Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
 70. Grosz, *Chaos*, 79.
 71. Deleuze, *Essays*, 1.
 72. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 36, 45. While Deleuze and Guattari often turn to classically male-modernist figures such as Joyce and Lawrence, it is important to note, as Ronald Bogue argues, that they do not rely on a notion of modernism as apolitical or anti-political (*Deleuze* 113). Moreover, they share a fondness for non-modernist writers such as Herman Melville and William S. Burroughs, and Deleuze, in particular, cites a wide array of popular cultural texts in his books on cinema, from Charlie Chaplin to Howard Hawks.

73. Ibid., 45.
74. Massumi, *Parables*, 28. Also see Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Malden: Polity Press, 2015), which qualifies that affect is not “prelinguistic” and that there is no “antinomy between affect and language. There is accompaniment and becoming, always involving the full spectrum of the graded continuum of experience. The nonverbal grades on the continuum of experience are not in opposition to the verbal registers, any more than infrared is opposed to red. They companion them” (212). My critique here is that the rhetorical figures that affect theory often uses to describe this companionship sometimes fail to capture the non-dialectical relationality of affect and language, particularly when it comes to narrating becomings stimulated *by* and *through* language.
75. Massumi, *Parables*, 35, original emphasis.
76. Sedgwick articulates a similar desire in *Touching Feeling*, 1–25.
77. Grosz, *Chaos*, 80. For a critique of Deleuzian becoming as an asocial transcendence of the world, a position with which I clearly disagree, see Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006).
78. Note, too, Massumi’s point that, in reading, “sensation is a turning in on itself of the body’s activity, so that the action is not extended toward an object but knots at its point of emergence: rises and subsides into its own incipency, in the same movement. *The acts of attention performed during reading are forms of incipient action*” (*Parables* 139, my emphasis). For a different approach that influences my conception of the incipiently social, see Warner, *Publics*, 125–58, which recovers an “orientation to futurity” in counterpublic discourse (such as, in his example, academic writing) and thereby affords “a way of imagining speech for which there is yet no scene, and a scene for which there is no speech” (158). The question that Warner poses is central to every work examined in *Queer Experimental Literature*: “It may well be that extant forms and venues will accommodate many political aims. But what if they do not? *What if one hopes to transform the possible contexts of speech?*” (128, my emphasis). To understand this problem, I contend, requires not only an attentiveness to the torsions between the form, aim, and venue for speech but also to the *hope, the affective relation*, that inspires such efforts at queer world-building.
79. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 187.
80. On affect as relation, see Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). I diverge from Brennan’s view that affect points toward a natural, organic unity to the human body, which she describes in avowedly mystical terms, such as “the union of spirit and sensuality that was lost with the fall into a divided mind and body” (159).

81. Damasio, *Looking*, 140. For the philosophy of affect as action and affection, see Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); and Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988).
82. Nancy K. Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Womens Fiction," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 341, original emphasis. For a relevant analysis of lesbian experimental writing, see Elizabeth A. Meese, *(Sem)erotics: Theorizing Lesbian: Writing* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).
83. Ibid. On the skepticism toward *écriture féminine* as utopian, see DeKoven, "Jouissance, Cyborgs, and Companion Species: Feminist Experiment," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1690–96.
84. On this issue, see Doyle, *Hold*.
85. For a helpful overview, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. (Crows News: Allen & Unwin, 1989).
86. Note Acker's significance as a vector here. While she remains a marginal figure in contemporary literary criticism, largely consigned to the rubrics of postmodern fiction, Acker had a profound and enduring influence on many of the major figures in contemporary American and British literature that has yet to be fully recognized.
87. For an overview of differing approaches to form and context in analyses of experimental writing, see the important collection, *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Writing*, eds. Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), especially 3–51; and Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
88. For a convergent approach, see Alex Houen's notion of literary "potentialism" in *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing Since the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 241. For a relevant inquiry into the relationship between experimental form and the affective relations of reading, see Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
89. As Berlant and Warner note, "Queer culture comes into being unevenly, in obliquely cross-referencing publics, and no one scene of importance accounts for its politics—neither hyperabstracted contexts, like 'the Symbolic,' nor hyperconcrete ones, like civil disobedience" ("What" 346).
90. See DeKoven, *Different*, 16.
91. Kathryn Hume, *Aggressive Fictions: Reading the Contemporary American Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 55.
92. Freeman, *Time*, xix.

93. Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 1.
94. Doyle, *Hold*, 72.
95. This expansion of queer aesthetics is also necessary because, in Berlant and Warner's words, queer commentary emerges "[t]hrough a wide range of mongrelized genres and media" (344, my emphasis).
96. de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive*; Bersani, *Freudian*; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Dean, *Beyond*; Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and The Queerness of Style* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
97. Ohi, *Henry*, 1.
98. *Ibid.*, my emphasis.
99. On the queerness of stickiness, see Ahmed, *Cultural*, 89–92. For a relevant analysis of postmodern stickiness, see Ngai, *Ugly*, 285–97.
100. Sedgwick, *Touching*, 160.
101. Freeman, *Time*, 13–14.
102. *Ibid.*, 14, my emphasis.
103. See Edelman, *No Future*. On the Lacanian conception of fantasy, see Slajov Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2008). Despite her provocative approach to fantasy in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), Teresa de Lauretis's more recent definition of queer writing follows the Lacanian subordination of the imaginary in favor of the drives. See Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future," *GLQ* 17, nos. 2–3 (2011): 243–63. Lauren Berlant permits more agency within the scene of fantasy. As she notes in *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), "without allowing for ambivalence, there is no flourishing" (12), and in *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), she locates fantasy as the means by which a subject "parses ambivalence in such a way that [she] is not defeated by it" (122). Yet Berlant tends to privilege the conservative function of fantasy, the way that it "make[s] the subject appear intelligible to herself and to others throughout the career of desire's unruly attentiveness" (*Ibid.*). For Berlant's dialogue with Edelman on fantasy, desire, and queer negativity, see Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable*.
104. Edelman, *No Future*, 33–34.
105. *Ibid.*, 24.
106. Deleuze, *Essays*, 3. Stressing the incipiently social nature of fabulation, Deleuze adds, "Literature is delirium, but delirium is not a father-mother affair: there is no delirium that does not pass through peoples, races, and tribes, and that does not haunt universal history. *All delirium is world-historical*" (4, my emphasis). For a relevant analysis of literary eroticism and the aesthetics of sexual fantasy, see Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1989).

107. On the literary representation of fantasy, see Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981); and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975).
108. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17.
109. *Ibid.*, 16.
110. Valerie Rohy, *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 110.
111. *Ibid.*, 118.
112. Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Mariner, 2006).
113. *Ibid.*, 206.
114. Similar to the professor's reading for correspondence, Alison's father dictates a mode of good reading that restricts Alison's contact with the text. When he enjoins her, "you damn well better identify with every page" of *Portrait of the Artist*, Alison feels that his "suffocating" "excitement began to leave little room for my own" (201). Here Bruce can experience an affective relationship to the texts of male modernism, but his aggressive enthusiasm saps Alison of her ability to enter these texts on her own, and it also narrows the event of reading to subjective identification.
115. *Ibid.*, 76.
116. *Ibid.*, 205.
117. *Ibid.*, 74.
118. *Ibid.*, 76.
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Ibid.*, 228.
121. *Ibid.*, 224.
122. *Ibid.*, original ellipsis.
123. *Ibid.*, 47.
124. *Ibid.*
125. *Ibid.*, 80–81, original ellipsis.