# INTRODUCTION: QUEERER THAN FICTION

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In the last paragraphs of Freud's essay on the paranoid Dr. Schreber, there is discussion of what Freud considers a "striking similarity" between Schreber's persecutory delusion and Freud's own theory. Freud was indeed later to generalize, famously, that "the delusions of paranoiacs have an unpalatable external similarity and internal kinship to the systems of our philosophers"—among whom he included himself.[1] For all his characteristic slyness, it may be true that the putative congruence between paranoia and theory was unpalatable to Freud. In the hands of subsequent thinkers, however, it has by now become less an embarrassment than a prescriptive article of faith: for literary and cultural critics, the prevailing theoretical challenge has been to find ever more subtle and searching ways of implementing a hermeneutic of suspicion. In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naive or complaisant.

Even aside from the prestige that now attaches to a hermeneutic of suspicion in critical theory as a whole, queer studies in particular has had a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative. Freud, of course, traced every instance of paranoia to the repression of same-sex desire, whether in women or in men. A chain of powerful, against-the-grain responses to Freud's argument, beginning with Guy Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire*, has established the paranoid stance as a uniquely privileged one for understanding not—as in the Freudian tradition—homosexuality itself, but rather precisely the mechanisms of homophobic and heterosexist enforcement against it.[2]

Subversive and demystifying parody, suspicious archaeologies of the present, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure: these infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies, and signs in turn of the special status that queer and antihomophobic inquiry seems to hold within that

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movement. If there is any obvious danger in the triumphalism of a hermeneutic of suspicion, it is that the broad consensual sweep of such methodological assumptions, the current near-profession-wide agreement about what constitutes narrative or explanation or adequate historicization, may, if it persists unquestioned, unintentionally impoverish the gene-pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills. The trouble with a narrow gene-pool, of course, is its diminished ability to respond to environmental (for instance, political) change. Another danger of the present paranoid consensus, however, is that it may require the disarticulation, disavowal, and misrecognition of other ways of reading—ways less oriented around suspicion—that are actually being practiced.

One premise of the present collection is that a closer, more respectful attention to past and present queer reading practices—the kind of attention these essays, in their different ways, all embody—will show how the reservoir of practices already in use crucially exceeds the theorizations of a consensual hermeneutic of suspicion. Many of these essays are, rightly, incisive and unerring in their methodical suspicion; but what more unites them is a very different impulse and history, which would be badly misrecognized under the currently available rubrics.

Perhaps instead of battening on the Freudian understanding of paranoia, for all its useful definitional linkage to homoerotic issues, it would be more descriptive here to use Melanie Klein's less differentiated, arguably less elegant concept of the paranoid position. The interest of Klein's concept lies, it seems to me, in her seeing the paranoid position always in the oscillatory context of a very different possible one, the depressive/reparative position.[3] For Klein's infant or adult, the paranoid position—understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety—is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by hateful and envious part-objects that one cannot help but ingest from the world around one. By contrast, the depressive/reparative position is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and briefly, succeeds in inhabiting: this is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or "repair" the murderous part-objects into something like a whole (though not necessarily like any preexisting whole). Once assembled to one's own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment in turn. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.

Love of a book, even a sinister book, love that generates out of concentrated meditation on its pieces a different and needed book; the transformative, frankly instrumental love of the artifacts of a culture, threatening though that culture itself may be: perhaps no impulse has less warrant than such love in the climate of a hermeneutic of suspicion. The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a culture is at present so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it's no wonder

few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, is in the limitations of the extant theoretical discourse rather than in the reparative motive itself. No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks.

To read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever take the reader by surprise: to a reparative reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because she has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.[4]

It seems to me that such practices of reparative reading may lie, barely recognized and little explored, at the heart of many histories of gay, lesbian, and queer intertextuality—including the intertextualities of the present collection. The queer-identified practice of camp, for example, has long been Exhibit A for critics who want to describe and privilege a hermeneutic of the most radical suspicion. Following an influential discussion of gender performance by Judith Butler, camp is currently understood as uniquely appropriate to the projects of parody, denaturalization, demystification, and mocking exposure of the elements and assumptions of a dominant culture; and the degree to which camping is motivated by love seems often to be understood only as the degree of its self-hating complicity with an oppressive status quo.[5] By this account, the X-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse in camp sees through to an unfleshed skeleton of the culture; the paranoid aesthetic, correspondingly, is one of minimalist elegance and conceptual economy.

The desire of the reparative impulse, on the other hand, is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self. To view camp as the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices is to be able to do better justice to many of the defining elements of classic camp performance: the startling, juicy displays of excess erudition, for example; the passionate, often hilarious antiquarianism, the prodigal production of alternate historiography; the "over"-attachment to fragmentary, marginal, waste, or leftover products; the rich, highly interruptive affective variety; the irrepressible fascination with ventriloquistic experimentation; the disorienting juxtapositions of present with past, and popular with high culture.

A glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment, unexplained upwellings of threat, contempt and longing cements together and animates the amalgam of powerful part-objects in such work as that of Ronald Firbank, Djuna Barnes, Joseph Cornell, Charles Ludlam, Jack Smith, John Waters, and Holly Hughes.

The very mention of of these names, some of them attaching to almost legendarily "paranoid" personalities, confirms, too, Klein's insistence that it is not people but mutable positions—or, I would want to say, practices—that can be divided between the paranoid and the reparative; it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices. And if the paranoid or the repressive/reparative positions operate on a smaller scale than the level of individual typology, they operate also on a larger scale, that of shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse.

Camp may be exemplary as a queer reparative practice, or it may simply be the only one that currently has a name. At any rate, these essays demonstrate that it is far from the only one. The surprise of this collection of work by lesbian and gay critics is that readers who have so much reason to be suspicious of culturally sanctioned fictional texts should, in the event, rely so little on the protocols of exposure or demystification. Instead, what there is most to learn here is the many ways in which readers succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture whose avowed desire has been not to sustain them.

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## NOTES

1 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey and tr. James Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-), 12:79, 17:261.

2 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, tr. Daniella Dangoor, preface by Jeffrey Weeks, intro. by Michael Moon (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1993).

3 Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Tavistock, 1957).

4 I don't mean to hypostatize, here, "the way it actually did" happen, or to deny how constructed a thing this "actually did" may be—within certain constraints. The realm of what *might have happened but didn't* is, however, ordinarily even wider and less constrained, and it seems conceptually important that the two not be collapsed; otherwise, the entire possibility of things' *happening differently* can be lost.

5 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), esp. pp. 142-49.