
Volume 52

Issue 2 *Honoring Eve: A Special Issue on the Work of
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*

Article 1

2010

Introduction

Erin Murphy

Boston University, ermurphy@bu.edu

J. Keith Vincent

Boston University, kvincent@bu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism>

Recommended Citation

Murphy, Erin and Vincent, J. Keith (2010) "Introduction," *Criticism*: Vol. 52: Iss. 2, Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol52/iss2/1>

INTRODUCTION

Erin Murphy and J. Keith Vincent

This special issue grew out of the event “Honoring Eve: A Symposium Celebrating the Work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,” which was held on 31 October 2009 at Boston University (BU), about six months after Sedgwick passed away on 12 April. More than two hundred people came to the symposium from all over the United States and as far away as Spain and Israel. They were not just academics, but artists, musicians, writers, and many others who had been touched by Sedgwick’s work. Within BU, faculty members from across the university prepared for the symposium by assigning Sedgwick’s work in courses whose diversity testifies to the breadth of her influence: from “Family Trouble: Contesting Kinship in Theory and Literature” to “Japanese Popular Culture” to “Buddhism in America” and the “New Testament Seminar on Gender and Christian Origins.” In honor of Sedgwick’s commitment to pedagogy and activism, in the week before the event we also held two workshops at which faculty members and one hundred undergraduates gathered to discuss her essay “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay.” Although this essay was written before many of these students were born, Sedgwick’s fiery insistence that the existence of gay people be understood not just as a fact to be tolerated but as a “positive desideratum, a needed condition of life”¹ remains just as powerful as when she wrote it in 1991.

The day itself began with introductory remarks by Hal Sedgwick (included here) in which he recalled their time in Boston when Eve taught at BU from 1981 to 1983. The symposium itself included four panels at which speakers were asked to address specific texts by Sedgwick that were chosen to represent the depth and breadth of her intellectual legacy in four areas: “Feminism and Queer Theory,” “Writing and Illness,” “Affect and Reparative Reading,” and “Reading Proust.” The essays in this issue are revised and, in some cases, expanded versions of the papers from these panels. The relevant Sedgwick texts were made available to the BU community on the symposium website, and participants were encouraged to



Figure 1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, September 2008. Rubin Museum of Art, New York City. Photograph by H. A. Sedgwick.

read or reread them in advance. This helped focus discussions on Sedgwick and her work both during the panels and the breaks as the notes of her inimitable prose rang fresh in everyone's heads. The speakers stood in various degrees of intellectual and personal proximity to Eve: some were her peers, some her students, many were close friends, while others knew her primarily through her writing. Those who knew Eve personally knew her from various points in her life—some from her days at BU, some from her time at Duke, and some from her years at the CUNY Graduate Center. The result was quite a multifaceted picture of Eve, combining rigorous intellectual engagement with her work with personal anecdotes of her as teacher, reader, mentor, and friend.

Many people commented during the day and after on how different "Honoring Eve" was from the typical academic symposium. There was no posturing and no posing, and the discussions were satisfying both on an intellectual and an emotional level. Some said that it felt like a cross between a wake and a conference. Although many participants knew each other already, most were strangers to one another, and most had known

Sedgwick only through her writing. But, perhaps because it was Eve who brought us all together, there was a sense of intimacy and connection in the room that, we like to think, would have made her very happy.

The texts around which the symposium was organized come from different moments in Sedgwick's thinking, yet they all display her characteristic commitment to recognizing, honoring, and creating deep engagements and connections, both to texts and to people, engagements and connections that do not fit into our most told narratives or that partly fit but end up depleted by being squeezed into those narratives. Given this commitment, it seems apt that organizing this event in Sedgwick's honor led those of us in the BU Junior Faculty Gender and Sexuality Studies Group (Gina Cogan, Anna Henchman, Jennifer Knust, Suzanne O'Brien, Carrie Preston, Shelly Rambo, Jessica Sewell, Deborah Swedberg, among others) to discover one of those rich connections, a connection about which we should have already known but that had been hidden. Our group came into existence in the fall of 2007, when junior faculty members from throughout the university came together to read and discuss the latest scholarship in gender and sexuality studies. It was not until we began organizing this event in the summer of 2009 that we learned that one of our members, Deborah Swedberg, had belonged to another group that had formed at BU exactly twenty-five years earlier. That group was the collective ID 450, which Sedgwick helped to found in 1982. In her piece here, Swedberg describes the origins and the work of ID 450. Part of that work included the writing of sexual fantasies through a shared process called "writing the plural." In 1984 and 1986, Sedgwick took part in performed readings of these fantasies. As part of the symposium, several members of the group staged a reading, which included writings from those original performances, as well as some never before staged. We include the performance text from the symposium here, a text that marks an early stage in Sedgwick's thinking about sexuality and yet another dimension of her experiments in writing, thinking, and connecting.

Even though more than two decades separate the formation of our group and ID 450, what some may describe as a generational gap, they do not fit into a generational narrative—this is no family story. There are deep connections between the groups (common topics of investigation, an interest in intellectual collaboration, a belief in the enabling effects of communal support and humor for serious inquiry) but crucial differences, as well. (For instance, our group has both nonfemale members and institutional support, two things ID 450 did not.) The idea of these two groups connecting across time in a way that defies conceptions of inheritance seems to speak to the kind of queer possibility that Sedgwick writes about

throughout her work, the kind of connection that can be made in the absence of traditional generational narratives. So we love that this event in Eve's name and Eve's spirit provided the occasion for these two groups to recognize each other, enabling us to forge that connection more powerfully.

In the essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," Sedgwick discussed, through the very personal example of her relationships with three friends and their experiences of mortality, the kinds of connections that are possible in the absence of "normal" generational narrative, the kinds of identifications that happen when "an older person doesn't love a younger as someone who will someday be where she now is, or vice versa."² As she puts it, this is the connection that can happen when "no one is, so to speak, passing on the family name."³ Instead, the connection she describes is something else: "It is one another immediately, one another as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further, whom we each must learn to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company."⁴ This special issue attempts to capture and continue some of the work of bearing company inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on that Halloween in Boston.

As those of us writing in the collection attempt to honor the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, we are not passing down a name, but the issue of naming does arise as an index of some of the many different forms of intimacy she created throughout her life. Some of the contributors refer to her as "Eve," some as "Sedgwick," many as both. For most, these choices are implicit, whereas others comment on what these different names signify in their writing. The different ways the following texts negotiate these relations are subtle and powerful, and we leave them to speak for themselves on this point. Our own intimacy with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is mostly textual. Though profoundly influenced by Sedgwick's writing, Erin Murphy never met the writer in person. And Keith Vincent met her only on a few occasions in New York City, a dinner after she spoke on Proust and a few memorable conversations here and there. As co-coordinator, along with Leland Monk, of BU's premier lecture series in literature, he had invited Eve to speak at BU and corresponded with her about her plans to visit. She was excited to return to BU to reconnect with old friends and scheduled to deliver a lecture with the lovely title "The Middle Ranges of Agency." But the talk was scheduled for April 2009 and by February she e-mailed to say she wouldn't make it. The funds put aside for that lecture became the seed money for "Honoring Eve."

The day concluded with two performances that both honored and represented the experimental breadth of Sedgwick's work and love, or as she might have said, the wonderful mix of the two.⁵ The ID 450 reading,

which demonstrated Sedgwick's interest in communal writing and the reimagining of subjectivity, was followed by a showstopping video of Eve as Mama Cass lip-synching "Dream a Little Dream of Me." The original occasion of the second performance was one of the many drag shows that she hosted at her home while teaching at Duke. Sedgwick's gyrations were matched by hoots, hollers, and applause from an audience of students and friends who were just as riveted by her presence on screen as we have all been for years by her writing. Responding to Eve, the guests in Durham and the crowd in Boston years later shared a moment of intimacy that confounded temporal bounds. The juxtaposition of the "Writing the Plural" performance with Eve as Mama Cass also spoke volumes about the contagious, critical, world-making fun Sedgwick had with performance, identity, fantasy, and sexuality.

FEMINISM AND QUEER THEORY

Though it does not yet deploy the term "queer" as its own, Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) helped inaugurate the field of queer studies by insisting

that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and it will assume that the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.⁶

Following the insights of her groundbreaking *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), which had mobilized a "fusion of feminist and gay male preoccupations and interrogations,"⁷ Sedgwick challenged herself and her readers to try something new. In Axiom 2 of *Epistemology*, she offered a paradoxically open-ended declaration: "antihomophobic theory is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can't know in advance how they will be different."⁸ By modeling the difficult and vulnerable work of exploring that which one can't know in advance, Sedgwick fostered "our ability to arrive at understandings of sexuality that respect a certain irreducibility in it to the terms and relations of gender."⁹ Via the deliberately mismatched and somewhat anachronistic pairing of "Feminism and Queer Theory," this section explores this early stage

of Sedgwick's work through readings of her 1990 *The Epistemology of the Closet*.¹⁰

In their different ways, all three pieces in this section provide a context for *Epistemology of the Closet*, providing a window into the exciting intellectual world that both produced and was produced by Sedgwick's earliest work. Together they constitute a kind of academic ode to the 1980s. Perhaps inspired by the occasion, or by Sedgwick's own mobilizations of the first person, each writer describes his or her first encounter with Eve and with *Epistemology of the Closet*. Carolyn Williams recounts helping to hire Sedgwick and their shared experiences in ID 450 in the years in which *Epistemology* was first taking shape. In his prefatory remarks at the symposium, Lee Edelman describes meeting Eve through a letter he wrote her about her work, and explains how his essay represents a return to that letter, which "makes clear the loving and respectful differences that animated our work throughout our careers."¹¹ Siobhan Somerville mines her personal archive to share the notes she scribbled during her first semester of graduate school on a handout from a conference at which Sedgwick presented a paper charting the first chapter of *Epistemology*.

The proximity and fondness that marks these contributions, however, does not conceal the provocative nature of Sedgwick's work, nor the debates *Epistemology* spurred. Describing her work in *Between Men*, Sedgwick writes of rejecting "the development of a feminocentric field of women's studies in which the subjects, paradigms, and political thrust, as well as the researchers themselves might all be identified with the female."¹² In *Epistemology*, she went on to help open up a space to think sexuality independently of gender that many feminists found exciting because it provided a "welcome relief" from the "injunctions to identify with and as women."¹³ Despite this excitement, some feminists found this new work simultaneously worrying because, as Biddy Martin claimed, its understanding of the putative mobility of sexuality seemed to depend on an image of gender and race as fixed. By continuing to explore and query the interrelations of gender, race, and sexuality in *Epistemology*, the essays in this section demonstrate the richness of the text and its undiminished relevance.

Describing how the conceptualizations of these two early books of Sedgwick's were emerging simultaneously during those heady, though professionally insecure, days at BU, Carolyn Williams's essay emphasizes "the continuity . . . in [Sedgwick's] theoretical project from the emphasis on gender in *Between Men* to the emphasis on sexuality in *Epistemology of the Closet*."¹⁴ After surveying Axioms 1 and 2,¹⁵ Williams follows Sedgwick in ending her discussion with a consideration of the "homophobic

construction, by men, of the figure of *the woman who can't know*, as the supposed ultimate consumer for presentations of male sexuality."¹⁶ Williams draws our attention to the way that, at the close of *Epistemology*, "Eve returns to gender—her own," asserting "herself as a knowing subject, occupying the ground of her knowing."¹⁷ By pointing us to Sedgwick's ambivalent occupation of the position of the knowing woman at the end of the book, Williams implicitly highlights the complex performance of gender that gets lost in Martin's critique of *Epistemology*'s supposed fixing of gender, and reveals the ways in which the text maintains its feminist commitments.

Lee Edelman's essay also turns to the figure of the knowing woman as a key problematic in *Epistemology*. Crucially, Edelman begins by reminding us that Sedgwick does not deploy the word "queer" in this book that is so often cited as a founding text of queer theory. He calls upon us to pause at the moment before this word was possible and warns against erasing the terms that Sedgwick's *Epistemology* uses to name its theoretical practice—"gay-male oriented" and "antihomophobic"—both of which stand in an overdetermined relation to the "woman who knows." Emphasizing the way that Sedgwick posits "gay-male oriented" or "antihomophobic" "in a troubled and troubling relation to feminist discourse," Edelman argues that, despite her later investment in the reparative mode, much of the power of her work can be found in its paranoid qualities.¹⁸ With this, Edelman turns his own powers of paranoid reading on the text to reveal how the book betrays "its own deep investment in knowing"¹⁹ despite its incisive critique of "the terrible one-directionality of the culture's spectacularizing of gay men."²⁰ Unfolding a close reading of the three biblical figures of Esther, Eve, and Lot's wife, Edelman analyzes the relation of both Sedgwick and feminism to the position of the knowing woman, offering a much darker reading of this position than Williams. The implicit tension between Williams's and Edelman's interpretations of the role of feminism in *Epistemology* neither mirrors nor negates the early feminist critique of the book, but instead points to the fact that the power of this text lies not only in its explicit claims but also in its open struggle with the problems it addresses, suggesting that it will continue to provoke new work.

Siobhan Somerville's return to *Epistemology* in the wake of recent critiques of the unacknowledged but inherent racialization of the closet in the text helps to chart possible directions for such new work. Revisiting claims that *Epistemology* flattens out feminism and ignores race, Somerville's essay uncovers the text's implicit relation to the critiques of feminists of color that had "dismantled the viability of gender as a category undif-

ferentiated by race.”²¹ Rather than denying the racialization of the closet, Somerville returns to the moments in the text when Sedgwick mobilizes race as part of her analysis, arguing that “[i]n her very attempt to isolate and expose the specificity of the structure of the sexual closet, and in her own attempts to distance her project from feminist theory, Sedgwick inadvertently—or is it strategically?—closets race.”²² By emphasizing the closeting of race rather than the racializing of the closet, Somerville’s essay reimagines the relevance of the concept of the closet and shows once again how the performance of Sedgwick’s text exceeds its explicit arguments.

WRITING AND ILLNESS

The next series of essays grow out of the panel that explored Sedgwick’s formally dazzling 1999 “little memoir,” *A Dialogue on Love* (1999). The opening of this book first appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, in a special issue on intimacy that took “on as a problem how to articulate the ways the utopian, optimism-sustaining versions of intimacy meet the normative practices, fantasies, institutions, and ideologies that organize people’s worlds.”²³ Sedgwick approaches this challenge by tracing her own psychotherapy, attempting, in moderator Suzanne O’Brien’s words,

to render in and through writing an intersubjective space in which to reconstitute and maintain an open, desiring, resilient self—a space for both herself and her readers. Interweaving prose, poetry, and her therapist’s notes, she demonstrates how such a space can endow writers and readers with an empowering sense of “being alone but not alone” in their efforts to deal with illness, loss, and death, without being overwhelmed by their attendant anxieties and anguish.²⁴

Given the polyvocal nature of the work, it is no surprise that all three of the essays in this section engage Sedgwick’s text by placing her in conversation with other texts, including lectures from Michel Foucault, essays by Virginia Woolf, the genre-bending work of Gertrude Stein, and sociological treatises by Pierre Bourdieu.

Ed Cohen takes up the intriguing issue of Sedgwick’s curiosity, placing her thought in dialogue with the work of Foucault, particularly *Le Courage de la Vérité* (*The Courage of Truth*), the volume of lectures that Foucault delivered in the months before he died from AIDS in 1984. Cohen makes the claim that, despite Foucault’s tremendous insight into truth, the lec-

tures pay little attention to the courage their title invokes as necessary for the pursuit of truth. For Cohen, *A Dialogue on Love* does what Foucault's text does not—it reveals “the *coeur*—the heart—that is at the heart of courage.”²⁵ Drawing on Foucault's distinction between a philosophical intellectual practice, which understands knowledge as an apprehension of an always already existing truth, and a spiritual one, which conceives of knowing as performing “exercises and transformations on the self that enable the self to consider and to appreciate the truth as such,” Cohen argues that *A Dialogue* is both “spiritual precept” and “philosophical practice.”²⁶ Though not explicitly engaged with Edelman's critique of the knowing author of *Epistemology*, Cohen's reading of the pursuit of truth “as a risk of the self *before* the other” shows how Sedgwick continues to interrogate her own position of knowing through formal experiment in *A Dialogue*.²⁷

By beginning his essay with a dishy secondhand anecdote about an encounter between Ian Watt, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf, Michael Moon subtly draws our attention to the importance of form to *A Dialogue*. Moon explicitly includes the story of the two modernist giants, Stein and Woolf, in order to read their work alongside Sedgwick's text as “comparably rich sites of writing that register the effects of pain and illness on thinking and writing.”²⁸ Implicitly, Moon's invocation of these earlier writers calls attention to the literariness of Sedgwick's work, effectively placing her in the pantheon of these powerfully experimental and potently queer writers. Despite these connections, Moon is ultimately disappointed in his search for “something uniquely perceptive . . . about the relation of the experience of illness to writing” in Woolf and Stein, but finds it in spades in Sedgwick.²⁹ He explores Sedgwick's engagements with form as he discusses “illness as both a circumstance and a subject of Sedgwick's work.”³⁰ Pointing to Sedgwick's increasing recognition of the mind-body split as perhaps “the most pernicious” dualism, Moon's essay concludes by celebrating the “world-making powers” of her writing.³¹ Having evoked the triumvirate of Stein, Woolf, and Sedgwick, Moon leaves us to consider Sedgwick's experimental writing as one of the sites for challenging this dualism by imagining a much denser permeation of body and mind, opening up new space for thinking illness and queerness together.

When we invited Cindy Patton to discuss *A Dialogue on Love* as part of the panel “Writing and Illness,” we did so because of her groundbreaking work on AIDS. We had not considered the perversity of asking the only scholar at the symposium not centered in literary studies to discuss Sedgwick's most literary work. Of course, the potential of such a happy accident would not have been lost on Sedgwick, whose work never abided by

disciplinary rules, and *Dialogue's* deep engagement with issues of form and genre make it a particularly rich site for such an interdisciplinary investigation. Intriguingly, Patton brings her own disciplinary struggles, as well as the struggles Pierre Bourdieu describes as characteristic of all academics, to bear on this query. Beginning the essay by introducing the difference between writing as poesis and writing as communication, Patton draws on the productive tension between literature and sociology to analyze the conflict between the family and the individual. Patton reads *A Dialogue* as a kind of case study or, as she more aptly calls it, "a poignant window onto the 'cleft habitus'" typical of academics from the middling classes.³² Patton explores the text's engagement with feeling "out of place" in relation to both the family and academia, drawing on Bourdieu's sense of the intersections of these two institutions. By bringing together Sedgwick's poetic memoir with the sociology of Bourdieu, Patton not only provides the sociohistorical or historicosocial reading she explicitly promises but also offers a poesis of her own. The encounter between Sedgwick and Bourdieu stages a kind of double vision, different from but still akin to the dual point of view Bourdieu calls for when he advocates the simultaneous consideration of the individual and the institution in order to understand the way "the world" is "inflected in the immediate."³³ Through this provocative pairing, Patton explores *A Dialogue's* struggles with the compulsory quality of "family feeling" as it tries to imagine "how one might sometimes love without obligation."³⁴

AFFECT AND REPARATIVE READING

This panel discussed the relation between paranoid and reparative reading based on the essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," first published in 1997.³⁵ In the initial description of the panel, we suggested that one could read Sedgwick's work as having shifted over the course of her career away from a "paranoid" style that she shared with most early queer theorists and toward a model of what she called "reparative" reading inspired by Silvan Tomkins and Melanie Klein. If paranoid reading was defined by what Heather Love in her essay calls "a way of disavowing affect in order to claim ownership over truth,"³⁶ reparative reading was more attuned to the modest pleasures of close reading, "weak theory," and texture. The best criticism, as Sedgwick wrote, however, knew how to allow the paranoid and the reparative to "interdigitate."³⁷

True to Sedgwick's own resistance to both binary thinking and linear teleologies, all of the essays in this section more or less reject the notion of



Figure 2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, July 2008. Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Photograph by H. A. Sedgwick.

a fundamental shift and emphasize instead the continuity with which the paranoid and the reparative impulses were always in some sense “interdigitating” in her writing. With regard to the “You’re So Paranoid” essay, Jonathan Flatley notes that “it’s not all friendly and reparative in there,”³⁸ and Love points to “whipsmart exclamations” and “moments of pique” that, she deadpans, “do not sound a reparative note.”³⁹ If this later Sedgwick still has use for the paranoid mode, Tavia Nyong’o reminds us that she was always also interested in “opening out the world for a wider range of response than a hermeneutics of suspicion allows.”⁴⁰

All three essays address how Sedgwick’s thinking about and through affect helped enable a new theory of reading and a dazzling rethinking of what we think “theory” is and does. For Flatley, Sedgwick’s “theory” is shaped by “a palpable, even flamboyant, effort to make her readers not just smarter, but happier, too.”⁴¹ As her reader and her student, he writes that her discussion of affect theory provided “welcome assistance in understanding an aspect of my own daily emotional life I had previously found convoluted and confusing.”⁴² Through a personal anecdote and a short discussion of his work on Warhol, Flatley sketches a sort of reparative theory of imitation inspired by Sedgwick’s example. His part-comic

description of a harrowing job talk at Harvard seems to offer evidence for Cindy Patton's biting (and hilarious?) claim about academic life: "Feeling 'out of place' is a cliché of youthful ennui, but for academics, at least, the sensation stretches into a lifetime of misery."⁴³ But Flatley's account of what it was like to study with Sedgwick offers a way to rethink the structural conditions of the academic world, conditions that produce a "suffering that we might be able to stop passing on to our students."⁴⁴

Both Love and Nyong'o feel interpellated by the aggressive second-person pronoun in the essay's title, and each responds with a different defense of paranoid reading. As Love grapples with what is "enabling" about Sedgwick's work, she finds in the paranoid reading it describes and in some ways enacts "the call to acknowledge the negativity and the aggression at the heart of psychic life" without which, she argues, "thinking is impossible."⁴⁵ Noting the interdependence of the schizoid and depressive positions in Melanie Klein's work, Love emphasizes a similar interdependence between Sedgwick's paranoid and reparative reading. Recognizing the paranoid aspects of Sedgwick's work, moreover, is also a way of "de-idealizing" her and dispelling the beatific aura she is apt to assume if we read her *only* in a reparative mode.

If for critics like Edelman or Love the usefulness of the paranoid position has to do with its grounding in the negativity of psychic life, Nyong'o theorizes how it can have positive and world-making effects, as well. Through a reading of metastasizing rumors about homosexuality and other scandals in R. Kelly's video series *Trapped in the Closet*, Nyong'o shows how the paranoid sense that "people are talking about you" can exert not just "rigid and isolative effects" but also "draw together and conjugate alternative social relations."⁴⁶ Departing from Edelman's focus on the unequal power relations around knowing and not knowing, Nyong'o sketches an account of the pliable dynamics of the production of knowingness in African American culture. His essay also follows up on Siobhan Somerville's identification of the possible affordances in Sedgwick's work for theorizing race. Allowing the reparative and the paranoid to interdigitate, Nyong'o suggests, is good practice for thinking about the discourse of race, where "the interdigitation of dualistic and nondualistic modes of knowingness are starkly apparent."⁴⁷

READING PROUST

As Leland Monk, the moderator for the Proust panel, wrote in its initial description, "The work of Marcel Proust was an abiding concern for Eve

Sedgwick throughout her writing career, shaping her understanding of what it means to be a writer and to have a career.”⁴⁸ The essays in this section focus on two texts from two different moments in Sedgwick’s life of reading and writing about Proust: “Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet,” the concluding chapter of *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), and “The Weather in Proust,” an unpublished talk written around 2005. While both texts beautifully evoke the pleasures of reading Proust, “Spectacle” concentrates on the epistemological consequences of the homo/hetero divide while “The Weather” flings open the binary to let in hundreds of “little gods,” along with a lot of fresh air. In some ways, these two essays exemplify the “paranoid” and “reparative” modes discussed in the panel on affect, and the dates of their publication might be taken to suggest a shift in her work from one to the other.

As Joseph Litvak shows, however, a productive tension between the two modes is already there in the earlier essay and in Proust’s work itself. In Proust, it is the “worldly wit inseparable from homophobic knowingness” associated with the vicious gossip Mme. Verdurin and her circle that exemplifies the paranoid mode.⁴⁹ If Sedgwick’s own position as a “woman who knows” more about homosexuality than homosexuals themselves might seem in some ways to mirror that of the Verdurin circle, the same can be said for Proust’s narrator, whose inexhaustible but disavowed curiosity about the sexuality of Baron de Charlus and other queer characters sometimes threatens to make him into “just another bitchy character.”⁵⁰ The difference, Litvak argues, has to do with a risky willingness to imitate the desires of those one is observing or about whom one writes. If, for Mme. Verdurin and her set, *knowingness* is the engine of ridicule that seals the separation of self and other, Sedgwick and Proust’s narrator turn their voyeurism into an exhibitionist spectacle. This symbiosis of voyeurism and exhibitionism recalls Cohen’s discussion of Sedgwick’s *curiosity*, which he describes as a willingness to risk “the self in order to venture towards the truth.”⁵¹ As Litvak shows, of course, where there is risk there is also pleasure. In Sedgwick’s Proust, Mme. Verdurin’s contemptuous cackle is met by a contagious giggle, which yields a “blissful and hilarious atmosphere of truth-telling” in which the reader can “float.”⁵² What Litvak refers to as Sedgwick’s ability to be “galvanized by Proust’s mimetic nerve” echoes Flatley’s description of her abundant and enthusiastic availability “for various practices of resemblance, identification, and imitation.”⁵³ And while Litvak concentrates on Sedgwick’s early work on Proust, his emphasis on the importance of atmosphere resonates with the later essay, where the weather, as an open system that, with the breath, passes freely in and out of the body, confounds the division of self and other.

Bill Goldstein, who had the enviable pleasure of taking Sedgwick's yearlong Proust seminar not once but *twice*, also mentions that giggle "and how giving into the desire to laugh animated Eve's idea of Proust."⁵⁴ Indeed, it is laughter and fun that seem most to have characterized Goldstein's experience of reading Proust with Sedgwick: "What could be more fun," she proclaimed, "than to spend a year reading Proust?"⁵⁵ It is also fun to read Goldstein's descriptions of Sedgwick as a teacher. One of her techniques he describes—reading Proust out loud in class until someone knocks on the table because she is moved to comment—not only sounds like a superb teaching technique, but also perfectly exemplifies Sedgwick's critical and pedagogical commitment both to the text and to enabling the voices of others. Goldstein shares many of Sedgwick's strategies for teaching Proust, all of which were designed to defetishize it and to deroutinize the way it is usually read. He also relates Sedgwick's thoughts about what to read *after* Proust. The list includes Ivy Compton Burnett, the author of a string of very similar novels about "hilarious fake-Edwardian types." We can almost hear her giggling when she writes, "The incredulous, brutal, helpless laughter she prompts is very Proustian, I think."⁵⁶

More perhaps than some of the other essays, Katherine Hawkins's piece recognizes a certain development or transformation across the span of Sedgwick's career. She describes it as an "optimistic, expansive movement . . . from the propositional mode of knowingness . . . towards themes of refreshment and rebirth."⁵⁷ The culmination of this movement, she argues, can be found in the intersection of Sedgwick's art and her increasingly Buddhist-inflected readings of Proust. In carefully layered readings of several examples of Sedgwick's textile and book art, all of which engage Proust's work, Hawkins shows how they explore the relations between closed and open systems, body and mind, paranoid and reparative modes, the individual and the supraindividual. Hawkins's take on Sedgwick's tactile turn also illuminates a new approach, inspired by Buddhist teachings of emptiness, to the overcoming of identity. Hawkins goes on to describe what she calls the "almost indistinguishable attractions to nonidentity and nonbeing" evident in Sedgwick's work as what might differentiate her from Proust.⁵⁸

In his essay, with the advantage of a deep familiarity with all of Sedgwick's late unpublished writing, Jonathan Goldberg fleshes out the connection between an attraction to nonidentity and nonbeing and the creative process. He finds it in a pivotal unpublished essay titled either "Come as You Are" or "Reality and Realization" in which Sedgwick "breathhtakingly sketches the difference between an order of propositional truth that is necessarily bound to its opposite—what is false—and a reality



Figure 3. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Elephant Sanctuary near Ubud, Bali, September 2003. Photograph by H. A. Sedgwick.

project tied not to *'what's true'* but to *'what's realized.'*"⁵⁹ In ways that echo Hawkins's discussion, Goldberg explains that one place that Sedgwick explored this "reality project" was in her art—through a creative process that emphasized the materiality of language, using sometimes unreadable fragments of Proust's text, for example, printed using a labor-intensive technique that Hawkins describes called monoprinting. Unlike language alone, which was prone to propositional truths and dualisms, the use of material objects in her art (what Hawkins called "a bald concretization of the processes of creative work") reminded Sedgwick, and her audience, of a reality that "presses on us, resists our attempts to reduce or refuse it, chastens grandiosity or fantasies of omnipotence."⁶⁰ At the same time, however, the notion of *realization* held out the possibility of a different relation to reality: rather than analyzing, categorizing, or theorizing it, her art was about *realizing* it. Goldberg's piece provides an inspiring account of Sedgwick's unpublished work, much of which was about Proust, and which Goldberg, as her literary executor, is currently compiling for publication. Despite the relative absence of sexuality as an explicit theme

in these works and their increasingly spiritual orientation, Goldberg assures us that these late texts remain uncompromisingly queer and, in some cases, activist, as well. They contain valuable resources for contesting the forms of divisive identity politics that persist today, and will be sources of powerful inspiration for the queer theory of the future.

The videotaped proceedings of the symposium, as well as other materials are available at the symposium website at www.bu.edu/honoringeve.

Erin Murphy, associate professor of English at Boston University, has published Familial Forms: Politics and Genealogy in Seventeenth-Century English Literature (University of Delaware Press, 2010). Her new book project rethinks concepts of "identity" in women's English Civil War writing in light of new military history, as well as exploring the appropriation of these writings in later moments of war, including our own.

J. Keith Vincent is assistant professor of Japanese and Comparative Literature at Boston University. He is coeditor of Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture (Routledge, 2010) and is finishing a book titled "Two-Timing Modernity: Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction."

NOTES

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids up Gay" (1991), in *Tendencies*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 154–66, quotation on 161.
2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51, quotation on 149.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. In *A Dialogue on Love*, Eve Sedgwick quotes herself as saying "What I'm proudest of, I guess, is having a life where work and love are impossible to tell apart" (*A Dialogue on Love* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1999], 23).
6. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.
7. *Ibid.*, 15.
8. *Ibid.*, 27.
9. *Ibid.*, 16.
10. The relationship between feminism and queer theory in Sedgwick's work was always one of productive tension. The mismatched pair of "feminism and queer theory" in place of "feminist theory and queer theory" helps to preserve the awkwardness of either term as a sufficient description of her project. Though Sedgwick's use of the term "queer theory" postdates *Epistemology*, we deploy it here in order to evoke the on-going

reception history of her text. The terminology of “feminism,” “gay-male theory,” and “antihomophobic analysis” used in *Epistemology*, illuminated by Lee Edelman’s reading of it below, should not be subsumed by this title, and continues to challenge understandings of “queer theory.”

11. Lee Edelman, oral remarks at “Honoring Eve: A Symposium Celebrating the Work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009),” 31 October 2009.
12. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, preface to *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), vii–x, quotation on vii–viii.
13. Bidy Martin, *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian* (London: Routledge, 1996), 105.
14. Carolyn Williams, “The Boston Years: Eve’s Humor and Her Anger” (in this issue), 180.
15. “Axiom 1: People are different” and “Axiom 2: The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender; correspondingly, antihomophobic inquiry is not coextensive with feminist inquiry. But we can’t know in advance how they will be different” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 22, 27).
16. Williams, “The Boston Years,” 182.
17. *Ibid.*, 183.
18. Lee Edelman, “Unnamed: Eve’s *Epistemology*” (in this issue), 185.
19. *Ibid.*, 187; and Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 60.
20. Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 60.
21. Siobhan B. Somerville, “Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Racial Closet” (in this issue), 195.
22. *Ibid.*, 198.
23. Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” in “Intimacy,” ed. Lauren Berlant, special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 281–88, quotation on 282.
24. Suzanne O’Brien at “Honoring Eve,” 31 October 2009.
25. Ed Cohen, “The Courage of Curiosity, or the Heart of Truth (A Mash-up)” (in this issue), 204.
26. *Ibid.*, 206.
27. *Ibid.*, 204.
28. Michael Moon, “Psychosomatic? Mental and Physical Pain in Eve Sedgwick’s Writing” (in this issue), 211.
29. *Ibid.*, 210.
30. *Ibid.*, 211.
31. *Ibid.*, 212.
32. Cindy Patton, “Love without the Obligation to Love” (in this issue), 217.
33. *Ibid.*, 217.
34. *Ibid.*, 221.
35. We cite the title under which the essay appeared in *Touching Feeling* (see note 2). The latter half of the title originally read “You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This

- Introduction Is About You” when it was published as the introduction to the edited volume *Novel Gazing*. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 1–40.
36. Heather Love, “Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (in this issue), 237.
 37. Sedgwick, “You’re So Paranoid,” 145.
 38. Jonathan Flatley, “Unlike Eve Sedgwick” (in this issue), 226.
 39. Love, “Truth and Consequences,” 238.
 40. Tavia Nyong’o, “Trapped in the Closet with Eve” (in this issue), 245.
 41. Flatley, “Unlike Eve Sedgwick,” 225.
 42. *Ibid.*, 226.
 43. Patton, “Love without the Obligation,” 218.
 44. *Ibid.*, 222n1.
 45. Love, “Truth and Consequences,” 238.
 46. Nyong’o, “Trapped in the Closet,” 246.
 47. *Ibid.*, 246.
 48. Lee Monk, Honoring Eve website, www.bu.edu/honoringeve/.
 49. Joseph Litvak, “Sedgwick’s Nerve” (in this issue), 254.
 50. *Ibid.*, 257.
 51. Cohen, “Courage of Curiosity,” 206.
 52. Litvak, “Sedgwick’s Nerve,” 261; and Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 240.
 53. Litvak, “Sedgwick’s Nerve,” 260; and Flatley, “Unlike Eve Sedgwick,” 229.
 54. Bill Goldstein, “Some Scenes in Proust” (in this issue), 263.
 55. Sedgwick, cited in *ibid.*, 265.
 56. *Ibid.*, 268.
 57. Katherine Hawkins, “Re-creating Eve: Sedgwick’s Art and the Practice of Renewal” (in this issue), 277.
 58. *Ibid.*, 279.
 59. Jonathan Goldberg, “On the Eve of the Future” (in this issue), 283.
 60. Hawkins, “Re-creating Eve,” 279; and Goldberg, “On the Eve of the Future,” 287.