

# **Mess and Proximity: reflections on research integrity when researching work we love.**

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# Part 1: feelings, leaking, hope



*Routledge Series in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Theatre  
and Performance*

# THEIR MAJESTY

**DRAG PERFORMANCE AND QUEER  
COMMUNITIES IN LONDON**

Joe Parslow





# Part 2: on care and love

## Chapter 4

# PARANOID READING AND REPARATIVE READING, OR, YOU'RE SO PARANOID, YOU PROBABLY THINK THIS ESSAY IS ABOUT YOU



Sometime back in the middle of the first decade of the AIDS epidemic, I was picking the brains of a friend of mine, the activist scholar Cindy Patton, about the probable natural history of HIV. This was at a time when speculation was ubiquitous about whether the virus had been deliberately engineered or spread, whether HIV represented a plot or experiment by the U.S. military that had gotten out of control, or perhaps that was behaving exactly as it was meant to. After hearing a lot from her about the geography and economics of the global traffic in blood products, I finally, with some eagerness, asked Patton what she thought of these sinister rumors about the virus's origin. "Any of the early steps in its spread could have been either accidental or deliberate," she said. "But I just have trouble getting interested

## Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading

*Heather Love (bio)*

Perhaps the most common description of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work is *enabling*—I have used it myself many times to describe her effect on me. But I sometimes wonder whether I know what this word means. The problem could be overdetermination: there are so many things I might mean. Insofar as Sedgwick helped to launch queer literary studies, she played a significant role in allowing me to have a job that I could tolerate in academia, or even in a profession at all; along with a handful of others, she helped to make it possible for me to live a queer life that I could never have imagined. In addition to this most direct sense in which I have been enabled, there is also the fact that Sedgwick in her work explicitly sought to clear intellectual and affective space for others—to grant permission. She really knew how to reach out and touch someone. Reading her work tends to open unexpected conceptual possibilities, ways of thinking, gestures, and tones. I think this sense of opening or enlargement is what Judith Butler has in mind when she observes that an encounter with Sedgwick's work has "made her more capacious": she writes that reading and teaching Sedgwick "has moved her to think otherwise . . . and . . . it has demanded that I think in a way that I did not know that thought could do—and still remain thought."<sup>1</sup>

“rigid, grim, single-minded, self-defeating, circular, reductive, hypervigilant, scouringly thorough, contemptuous, sneering, risk-averse, cruel, monopolistic, and terrible.”

[...]

“kind of reading [which] contrasts with familiar academic protocols like maintaining critical distance, outsmarting (and other forms of one-upmanship), refusing to be surprised (or if you are, then not letting on), believing the hierarchy, becoming boss”

**Love, 2010: 236-237**

“...we should read [Sedgwick’s essay] reparatively, that is to say, meeting Sedgwick halfway. Reparation in the essay is on the side of multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love”

**Love, 2010: 237**



“What [Sedgwick’s] essay argues, and what it performs is the impossibility of choosing between [paranoid and reparative readings]. So many of us feel compelled to answer Sedgwick’s call to reparation, which cracks us out of academic business as usual and promises good things both for Sedgwick and for us. But I also think we need to answer the call to paranoia and aggression. Sedgwick taught me to let the affect in, but it’s clear that by doing so I won’t only be letting the sunshine in”



“Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organise the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realise 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 different from the way it actually did.”

“And that’s love too.”

**Love, 2010: 24**

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