theories and methodologies

On the Eve of the Future

JONATHAN GOLDBERG

JUST A FEW DAYS AFTER EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK'S DEATH LAST APRIL 12, I RECEIVED AN E-MAIL FROM LEE EDELMAN. "I SOMETIMES think," he wrote, "that Eve was the only person who really thought this day would come." Lee's "really" resonates with a talk Eve gave a decade ago. I don't recall that she shared it with me at the time she wrote it, or I may have forgotten, not wanting to take in what she was saying. The piece was made available to me as Eve's literary executor, a task I agreed to several years ago in something of the same state of mind: not wanting to accept what I knew I was agreeing to, not wanting to believe what Eve realized would come.[1] I'm aiming now to put together a volume of Eve's writing that represents her work since *Touching Feeling* appeared in 2003. Thanks to David Kosofsky, I have on one of those mass storage devices the contents of Eve's computers; there I found "Reality and Realization," the 1999 talk to which I refer.[2] It was "learning that a cancer I had thought was in remission had in fact become incurable," Eve wrote, that made "inescapably vivid in repeated mental shuttle-passes the considerable distance between *knowing* that one will die and *realizing* it." Just this shuttle, I would suggest, colors much of the work Eve was doing toward the book on Proust she was writing in the last several years.

In the volume I'm assembling, "Reality and Realization," although possibly the earliest piece to be included, will come at the end, since I believe its realization was a shaping force on the work Eve undertook over the past decade. As she makes clear, the perspectives she brought to the Proust project were multiple: Buddhism, for example, which is crucial in "Reality and Realization"; object relations and affect theory, among a panoply of nonoedipal psychologies, including most notably work by and around Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins but also embracing a number of other theorists, D. W. Winnicott and Michael Balint among them. Some of this work she considers in "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," which appeared in a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* on the future of queer theory and will be reprinted in the collection I'm gathering. The Proust

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project was nurtured as well by a wide range of Western philosophical texts that can be grouped loosely under the label Neoplatonism, ranging from Plotinus to his modern commentator Pierre Hadot. In an essay written for a 2007 conference on C. P. Cavafy at Harvard, "Cavafy, Proust, and the Queer Little Gods," aspects of this inquiry are extended. The piece on Klein appeared in a volume of *SAQ* that contemplated an "after" queer theory that might be assumed to be "after sex" as well; a quick perusal might also extend that assumption to Eve's work on Proust, where sex is not a privileged term of analysis. Yet the piece on Klein and affect theory looks askance at much political work done in the name of queer sexuality that has made it a conformist and identitarian project; Eve's essay, that is, refuses that "after" but not the possibilities of queer theory. Indeed, it's arguable that the new work on Proust represents a future for queer theory of just the unexpected sort we might have hoped for from Eve Sedgwick as one of the most important initiators of that venture. Moreover, direct work in more recognizable queer theory and queer politics persists in papers Eve wrote and talks she gave over the last several years. "Anality: News from the Front," forthcoming in *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, responds to essays by Jeffrey Guss and Stephen Botticelli, two gay therapists. The normalizing gestures in their writing, Eve suggests, fall short of the mark in spite of the ways in which their work represents an advance beyond the ordinary practices of American psychiatry in relation to queers. I plan to include this piece, along with at least two talks Eve delivered abroad in which questions of identity and sexual politics are salient, one noting the differences between French and United States notions of identity, the other making an impassioned plea that the AIDS crisis, so fully blanked in gay activism in the United States as the movement has turned into advocacy for military service and marriage, not suffer the same disavowal in Japan.

The Proust project expands the contours of possibilities for work one could go on calling queer; it gives permission, once again—as Eve's work always did (always does)—to think more boldly than one had thought one could. For Eve, work "in" Proust was intimately bound up with the textile practices she pursued over the past decade, some of which involved juxtaposing sometimes all-but-illegible bits of Proust's writing with Buddhist imagery. In talks about her art that she gave a couple of years ago, she stresses the value of this work precisely for its engagement with matter and especially its engagement with the resistance of matter to human designs upon it. This material recalcitrance also is crucial to the writing, particularly its contemplation of the reality in which we exist and that persists. Reality presses on us, resists our attempts to reduce or refuse it, chastens grandiosity or fantasies of omnipotence. Eve's forays in the various fields I've sketched here were taken to open up a range of possibilities and agencies beyond aggrandizing zero-sum schemes of dichotomized modes of analysis whose effects are stultifying. What she lights upon is something—but not one thing—between all and nothing, the little gods, for example, who mitigate and populate ranges of experience.

"The Weather in Proust" is the largest finished chunk of the Proust project, the only piece of writing where Proust is always central—although a stunning lecture of Eve's on affect theory and theory of mind has a long, breathtaking section on the pained impasses of *La prisonnière*. In longer and shorter versions, "The Weather in Proust" was delivered on many occasions over the past five years; a part of it slated for publication reflects the version delivered on a panel on seriality at the English Institute in 2004. I will be printing as full a version of it as possible. In this piece of writing, the mental shuttle pass between knowing and realizing engages relations between open and closed systems, between laws and surprises, between the oedipal and the

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aleatory. In characteristic nondualistic readings, the terms of these pairs are displaced, overturned, allowed to infuse each other in a direction that points to an order of reality that would exceed the one that assumes the truth of binarisms. What emerges from these encounters is what Eve characterizes as a "grounded reality-level of surprise and plenitude." Difficult as it is to wrap one's mind around that and to think it alongside death—and not death in the abstract but Eve's death—Eve's writing shows us how to do it, shows her doing it.

"Proust's reality orientation," Eve writes, "coincides with his mysticism." This is a mysticism attached to the weather, not just because the weather is a metaphor for an order of reality that corresponds to an order of propositional truth as well as to the unexpected but also because this external, material phenomenon serves as more than a metaphor for one's internal state—indeed, for a state in oneself that exceeds one's own. Its analogue—or rather its equivalent—is breath. And, again, not just one's own but as a surround, a "supra-individual identity that persists at the moment of death."

Proust's mysticism is attached to this materiality, to a spirituality that infuses matter as its life, an unstoppable life. Eve characterizes this in Proust as "a cosmopolitan field of divinity" that includes the nonsentient, "a stone, a plant, a smell, or a song." This field includes writing—Eve's writing too, it goes without saying. "People are different from each other," her first axiom in *Epistemology of the Closet*, means that Eve herself was irreplaceable (22). But also not singular. As she insists in "The Weather in Proust," one meaning of supra-individuality is that one is connected and constituted beyond oneself, connected thereby to versions of oneself that succeed oneself. That is, one lives not only various lives, so that the difference of people also comprehends one's own self-difference, but also as oneself in relation to others. At the opening of "The Weather in Proust," Eve conjures up one of the great ekphrastic set pieces in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the description of the Hubert Robert fountain found early in the fourth volume. There the flows, the jets, dying and being replenished, figure many things—writing among them, the weather, too, as part of the flow of water, and thereby the relations between insides and outsides, self and others. The fountain figures these and embodies them in its predictable and surprising spurts. It figures the life beyond life that inheres in relation that exceeds and constitutes the individual.

For me, writing on this occasion, this is exemplified best in Eve's exploration of the painful contemplation of the death of the grandmother in the *Recherche* and the ways in which Marcel and his mother respond to it. To this aching loss, Eve attaches an exploration of the abrasive figure of the often abjected family servant Françoise. In this constellation, she locates a non-Freudian reality principle that must affect our mourning. Whereas Marcel's mother attempts to incorporate her dead mother, Marcel seems less in the grips of what Eve characterizes as "the fully melancholic, Oedipal, monotheistic form of mourning practiced by the narrator's mother." Freud and Freudian psychology might approve of the mother and look askance at Marcel, but, Eve continues, "from a Kleinian perspective, the mother's own grief looks like a continuing failure to internalize the grandmother in the form of a good object, a source of nurturance and possibility, one that could foster the kind of holding environment that would allow her to think of something *else*."

To think of something else.

"That the universe along with the things in it are alive and therefore good; here, I think, is the crux of Proust's mysticism," Eve writes at the conclusion of "The Weather in Proust." "Moreover, the formulation does not record a certainty or a belief but an orientation, the structure of a need, and a mode of perception.

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It is possible for the universe to be dead and worthless; but if it does not live, neither do the things in it, including oneself and one's contents. So put it comparatively: the universe itself is *as* alive as anything it holds."

It holds Eve still. She holds us still.

Notes

1. Here I would demur just a bit from Edelman's remark; certainly Eve's life partner, Hal Sedgwick, also realized such a day would come. I must add to the gratitude I've expressed to Eve's brother, David Kosofsky, my thanks to Hal for his assistance with the projected volume of Eve's writing.

2. Melissa Solomon cites a version of the 1999 talk titled "Come As You Are" 213–14.

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