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"A Queer Method? Samuel Delany's Empiricism and the Uses of the Literary"

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I situate the work of Samuel R. Delany in the context of post-War social science studies of sexual deviance, arguing that he shares with these figures a commitment to observational research methods; an ecological view of small social worlds; a belief in the ordinariness of deviance; and an ethics grounded in practices of documentation. I argue that the rise of queer theory at the height of the linguistic turn resulted in a narrowing of the epistemological and methodological range of the field. I suggest that Delany's account of experience in his non-fictional writing—attuned to both material conditions and the complexities of representation and feeling—offers a model for an empirical turn in contemporary queer studies.