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## CARTOGRAPHIES OF DESIRE

### Mapping Queer Space in the Fiction of Samuel Delany and Darieck Scott

by GerShun Avilez

Applying his knowledge of urban planning to the field of cultural theory, Haitian-American architect-artist Jean-Ulrick Désert invokes the concept of “queer space” in order to describe the complicated (yet valuable) nature of actual gay and lesbian communities and neighborhoods; these locations, he contends, simultaneously engage and transgress the social, architectural, and juridical meanings attributed to the areas that they occupy by means of the subversive bodies that collectively inhabit and pass through them. He goes on to characterize this concept in these terms: “queer space is in large part the function of wishful thinking or desires that become solidified: a seduction of the *reading space* where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape” (21, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> The term “queer space” is most often employed as a way to discuss and analyze the precarious positioning of gay, lesbian, and transgender social spaces and the politics of gentrification in regard to these locations.<sup>2</sup> However, I believe that Désert’s formulation reveals the potential of the lens of “queer space” to exceed its strictly geographical or architectural valence and provide a framework for theoretical and formal analysis within literary studies.

In this paper, I use this theorizing of residential and social districts such as Greenwich Village in New York City, the Castro in San Francisco, or Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, as a conceptual framework to analyze the engagement and redefinition of public space in Samuel Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984) and Darieck Scott’s *Traitor to the Race* (1995). In other words, I use an idea developed by geographers and social commentators to elucidate thematic and formal choices made by novelists. My argument is not that the actual physical spaces function as the literary texts do, but rather that the framework used to describe and document these districts also has value for the analysis of art. I contend that these novels provide effective cartographies of desire that generate “queer space” within the generic parameters of the novel. In addition to exploring the affective dimensions and implications of the enacted queer spaces within the novels, my analysis will demonstrate (or map) how the impulses toward and attention to the “place-making practices” that characterize queer space get reinterpreted and transmogrified into innovative aesthetic methodologies.<sup>3</sup>

### Erotic World Making

The vastness of outer space is the setting and the subject of science fiction writer Samuel Delany's masterpiece *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*. As Madhu Dubey explains, Delany writes a novel that is about information and the dissemination and perception of information. That which connects the six thousand or so worlds referenced in the novel is a complex, intergalactic system of information sharing called the Web. Even planets that are not "online" or "plugged" into the Web become identified by their exclusion, so that this exclusion *includes* them within the purview of the vast matrix of knowledge that is the Web thereby demonstrating an unlimited jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup> Ostensibly, there is no outside of this invisible framework. Accordingly, through the "web" motif, Delany offers a spatialization of information—information that is all-encompassing, inundating, and ultimately repressive.<sup>5</sup>

The control and regulation of information is the Web's most salient activity throughout the narrative, and this control extends to the realm of intimacy. The central plot of the narrative is driven by the need for protagonist Marq Dyeth to be united with his "perfect erotic object," another person with whom (reportedly) he is sexually compatible "out to about seven decimal places" in one direction and "out to about nine decimals" in the other (Delaney, *Stars* 166). Curiously, Marq and his erotic object Rat Korga do not meet because they had been looking for each other or for their "soul mates"; instead, the Web's officials—appropriately called "spiders"—determine that they should meet.<sup>6</sup> Japril, a spider, tells Marq: "What's important—to you, to Rat, *and to the Web*—is that you will meet" (169, emphasis added). Accordingly, the Web enables and sanctions their meeting and even the possibility of their desire. In this sense Delany's fictional Web materializes Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant's idea that "intimacy is itself publicly mediated" (193).<sup>7</sup>

The extension of the Web's attention into this amorous territory results in inexorable imbrications of circuits of desire with channels of regulatory power. Rat Korga himself provides the most palpable evidence of this imagined connection within the text. The perfect erotic object that is presented to Marq is an individual who has a radically processed and reformulated body; he only exists because of the Web's manipulative intervention. Rat Korga was living on the planet Rhyonon when it experienced a kind of planetary cataclysm called "Cultural Fugue"; although he survived, he did not survive intact: his eyes were destroyed in the explosion as was one of his legs. The spiders rescue him from the dead planet after the disaster and provide him with functioning prostheses so that ultimately the Web makes possible both his sight and mobility. Through this process, the extensive capabilities and unlimited resources available *only* to the Web become inscribed onto Rat Korga's body and are mapped into his skin through the stitches that solidify his physical being. Not only does he carry around with him material evidence of the Web's power, but he is also a living document and token of that power. Rat Korga is not identified as Marq's perfect erotic object until after the accident—after he is a functioning cyborg and a symbolic banner announcing the Web's seeming omnipotence. In effect, this "erotic object" is always a creation, a contrived construction that is only made possible through manipulation and artifice. Additionally, Rat Korga is only Marq's perfect erotic object because Japril "assures" him that the stranger is (181). I insist on Marq's erotic object being one that is artificially constructed and then provided for him by a third party *not* to undermine the

erotic attraction that exists between the two male characters; on the contrary, the Web's intervention does not necessarily evacuate their liaison of its erotic charge. In making this point, I aim to elucidate the argument that Delany is proffering about erotic relationships: circuits of desire—regardless of their specific nature or the individuals involved—cannot be experienced, imagined, or analyzed without recourse to discourses of power and control. There is no other way to read them, as it were.

The authoritarian Web makes possible a desire in the narrative that can be characterized by its public nature demonstrating how desire here is not configured as being solely about a private physical and emotional relationship. All of the inhabitants of and visitors to Velm know about Marq and Rat Korga's mathematical erotic correlation and their intimate encounters almost before they happen; in other words, their relationship is common knowledge even though they tell no one about it. Moreover, public intimacy or sex in public becomes a fundamental textual component of their developing erotic relationship. The two do have sex outside (245), but it is their visit to the community's "runs" that best demonstrates how Delany refuses to limit their sexual relationship to the realm of the private. Runs are municipal spaces, something akin to an enclosed park or an historical arcade, wherein visitors can marvel at and taste statuary and engage in or simply observe consensual sex acts with individuals they may or may not know—more often than not the latter.<sup>8</sup> Aesthetic and corporeal pleasures become inextricably coupled in these traditionally sanctioned sites described as an "integral part" of the local culture (276). The fact that the runs are places where one can either see art or participate in physically pleasurable activities that are made analogous to artistic productions also indicates the theatrical value of the runs. Within these public theaters, one finds erotic life on display and performed for whoever may be interested in being an audience. In this sense, Marq and Rat Korga's sexual life attains a publicity that is intrinsic and even categorical to their relationship.

Delany has an ongoing theoretical curiosity about the possible public meanings of the sex act and about the definite social value of sex acts in public, making the delineation of the relationship between Marq and Rat Korga one instance of what has become a career-long project. In what is arguably his most significant piece of nonfiction, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), Delany discusses the social and economic implications of the late-twentieth-century urban development and zoning of Manhattan's Times Square area in New York City. These decisions about the spatial configuration and economic future of this area made by the city's administration resulted in the closing of a number of adult entertainment venues including many theaters, which screened sexually explicit and/or pornographic films and which functioned as meeting places for casual sexual encounters. These theaters (the Cameo, the Capri, the Metropolitan, among several others) form the primary focus of Delany's discussion in the first part of the book, and they are the geo-historical analogues for the runs that he writes about more than a decade before.<sup>9</sup> After cataloging and commenting on some of the intimate relationships he had with men over the twenty-five years he frequented these theaters, Delany suggestively extrapolates the social function of the theaters and of the kind of public sexual intimacy that came to characterize these spaces:

Despite moments of infatuation on both sides, these were not love relationships. The few hustlers excepted, they were not business

relationships. They were encounters whose most important aspect was that mutual pleasure was exchanged . . . Most [encounters] were affable but brief because, beyond pleasure, these were people you had little in common with. *Yet what greater field and force than pleasure can human beings share?*" (*Times Square Red* 56, emphasis added).

In other words, these theaters that traffic in the illicit and verboten remind Delany's reader of the democratic nature of pleasure and of pleasure's potential to effect inexhaustibly such an egalitarian ethos in unpredictable and unexpected public places such as porn cinemas.<sup>10</sup>

These potent desirous currents that emanate and flow (perhaps run) within the physical parameters of the theaters do not necessarily forge or effectuate romantic relationships or patterns of partnering that then move outside. Delany makes plain that these sites are not often seen as places to create long-term romantic relationships. He reflects, "Were the porn theaters romantic? Not at all. But because of the people who used them, they were humane and functional, fulfilling needs that most of our society does not yet know how to acknowledge" (*Times Square Red* 90). The point here is that these spaces of sexual entertainment inadvertently highlight the limits on the control and access of the public sphere and the juridical power that administers it. While it may not often create romance, this public intimacy, which draws people back to the theaters day after day for years (decades in some cases), stands as a playful and sensuous critique of the social sphere in Delany's text.

The fictional runs in *Stars in My Pocket* function similarly to these genuine places of cinematic diversion and physical pleasure.<sup>11</sup> The Web's spiders believe that they understand the terminology and basic functioning of the runs. However, Marq points out that the documented knowledge about the runs on the Web's information system is unable to keep up with the experiential reality and insider knowledge of the run's participants. In explaining why the runs are not structurally designed the way that Rat Korga had been told that they would be, Marq asserts: "[the] problem with General Information [the Web's massive collection of publicly-accessible information]—is that it's often ten years out of date—if not a hundred. Especially when it comes through the Web" (224). Those who participate in the activities in the runs have different topographical and symbolic understandings of the runs, their practices, and their possibilities. There is a knowledge gap or disconnect between what the Web charts as the truth of the runs and their actual meaning. Accordingly, these sites of public sex anticipate the protagonist's later declaration that his desire exposes the fact that the reach of the Web's spatialized knowledge-power does not go unchecked nor does it withstand resistance fully. The public intimacy, then, enables the cartographizing of desire that I contend ends the narrative—I will consider this proposal at length below.

Although he may carry with him emblematic and surgical signs of the Web's power, Rat Korga himself exposes the thresholds of the Web in a similar manner as the runs. The Web officials have sought to keep secret the death of the planet Rhyonon, which experienced Cultural Fugue; in fact, the spiders removed information about the disaster from the Web's system of general information access. Rat Korga, as a survivor of the catastrophe, literally incarnates a forbidden, unspeakable knowledge. Disrupting the encounter between Marq and Rat Korga and seeking to (re)establish dominance in the narrative, the spiders decide



that Rat Korga must be removed from Velm (Marq's planet) after just *one* day with Marq. Rat Korga's celebrity as a rumored survivor of a planet's destruction is causing increasing chaos on Velm. Crowds are gathering outside of Marq's palatial home Dyethshome hoping to see or touch the "survivor." Japril explains, "nine thousand people [are] outside; they're back up for almost a kilometer. About two thousand arrived in the last ten minutes alone . . . Another two thousand are expected in the next few minutes" (300). The entire population of Velm is threatening to converge on Dyethshome. This ever-growing crowd is also beginning to pose a threat to itself by the mere pressure of the physical movement of bodies closer to the gates. Insisting that the "experiment" did not work (339), Japril takes Rat Korga away without Marq's knowing because the pandemonium that Korga's presence creates introduces the possibility of Cultural Fugue with its inevitable destruction and disorder (219). Accordingly, Rat Korga embodies and conjures social upheaval and chaos, characteristics incompatible with the Web's regulated methods of documentation and systemization.

More than this destructive symbology, Rat Korga's celebrity is also a threat to the Web because he functions as an "open secret."<sup>12</sup> In this way, his character is an effective translation of the exact idea of "public intimacy." Again, no one is supposed to know anything about the destruction that happened on Rhyonon or even speak of it. Therefore, to know Rat Korga or even to be near him verges on defying the Web's spiders and undermining their authority. As a final caveat before leaving him with Marq, the spiders had warned Rat Korga against making any public announcement of his presence on Velm (290). In taking him away, Japril attempts to reinstate the power of the Web by making Rat Korga (a character that is both a manifestation and exhibition of restricted knowledge) subject to its caprice; in addition, this reactionary move forcefully interrupts Marq and Rat Korga's intimacy and attempts to cleave their bond by putting not simply space, but rather worlds between them. By *clandestinely* removing Rat Korga, Japril also takes hold of the frameworks of secrecy in the narrative directing it to his own ends and permanently sutures the figurative and threatening openness elemental to the crafting of Rat Korga's character—a figure that the reader never encounters again.

If, as Phillip Brian Harper explains, secrets help to effect the actual realm of the private, what do we do when there are secrets but no privacy, as in the intergalactic realm in Delany's novel in which the Web encourages secrets and deals in them but disrupts and invades the most intimate of situations?<sup>13</sup> In addition, what are the possibilities not only for a private life, but also for an erotic life that is not controlled and manipulated by the Web? These are the precise questions that Marq is left with after he discovers that Japril has absconded with his perfect erotic object. This circumvention interrupts any further sexual desire or activity that Marq can imagine. He declares that he would no longer be able to enjoy masturbation (343), revealing how the private erotic relationship he has with his own body has been destabilized. More than mere heartbreak, Marq fears that he might experience an intense, permanent deprivation of pleasure.

Besides the disruption of desire, the loss of Rat Korga also threatens to unsettle Marq's sense of himself. Marq is a character defined by his free will and freedom of movement throughout the text. He comes from a very influential Velm family, whose matriarch is renowned throughout the intergalactic system. In addition to the social access that he has always enjoyed because of his family, Marq is an Industrial Diplomat (ID) by profes-

sion; he is an independent contractor who is hired to consult for organizations on planets throughout the galaxy. The nature of the work of the ID's allows them to travel under the radar of the Web. Accordingly, the Web officials do not look kindly on ID's; the profession is not illegal, but the spiders deem suspect the unapproved movement through space and the gathering of information that constitutes the work of an ID.<sup>14</sup> The abduction of Rat Korga is not simply a random event or an inexplicable textual move; instead, this removal can also be read as an attempt to place the free-moving ID Marq under the Web's hegemonic control.

However, even in his lovelorn despair, Marq refuses to accept such ensnaring rule. He insists to Japril, "besides the coordinates the Web lays out for us, I have my own map of the universe" (341-42). This "map" is made up of "information to confound the Web and not to be found in any of its informative archives" (342). He explains this personal charting of space before proceeding to claim that his desire resists Web manipulation: "Desire isn't appeased by its object, Japril, only irritated into something more than desire that can join with the stars to inform the chaotic heavens with sense" (343).<sup>15</sup> Being deprived of Rat Korga is not a complete loss of pleasure because the experience of having been with him expanded the terrain and boundaries of Marq's desire itself. As with his private information about the cosmos, Marq creates his own personal constellation of knowledge and feelings as well as a hermeneutic for making sense of the world.<sup>16</sup> Marq contends that he has a cartography of his desire that parallels his cartography of knowledge, both of which exceed the purview of the Web. The protagonist here describes a pleasure deriving from his intimacy that is so powerful that it can undermine the Web, explicitly returning this consideration to Delany's question: "Yet what greater field and force than pleasure can human beings share?"

What Marq proclaims in these final statements to Japril is that his willful desire has the capability of enervating and even disabling the discursive power of the Web and its officials. In "The Rhetoric of Sex/The Discourse of Desire," a lecture delivered in 1993 at MIT, Delany clarifies: "Power is what distinguishes the psychic discourse of desire from the social rhetoric of sex. The rhetoric of sex commands enough strength to make a man or woman walk the streets of the city for hours, to drive alone or in groups, searching for a proper gap in the communicative wall through which desire may somehow show" (20). The "social rhetoric of sex" names the discursive realm that directs an individual's thoughts and body and that compels one to act while often leaving her desiring or yearning for desire. Japril and his commands represent an early artistic formulation of this "rhetoric" Delany describes in his speech. The reader must keep in the foreground of her mind the fact that Japril and his colleagues *calculate* Rat Korga to be sexually compatible with Marq; such measurements and projections have little to do with the dynamics of reciprocal desire, yet both Marq and Rat Korga act obediently upon this pronouncement. In his speech, Delany goes on to explain that desire, unlike rhetoric, "commands power enough to found and destroy cities, to reform the very shape of the city itself, laying down new avenues and restructuring whole neighborhoods within it. And desire—paradoxically—is what holds erect that barrier to sex that so much of our rhetoric, as well as our actions of which finally rhetoric is a part, breaks against and crumbles" (20). In this context, desire functions as the basis for an effective world making and remaking.<sup>17</sup> As opposed to keeping one within the identifiable sites that social rhetoric creates and perpetuates, desire founds

and destroys formally designated spaces for existence and the logic that underpins them. From this vantage point, desire as a theoretical construct has cartographic implications; it can make one little room an everywhere or a nowhere.<sup>18</sup> Delany offers his protagonist this insight in exchange for his loss and leaves the reader with no choice but to come to terms with both—the textual loss of intimacy and the imagined possibilities of desire—and to ponder their inextricable relation.

Through this cartography and his sexual encounter with Rat Korga, Marq claims independent access to a veritable “reading space” created by and through his unassailable desire. By “reading space,” I mean both the intergalactic knowledge Marq has accrued and the Web-controlled discursive terrain in which Marq encounters and deciphers public meaning. Marq’s defiance of the Web brings about the symbolic unsettling of the constricting norms of the reading space that Désert discusses; in effect, Delany’s protagonist claims for himself a queer space in the final pages of the novel.<sup>19</sup>

Following this consideration of the creation of reading space, I also want to draw attention to Delany’s formal presentation of the textual reading space of *Stars in My Pocket*. Delany divides most of the narrative up into “monologues” instead of chapters. The dominant persona and speaking “I” of these monological sections is Marq; almost every one opens with him directly speaking or with his thoughts and impressions, and even the few that do not begin in this way are still permeated with Marq’s presence. Delany chooses to present the events of the narrative as a series of monologues in order to anticipate and elaborate Marq’s defiant posture toward the Web’s hegemony. A monologue itself features one character speaking in an uninterrupted way independent of other characters or forces; this theatrical mode of presentation ostensibly allows the audience to gain unmediated access to the speaking character. The formal division of the novel into monologues, which foreground Marq and his desires, grants the protagonist an implicit monopoly of the textual space that disrupts and runs counter to the Web’s systematic domination of the story’s diegetic space. In relying on monologues as organizing units, Delany reconfigures the constitution of the novel form so that its structure participates specifically in the development of the central character and more generally in his theorizing of the disruptive dynamics between power and desire at the heart of the narrative. Delany’s unsettling monologues along with Marq’s insistence that he has surpassed the parameters of the Web’s knowledge and control reflect precisely the disruptive power of queer space. The nature of such space has little to do with sex necessarily; rather, through Delany’s text it becomes apparent that queer space describes a strategy that rubs against and unhinges hermeneutical frameworks that seek to define and delimit all relationships and encounters, especially but not only those with an erotic valence.

### Scripting Desire

The employment of the erotic to uncover the link between intimate space and the public realm characterizes novelist and literary critic Darieck Scott’s debut work *Traitor to the Race* as well. My interest in this novel emerges from Scott’s structural and formal techniques that I believe accentuate the thematic exploration of erotics and space. *Traitor to the Race*

is a work fixated on storytelling and narration; Scott organizes the major sections of the novel into four groupings "Prelude: All About Hammett," "Meanwhile . . .," "Later . . .," and "Postscript: More About Hammett," suggesting a self-consciousness about narrating the sequence of events that constitute the narrative and about temporality in general. As the tale unfolds, the reader finds that most of the story revolves around the romantic relationship between a Black man Kenneth and a White man Evan and not directly about the Hammett (Kenneth's cousin) referenced in the organizational headings. The reader no longer has direct access to Hammett after the prelude in a similar fashion to the textual submerging of Rat Korga's character after the prologue in *Stars in My Pocket*. In the prelude, the reader finds that Hammett is brutally assaulted in an act of gay-bashing in a dark alley. Interrupting Hammett's story, the account of Kenneth and Evan's relationship is told in the textual space between the prelude and the postscript. It is not that the scene of sexual violence against Hammett that ends "Prelude: All About Hammett" serves simply as a *prelude* for the interracial intimacy explored in the rest of the novel. Instead, the nature of the emotional and sexual intimacy between Kenneth and Evan becomes the primary conduit through which Scott can comment on the sexual violence and discrimination that result in the murder of Hammett.

Although the short novel is not a piece of science or fantasy fiction, in *Traitor* Scott emphasizes fantasy and fantasizing. Most of the chapters alternate between a perspectival focus on Kenneth and a focus on Evan. However, a number of the chapters are called "Game," and each shows the two lovers role playing (often in public) in games that end in actual sexual excitement and sometimes sexual intercourse. For example, in one of these early games, Kenneth is a professor and Evan is his disobedient student, and the two get into an "argument" and a physical altercation on a sidewalk (9–11). In another game, Evan is a military "captain" that yells and wrestles with Kenneth, a "whore" (25–26); later on, Evan plays the role of the "sun-god" Apollo, and Kenneth is a "bestial" nymph who attacks and rapes the deity (43–45). The games are ways for the couple to act out their fantasies and avoid some of the actual difficulties that exist in their tumultuous and conflict-ridden relationship. Their interactions throughout the narrative are characterized by such public fantasizing. These scenes of role playing can be read as enactments of social power dynamics, whose format both depends upon and complicates racialized conceptions of identity. Both characters are actors, but Evan has a flourishing career on a soap opera, while Kenneth is performing at community theaters. Nonetheless, Evan expresses frustration about being typecast as the intriguing "blonde ingénue." Kenneth rejoins this comment by criticizing his White lover for not relishing the social and economic privilege his White maleness affords. Kenneth ends the ensuing argument by exclaiming, "I love you. I envy you. Hate you, adore you. The whole script" (30).

Taking this ambivalently charged comment as a cue, I argue that *Traitor* can be read as a novel of plays (or dramas) and that the elements of plays and play-acting structure the storyline and the characters. In a different context, Hortense Spillers has held that "sexuality is the locus of great drama—perhaps the fundamental one—and, as we know, wherever there are actors, there are scripts, scenes, gestures, and reenactments, both enunciated and tacit" (153).<sup>20</sup> It is this understanding of sexuality and sexual practices that is at the heart of Scott's crafting of his narrative. Scott emphasizes scenes, scripting, and reenactments in these games and the accompanying intimacy that occur in the privacy of Kenneth and



Evan's bedroom and in front of people on streets and in parks. The role playing in their bedroom makes their sexual intimacy, even when alone, a kind of showing, while the role playing in the park demands and attains a kind of intimacy that the municipally-controlled spaces suggest is not possible or permissible.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, sexual encounters are figured as spatial performances throughout the novel.

For all the weight given to "publicness" and performance, the novel reflects a deep interest in how secrecy functions as a frame for identity and desire. While sitting in the park trying to think of a new game to play with Kenneth, Evan thinks back to his childhood game playing of "Planet of the Apes" and how these recreational interactions contributed to his gender socialization:

Guys got called fags ten times a day in my neighborhood. Sissy was much worse. That was for *real*. My life started to get real secretive about that time. I would be ashamed to think how I acted when we played Apes [crying and throwing fits because he wanted to be chased and "caught" by the other boys and did not want to do the aggressive chasing that constituted the game], and if anybody teased me about it, I'd get mad and start punching. What was open for everyone to see when I was nine had to go underground. . . . it is sad to me, how even when you decide to live a life of play like I have [as a professional actor], you have to kick and scream to play it the way you want to play it, or you have to do it in secret. (178, 180)

Through social encounters, Evan learns the necessity of hiding his behaviors and interests early in his life; he comes to understand that there is a certain way to be properly public. Evan realizes that he has two choices in regard to living the life that he desires: open defiance or secrecy. Because he must either endlessly expend energy in reactionary conflict or forever conceal himself in the shadows, there is no way to conceive of simply existing. This experience is more than a random memory that returns to Evan or even the defining moment in his psychosexual development. This statement about secrecy is integral to how Scott depicts homosexual identity, Black and White.

Secrets in the novel primarily concern the character that the reader loses access to throughout the narrative space between the prelude and postscript: Hammett. Hammett is gay, and this fact is one that is seemingly unspeakable to different populations distressed by his brutal death. No one mentions this fact at Hammett's funeral. Kenneth's family knows about Hammett's sexual preference but is unwilling to recognize it. In addition, the media and some social organizations refuse to acknowledge that the man who was killed was not only gay, but was also raped. At an impromptu public demonstration to protest the fact that the police have made no progress on locating Hammett's murderers, one of Kenneth's friends Cyrus is approached by a Black man from the watching crowd:

the man does nothing more frightening than insistently tap on Cyrus's shoulder. "So, so what?" he fires, like a man not quite able to restrain himself. "You saying the man who got killed here was a homosexual?"

"Yes, he was," Cyrus calmly replies after a small recoil. "He was and we think it should be called attention to, that he was a black gay man who was raped."

"Why you wanna say that about the man? Did you know him? You probably don't even know him! How this gon help anything?" (141)

This series of inflammatory questions and the interaction itself reveal Hammett's symbolic importance in the narrative. The man's final question "How this gon help anything?" does not really concern Hammett's case; he is questioning the relevance of this particular protest to the social activism against the ongoing social and political oppression of African Americans. He is asking how is this going to advance the "Movement." Hammett has a concrete social value that the allegations of homosexuality, which are broadcast by the protest, ostensibly tarnish. In death, Hammett embodies a contested terrain and is overdetermined with meaning—much like Delany's Rat Korga. Staged in front of the audience of demonstrators and random spectators, this micro-scene between Cyrus and the stranger is an effective drama between contending forces that relies upon demands of secrecy *and* public knowledge, questions of intimacy, and assertions of same-sex desire. Through Hammett's absented, queer body, Scott can delineate these contestations of the meaning of "Blackness" as well as the unclear ethical parameters of social identity. Unfortunately, it is only through losing Hammett, by never really knowing him, that the reader can witness this social drama.

This textual recessing of Hammett is staged through the structural foregrounding of the interracial intimacy between Evan and Kenneth, and this narrative focus on this couple ultimately enables Scott's presentation of queer space. In "Jungle Fever?: Black Gay Identity Politics, White Dick, and the Utopian Bedroom"—an article published as he was writing *Traitor to the Race*—Scott argues that "[whether] the object of political wrath or the butt of an easy joke, the black/white gay male couple as *figure* frequently stands on the imaginary border between political consciousness as an African-American gay man and the lack of such a consciousness; it marks the dividing line that defines a politicized, racially conscious identity which is black, male, and gay" (301).<sup>22</sup> As the diction of the critical passage indicates ("imaginary border," "diving line"), interracial relationships in this context always have a spatial significance that reveals divisions between the psychic/private and the social/public. Scott casts the "black/white gay male couple" not simply as an embodiment of a psychological boundary, but also as a discursive sign for the parameters and defining elements of an evaluative frame in that consideration of this specific coupling brings to light and enables the analysis of the social world itself. In describing the couple this way, I direct attention to the power that Scott attributes to interracial intimacy to inform how one evaluates his (Scott focuses on male relationships) own racial, gender, and sexual identity *and* the identities of those around him.

Part of the reason that interracial relations are understood as having potential analytical power here is because of the social meanings that buttress White male corporeality specifically. Scott goes on to argue that

White dick is socially and historically represented to us as potency; it is power, and power is sexy, just as sex can be the exercise of power—or rather, just as sex can be the interplay of relatively empowered and relatively disempowered roles, roles that can become all the more erotically charged when the markers of different kinds of power, gender/race/sexuality, are acknowledged. ("Jungle Fever?" 310)

These indicators of different kinds of power become apparent through interactions with the embodiment of power that we witness in the White male body (particularly in the male sexual organ); moreover, the concept of "interplay" names succinctly the "erotically charged" role playing that occurs throughout *Traitor to the Race*. Pushing Scott's assessment of the White male body (and its intimate parts) further, fiction writer and cultural critic Thomas Glave insists that the body of the White male has become a kind of representative and proprietary public space within the US social imaginary.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, because of these symbologies, sexual interaction with this racialized phallic metonym means that interracial intimacy always carries with it the potential to shed light on and redefine the social realm.

In Scott's analysis, through their employments as jokes, devices of political critique, and social distinction, interracial intimate couples as discursive formations represent a means by which one can decipher and assess—albeit not unproblematically—the lives and bodies of others. In other words, "the black/white gay male couple" provides the groundwork for (social) analysis that itself calls for the kind of cultural critique and exploration to be found in both "Jungle Fever?" and *Traitor to the Race*. It is through this symbolic value as a lens for reading the self and the world (the psychic and the social) that male interracial desire in Scott's text becomes fully legible as queer space, not merely because it involves same-sex desire, but also because of its functioning as an evaluative framework or reading space.

Scott's critical work and its relationship to his creative work is useful in recognizing how queer space is created through intimate encounters and engagements and *not* through the queer body alone. The physical interaction and symbolic interpenetration of the raced bodies in their particularity create the possibility for queer space in the thinking that subtends all of Scott's work. Delany's novel (as well as his nonfiction) also illustrates this understanding; it was only through the short-lived intimacy and ongoing desire between Rat Korga and Marq that the protagonist is able to articulate the conceptualization of queer space with which the narrative closes.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Désert contends that the queer body must be observed and interacted with in order to achieve the "seduction" or transformation elemental to queer zones (21). Accordingly, expressions of sociality and interaction become integral components of conjectures and imaginings of queer space.

With the notions of engagement and sociality in mind, I return to the game playing chapters that interrupt the linear narrative progression of *Traitor to the Race*; these games highlight the significance of fantasy to Scott's fictionalized queer space and its potential to make sense of others and the self. In the games, Kenneth and Evan take turns being empowered and disempowered, sadists and masochists, and sexual "tops" and "bottoms," thereby sharing and exchanging the psychic space and public meaning of the roles that each inhabits. The enacted or embodied fantasies the reader finds in the games of desire and exchange signify what Désert describes as "wishful thinking . . . solidified"; thus, he intimates the constitutive nature of fantasies to queer space as he understands it. Therefore, fantasizing shows itself to be a pivotal component to this discussion. In fact, in *Stars in my Pocket*, the reader finds Marq and Rat Korga participating in their own version of public embodied fantasizing: "dragon hunting." In this game played outside, Marq explains that a "radar bow hooks on to a pretty complete mapping of the dragon's cerebral responses and, after a lot of translation, plays it back" on the "cerebral surface" of the participant or

"hunter" (248). This means of entertainment and pleasure is a virtual embodiment of the dragon that allows one to feel as if she is inside the other living creature. The sensation is perceived as real, although it is never more than a programmed (through cerebral circuiting) imagining. After successfully hooking into and inhabiting one of the creatures, Rat Korga explains that the event reframed how he understood and experienced the world around him, ultimately defining the highly interactive dragon hunting as a reading experience ("It's like reading!"),<sup>25</sup> and this social reading is facilitated through the workings of fantasy.

In a discussion of the "logic of fantasy" within critical theory, Tim Dean contends that fantasy offers itself as an indispensable concept for discussing subjectivity and sociality together, without reducing one to the other. And owing to the psychoanalytic insistence on distinguishing the subject of fantasy from the individual who may be characterized as having the fantasy, this concept justifies our speaking of social fantasy or [even] national fantasy, *since fantasy, no matter how private it may seem, is not a strictly individual phenomenon . . .* the concept of fantasy describes how a dimension of sociality—the Other—inhabits the innermost, ostensibly private zone of the subject. (260, emphasis added)

This language of inhabiting and the circular interfacing between the subject and the social resonate with both Scott's game playing and Delany's dragon hunting. In addition, one may assume that the realm of fantasy must necessarily be coextensive with the concepts of "individual" or "private," but Dean makes plain that this realm inevitably gets saturated with the "public" and "social." Therefore, fantasy has the potential to destabilize any possible secure boundaries between the private and the public. This fantastical worrying of limits and margins does not conflate the terms under consideration, as Dean is quick to insist; rather, it highlights the fallacy of their division. In this sense, the disruptive logic of fantasy becomes an extension of the spatial work that desire accomplishes in these narratives.

In *Traitor to the Race*, the reader does not find, per se, the sort of "cartographizing" of desire that is apparent in Delany's work; instead, in Scott's novel of plays, there is a "dramatizing" or "scripting" of desire that pushes it from the bedroom and into the streets. In fact, the frustrated man's querying complaints to Cyrus are a response to a scripting or performance of desire enacted in the protest. The small protest prefigures the planned "dance-riot," which is much bigger and more passionate, that closes the narrative immediately preceding the postscript. The dance-riot organized in reaction to the poor handling of Hammett's case is itself a dramatization and performance of transgressive desire. I quote at length to illustrate the compelling nature of the event:

A huge crowd—estimates ranged from fifteen hundred to nearly three thousand, depending on the newspaper—appeared in the very center of the financial district. They poured out of vans and cars and subway stations and hotel lobbies—mostly men, but women, too, young and middle-aged, men of color and white boys, some beautiful, others not, many wearing skirts over hairy legs and dangling huge hoop rings from their ears, all bursting onto the streets amid the morning



traffic in a horde, on cue. Cars and taxis swerved into sidewalk curbs to avoid them; bleating horns and shouted obscenities resounded against the glass of the tall building. The crowd charged howling, leaping onto car hoods, grabbing men wearing dour business suits off the sidewalk and twirling them around . . . A troop of yodeling white boys, naked in blue paint traced in intricate whorls on their bellies and necks and down the length of their thighs, raced past. Their genitals, the only unpainted flesh on their bodies, bounced around as if trying to get a better look. Then away in the distance, above a vast plain of heads, Evan glimpsed another naked figure, a black man with long sand-colored dreadlocks, straddling something that looked like the stone figure of a horse. The man's slender torso whipped back and forth in rhythmic abandon and his hair writhed about his shoulders as if he were a Gorgon. Like everyone else the man shouted and waved a cat-o-nine-tails in the air. "Mother wants her children to dance again! Mother wants her children to dance again!" (204-6)

This dance-riot is a politicized sexual fantasia that takes place in the conservative and highly regulated financial district; it is destructive, unreal, and erotic. This chaotic event which never disregards its purpose or organization is not simply an expression of a desire to assemble and dissent; it is *dance-riot*. Scott never permits the reader to lose sight of the significance of the human body to the dance-rioters. In fact, as onlookers watch the dancers, bouncing genitals actively return the gaze. The dancing and erotic gyrations of the crowd suggest that the human body in all of its variations is important and must be loved, protected, and enjoyed. In addition, the dancer-activists' actual presence in the spatial location of Manhattan's financial district is an embodied argument about the right of the queer body to move freely through space. The insurgent performance, which ends with everyone under arrest, attempts to unsettle and undermine a regulatory discursive matrix that defines and delimits the lives of sexual minorities.<sup>26</sup> Scott uses the dance-riot as a device to effect a queer space within the normalized and standardized realm of the market-controlled and government-supported financial district.

As the attire (or lack thereof), props, and actions of the dance-rioters indicate, transgression and the undermining of seemingly traditional values and social policies are the crowd's primary methods. Moreover, as suggested above, the "dance-riot" is held where it is to insist that the dancers have a right to this space; they occupy this location to claim an ownership of it. This idea echoes Désert's discussion in his essay in which he elaborates the concept of queer space by explaining that such space "is an activated zone made proprietary by the occupant or *flâneur*, the wanderer" (21). The dance-rioters are the wanderers here that activate and enable subversive meanings and attain an ownership of the street through their physical placement and celebratory movement. In other words, the dance-riot enacts an expansive queerness that threatens to alter the nature and meaning of this business-defined space.<sup>27</sup> For that reason, these threatening bodies end up in jail—the regulatory power of the financial district is exercised. As opposed to the dismantling of power structures, we seem to find a maintenance and safeguarding of structural authority and juridical power in that the dance-riot ends in imprisonment. However, the value of the performance is not lessened by this outcome. Like the games,

the performative scene-making and place-making of the dance-riot work to demonstrate that both desire and the body, in Scott's mind, can resist restraining scriptings and mappings. Read together, the mobile fantasized games and the space-threatening dance-riot reveal that *Traitor to the Race* is a dramatized series of scenes of queer space.

This assessment fully returns the discussion back to Désert's description of queer space in terms of the manifestation of "wishful thinking or desires." The recasting of the financial district through joyous and defiant occupation in *Traitor to the Race* manifests and rectifies the often-disappointed desires of the performer-activists. Similarly, Marq's insistence on an undeniable and inexpugnable cartography in the face of the Web's ubiquitous presence and domination forges a parallel to the social work done by the dance-riot. At stake in both novels is a theorizing of queer space through the characters' respective attempts to combat and counteract the loss of intimacy and intimates.

I close by drawing a formal connection between Scott and Delany. Again, Scott's novel can be read as a novel of plays. Because Delany's novel is composed of a prologue, an epilogue, and thirteen monologues (instead of chapters), it also depends upon a *dramatic* structuring. As discussed above, this formal presentation of the narrative space allows Delany to offer his protagonist a narrative dominance that parallels Marq's claiming of queer space; however, this formal structuring also stands as a link between Delany's aesthetic strategy and Scott's own. The purposeful employment of the language and techniques of drama in these novels represents a translation or transliteration of the desire to *enact* queer space; the dramatic organizations aid and abet the conceptual cultivations of queer spaces highlighted throughout this discussion. In the final analysis, queer desire is imagined as having the power to redefine and recalibrate not only public space as Désert contends, but also the construction and presentation of narrative space as well. Both Scott and Delany mimic the conceptual power of the geographically-based formulation of queer space in their respective texts in order to alter social reading space through the manipulated textual reading space of the dramatized novel. In directing attention toward the apertures of both genre and subjectivity made visible by desire and intimacy, queer space as a paradigmatic lens makes legible the social work done by literary culture and instantiates the value of non-literary methodologies to literary studies.

#### NOTES

1. The collection in which Désert's essay was published is especially useful because contributions come from a variety of artists, activists, and academics.
2. See Walcott; Ingram; Halberstam.
3. Halberstam describes queer space through the frame of "place-making practices" (6).
4. This idea of the "included-excluded" is central to Agamben's discussion of the "state of exception" as a legal and discursive concept.
5. In the foreword to the 2004 edition of the novel, Carl Freeman suggests that the Web with its system of organizing and amassing information "anticipates the World Wide Web" (xiv).
6. In general, the spiders decide what information is suitable for general consumption, and their influence extends beyond that which is knowable to the control of people's movements through space (planetary and interplanetary) as well as to the details of their intimate lives.
7. See the chapter "Sex in Public" by Warner and Berlant; the co-written essay was originally published in *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998): 547-66. Warner and Berlant's analysis through its considerations of questions of public and private, its reference to queer space, and the potential it recognizes for desire to effect connections resonates with much of my discussion here.

8. Dubey explains how "metaphors of perception in the world of Velm have shifted from sight to taste as a result of decades of genetic and cultural interchange between human beings and the many-tongued elvemi [dragon-like creatures]" to the point that all elements of the world (and even statues) are physically sensed and described not primarily through sight, but also through taste (204). The significance placed upon tasting and comprehension through the tongue also illustrates the evocation of the sensuous throughout the texts and the extent to which the runs seek to engage all of the senses.
9. It is clear from his discussion in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* that Delany was an active participant in the theaters' sex culture as he was writing *Stars in My Pocket*, and it is likely that these places are the matter out of which Delany imagines and crafts his fictional runs. His sexual experiences that he details in nonfiction also appear in fictionalized form in work such as *The Mad Man* (1994). In the second part of *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, Delany insists on the importance of "contact" (casual physical and emotional interaction with strangers) for healthy social relations and living communities, especially cross-class contact. The theaters discussed at length in the first part of the book represent a prime location for the kind of contact that Delany champions.
10. Delany makes it a point to call attention to the fact that he had platonic and sexual encounters with men of many different ethnic identities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ages, and that the theaters were places in which heterosexual and homosexual men could commingle and outwardly express sexual desire with little to no tension, anxiety, or fear (See *Times Square Red* 24, 36–57).
11. I read the runs primarily as fictionalized versions of the theaters, especially given that art is an integral component of their constitution. However, one might also think about them as "tea rooms." Sociologist Laud Humphreys explains that a tea room refers to a public restroom used for "sexual encounters without involvement" and sexual games in relatively high stakes circumstances (29). The location of these facilities at rest stops and in parks makes them more susceptible to "sting" operations by the police so that a threat of a juridical presence is often higher. Like the theaters, Delany has a sustained interest in the "tea room" as a site for creative inspiration.
12. Michael Taussig defines the "open secret" as "that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated" (5). It becomes very clear that regardless of the Web's ban, people are constantly talking about the events on Rhyonon and spreading rumors about survivors. The afterlife of this world is the open secret around which the narrative revolves and Korga symbolizes that secret. Interestingly, D. A. Miller also relies upon the concept of the "open secret" in talking about how secrecy and forgetting become central to the act of reading. The emphasis he places on the act of reading resonates with my own consideration of Rat Korga here and my larger contention about queer space in relation to reading.
13. Harper explores the relationship between secrets and privacy in the essay "Private Affairs: Race, Sex, and Persons" (1–32).
14. All movement through space is questionable from the spiders' perspective. A hasty and irresponsible visitor to Velm who had been granted unlimited space travel is warned: "unlimited space fare is limited only to those uses which will broaden minds and enrich cultures. If one is caught abusing it, it can be rescinded at any moment!" (188).
15. Marq's contention here also helps to make sense of the Delany's lyrical title: *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*. By analogizing his own desire with a star, Marq indicates both the power of this desire and the fact that he is able to contain within himself (or metonymically in his pocket) something as massive and life giving as a star. To say that he has stars in his pocket means that he possesses the cosmos autonomously and easily.
16. Delany himself uses the language of mapping to describe his own sexual/erotic desire in the interview with Robert Reid-Pharr.
17. The notion of world making forges a connection between the discussion here and that of Warner and Berlant in that these thinkers understand queer culture as a "world-making project" (198). Though this discussion is not an elaboration precisely of queer space as I am employing it, they do situate their ideas about queer culture and a queer world in relationship to developments of forms of socially transformative intimacy.
18. I borrow the language here from the English poet John Donne in his sonnet "The Good Morrow."
19. It is important to keep in mind that the queer space that Marq claims access to is not a physical terrain as such, but rather a figurative means of access, reading, and interpretation.
20. In her discussion, Spillers draws special attention to the ways in which Black women and their sexual experiences are effaced in this "great drama."
21. Richard Mohr's argument about the inherent privacy of sex is especially relevant here, but I believe that Scott's fiction also ruminates on those moments when sex has an undeniable and significant publicity as well.

22. See Scott, "Jungle Fever."
23. See Glave.
24. In thinking through the similarities between Scott's and Delany's respective presentations of queer space, it is important to note that same-sex desire is not deemed to be socially non-normative in *Stars in My Pocket* in the way that it is in *Traitor to the Race*—on Velm it is not unusual for a character to have physical and emotional connections with individuals of other sexes or even with individuals from other species. In part for Scott, it is the non-normative that affords queer space its value. Delany, on the other hand, foregrounds the power of desire generally to disrupt social logics. However, the desire that Delany tracks and values in the novel is one that emanates from same-sex bodies thereby giving narrative emphasis to this expression of desire.
25. Madhu Dubey makes much of this declaration ("It's like reading!") in *Signs and Cities*. She explains how this moment—along with the others that she tracks—illustrates how reading functions as an innovative mode of knowing and as a rearticulation of the traditional reading subject in *Stars in My Pocket* thereby reflecting her larger discussion about the poststructuralist semiotic analysis at the heart of Delany's fiction.
26. Judith Butler's discussion of the "performative" and its simultaneous evocation and disruption of a regulatory matrix is especially relevant here.
27. The perceived threat of sexual minorities and queer spaces to heterocentric norms and business-defined space is also a central consideration in *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, further illustrating the extent to which these two authors often engage similar theoretical questions regardless of the selected generic form.

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