

10-1-2014

# Depressives and the Scenes of Queer Writing

Allen Durgin

*Graduate Center, City University of New York*

## How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: [http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds)

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Durgin, Allen, "Depressives and the Scenes of Queer Writing" (2014). *CUNY Academic Works*.  
[http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/482](http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/482)

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Works by Year: Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact [deposit@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:deposit@gc.cuny.edu).

DEPRESSIVES & THE SCENES OF QUEER WRITING

by

ALLEN DURGIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2014

© 2014

ALLEN DURGIN

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

---

Date

---

Robert Reid-Pharr, Chair of Committee

---

Date

---

Mario DiGangi, Executive Officer

---

Wayne Koestenbaum

---

Steven F. Kruger

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

## DEPRESSIVES AND THE QUEER SCENES OF WRITING

by

ALLEN DURGIN

Adviser: Professor Robert Reid-Pharr

My dissertation attempts to answer the question: *What exactly does a reparative reading look like?* The question refers to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's provocative essay on paranoid and reparative reading practices, in which Sedgwick describes how the hermeneutics of suspicion has become central to a whole range of intellectual projects across the humanities and social sciences. Criticizing this dominant critical mode for its political blindness and unintended replication of repressive social structures, Sedgwick looks for an alternative in what she calls *reparative reading*. Past attempts to expand on Sedgwick's brief yet suggestive remarks regarding reparative reading have foundered due to a lack of critical language. My dissertation is an attempt to develop this language. Retiring the term *reparative*, I return to the figure of the *depressive* within the works of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and experimental psychologist Silvan Tomkins, as well as Sedgwick herself, and trace the recursive contours of a depressive mode. I demonstrate how such a recursive mode is responsive to its own contingency and changing environment and how it offers alternatives to the normalizing teleologies and assumptions of paranoid critical practices. Experimental in form and method, my dissertation enacts the same depressive mode it purports to describe, ultimately locating the depressive within particular forms, or *scenes*, of queer writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“You could make a mother out of anybody.”

—*Postcards From the Edge*

Many a mother nursed this project to health.

Its first mother was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick whose expansive presence and enveloping love, I hope, can be felt on every page. Then came its fairy godmothers—Robert Reid-Pharr, Wayne Koestenbaum, and Steven Kruger—who took this orphaned project under their sheltering wings after Sedgwick’s passing. They are living, breathing, walking antidepressants, just going around making people feel better.

Of course, I cannot forget those longtime companions whose love, respect, and revitalizing energy have buoyed my spirit and kept me afloat these many years: Bob Speck and Jeffrey Gimble; Juleen D. Collins, Robin Follett, and Joanna Parson; Jeanine Casler and April Stafford; Kevin Donlin and James Leo Ryan.

Also, those strangers on whose kindness and kinship I came so happily to depend: Kelsey Louie, Marty McElhiney, Charles Quiles, Peter Dehazya, and that queer little family of Arielle Pink, Eposhe Paul Ithete, and little Leo Ithete.

Unlike many queer men, I had the good fortune of being born into a family whose love altered not when it alteration found: my mom and dad, Joan and Allen Durgin; my siblings Jean, Jennifer, Jason, and Jeremy, their spouses and children; as well as my extended family, particularly Pam Stevenson and Dr. Shannon Stevenson. They kept faith when I no longer could.

And when this project became lost, it was found and adopted by that motley crew at Columbia University's Writing Center. Sue Mendelsohn, Linh An, Kat Savino, Adam Pellegrini, Phoebe Collins—all dramatized not only the presence of attentive readers, but also the power of goodness and light.

Finally, my Sedgwickian family—Hal Sedgwick, Tina Meyerhoff, Annie Cranston, Kate Stanley, Mandy Berry, Michael Moon, Jonathan Goldberg, Jane Gallop. They kept Eve alive in my heart by graciously sharing with me their memories, words, and love of her. Eve was fond of pointing out how important it is for the characters in Proust to show that they are loved. How lucky I am that such demonstration has proven so easy.

I suppose it is common among those whose parents have passed away to wonder if they are proud of them. As I finish this dissertation, I find myself thinking of the last lines of “White Glasses,” a conference paper in which Sedgwick eulogizes her dying friend Michael Lynch who cannot attend. “Hi Michael!” she says, and I say along with her,

I know I probably got almost everything wrong  
but I hope you didn't just hate this.

For Eve



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction:

Depressive Pedagogy.....	1
Chapter 1	
Depressives are Dense.....	41
Chapter 2	
Depressives Make Scenes.....	80
Chapter 3	
Depressives Take Things Personally.....	121
Chapter 4	
Depressives Brood.....	166
Works Cited.....	207

## INTRODUCTION

### Depressive Pedagogy

The depressive creates other depressives by repeating the relationship which created his own character. —Silvan Tomkins

To me, though, apparently a vision of non-karmic possibility, however subject to abuse, at least opens a window to give air and light onto scenes of depressive pedagogy.

—Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Sometime in the middle of my graduate studies, I was talking with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. I don't remember the content of our conversation—I had long since learned that the ostensible reason for being there (i.e., to discuss a literary or theoretical text, to assist in some small research task, or, more often than not, to share whatever big or small things were going on in each of our lives) mattered little compared with the simple fact of being in the room with her—but I do recall that at the time I was taking class with queer theorist José Muñoz. After patiently listening to me go on and on about something equal parts mundane and monumental, Sedgwick startled with a haiku of sorts. “You know,” she enthused, “I was José’s teacher back at Duke. So not only

Am I your mother

I am

Your grandmother too.”

I have been brooding a lot over Sedgwick's words since her passing in 2009. No doubt, the reasons are complicated and varied—for instance, I find myself transfixed by its efficacious wrapping of maternal assurance with Little Red Riding Hood threat—but among the many things I want that story to do is to show myself as being loved by her; to install myself, however fleetingly and precariously, at the center of some queer family; and, most importantly, to revel in the thrill of mimicking her. What my story is really about is a kind of depressive pedagogy.

My dissertation examines the relationship between depressiveness and pedagogy within the field of queer theory. Its main point of departure is Sedgwick's provocatively titled essay "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading: You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." First appearing in the late nineties as an introduction to *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, and then later reprised in her 2003 book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy*, Sedgwick's essay signaled what many saw as a move away from the field she helped found—queer theory—and into the burgeoning field of affect theory. In the essay, Sedgwick describes how "the hermeneutics of suspicion" has become central to a whole range of intellectual projects across the humanities and social sciences: "not surprisingly, the methodological centrality of suspicion to current critical practice has involved a concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia" (*Touching Feeling* 125). Sedgwick is careful to distinguish between paranoid interpretative practices, on the one hand, and the diagnostic categories of schizophrenia and dementia (with their suggestion of delusionality and psychosis), on the other. She does so to make clear that the problem with practicing paranoid strategies is not that they may be wrong about what is going on in the world. In fact, they may know all too well the real, systematic violence that lies hidden within all sorts of institutions. Rather, paranoia "represents a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge. Paranoia

knows some things well and others poorly” (130). One thing paranoia knows poorly is how to deal with its own contingency. As Sedgwick demonstrates, the paranoid proclivities of current critical discourse have had the unintended consequence of replicating the same repressive structures these critical practices were meant to critique.

Disturbed by the danger of present theory in general and queer theory in particular becoming increasingly numb to itself, Sedgwick turns to the theories of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein and lesser known experimental psychologist Silvan Tomkins to articulate the assumptions, limitations and performative effects of paranoid critical practices. Of particular interest to Sedgwick is Klein’s concept of paranoid and depressive positions. Related to, but also quite different from, the diagnostic categories found in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the paranoid and the depressive in Klein mark two opposed relational structures—two sets of interpretative practices, two points of view, two postures, two positions:

[f]or Klein’s infant or adult, the paranoid position—understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety—is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one. (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 128)

In contrast, the depressive position signals “an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting” (128). For Klein, the depressive position, while related to depression, is not synonymous with it. Rather, it is the position from which the infant or adult reintegrates those parts of the self that had been deemed dangerous (both to oneself and others) and therefore disavowed or projected out. This wrestling into the depressive position is what allows the infant or adult to begin repairing the damage done in the paranoid position. Sedgwick finds these two positions “useful for [her] discussion of

paranoid and reparative critical practices, not as theoretical ideologies (and certainly not as stable personality types of critics), but as changing and heterogeneous relational stances” (128).

Most of Sedgwick’s essay concerns the relational stances of paranoid critical practices. She delineates five things that characterize such practices. First, paranoia as a critical mode is anticipatory, that “always already” so familiar in theory that it reads as the very stuff of Truth. Paranoia knows that since bad things happened in the past, bad things will happen in the future. What paranoia cannot tolerate is surprise: whether welcomed or not, surprises are ruled inadmissible out of hand. All things must be known in advance. Thus, in the case of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, there can be no time, either in the past or in the future, when it was not already known that the inexorable and violent law of sexual difference held sway. Second, paranoia “seems to require being imitated to be understood, and it, in turn, seems to understand only by imitation” (131). Put in layman’s terms, “paranoia proposes, *Anything you can do (to me) I can do worse*, and *Anything you can do (to me) I can do first—to myself*” (131). For instance, in D.A. Miller’s 1989 book *The Novel and the Police*, not only does the liberal subject always already know that he is a victim of state violence, but he will do the state’s dirty work himself by disciplining his own body first.

This anticipatory mimeticism is what allows paranoia to become a strong theory. Here, Sedgwick brings in the work of Silvan Tomkins. The strength of any given theory, according to Tomkins, is in direct proportion to its explanatory reach: the more of the world it tries to explain, the stronger it becomes. The effect of paranoia’s anticipatory and mimetic strategies is the mushrooming of this reductive power. So, in *The Novel and the Police*, “everything [in the novel] can be understood as an aspect of the carceral, therefore the carceral is everywhere” (135). A strong theory, indeed, and a grim one that is a piece with paranoia’s fourth

characteristic: that of being a theory of negative affect. For criticism couched in the paranoid position, any explicit recourse to the pleasure-seeking affects of joy and excitement is only ever admissible as a form of delusion. Instead, paranoia expends all its energies on predicting, avoiding, and minimizing the experience of such negative affects as shame and humiliation. Paradoxically, such a strong shame theory of negative affect grows stronger and becomes more monopolistic the more it fails in successfully anticipating and warding off humiliation, in particular the humiliation of having any knowledge come to it as a surprise. So Sedgwick finds it surprising that paranoia in its fifth and final guise would place such faith in exposure—“as though to make something visible as a problem were, if not a mere hop, skip, and jump away from getting it solved, at least self-evidently a step in that direction” (139). Miller, for instance, sets out to demystify “the intensive and continuous ‘pastoral’ care that liberal society proposes to take care of each and every one of its charges” (qtd. in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 141). To which, Sedgwick quips, “As if! I’m a lot less worried about being pathologized by my therapist than about my vanishing mental health coverage—and that’s given the great good luck of having health insurance at all” (141). That the New Historicist criticism of the 1980s could not foresee the Republicans’ 1994 Contract with America is understandable, but it is also part and parcel of paranoia’s nature to expand “as each unanticipated disaster seems to demonstrate more conclusively that, guess what, *you can never be paranoid enough*” (142). The unintended consequence of such a tautology is that paranoid readings run the risk of becoming immune to historical change. As an alternative, therefore, Sedgwick gestures toward what she terms a “reparative” way of reading, one more responsive to its own contingency and therefore more adaptable to a changing political environment.

Since its publication, Sedgwick's essay has served as both rallying call and stumbling block for many theorists and scholars. In practical terms, her call to reparation has been interpreted as a "hermeneutics of recovery"—an attention to cultural experiments and modes of existence rendered invisible by a paranoid optic. Recent articles, dissertations and books explicitly announcing themselves as reparative have recuperated cultural practices and textual moments once dismissed as trivial, or maligned as complicit, and re-read them as complication or transformation of dominant discourse.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in "Making It After All: A Reparative Reading of The Mary Tyler Moore Show," Susan Crozier argues that "an emphasis on the ideological conflicts inherent in the New Woman sitcom has allowed feminist criticism to overlook the emotional complexity of the Mary Richards character and the way in which the ambivalence evidently encoded in her might provide a structure for the viewer to negotiate intimate conflicts that are still politically significant" (56). "Taking seriously the notion of love for TV" (52), Crozier focuses on the iconic opening credits in which Mary Richards, newly arrived in Minneapolis, spins around in the middle of the street and tosses up her beret in joyful abandon: "the vision of her urban survival that is continually reaffirmed in the opening credits signals the possibility of a new, uncharted mode of being" (59). This "uncharted mode of being," however, is constantly undercut by the many professional and romantic humiliations that Mary must endure within the episodic narrative. "Yet this tension between desired ideals and less-than-perfect actualities," according to Crozier, constitutes "Mary's enabling affective potentiality for socially and sexually diverse viewers" (61). Crozier cites fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi's "longstanding love" for the sitcom as one example of such cross identifications. When the "rather dowdy" Mizrahi spins around and "throw[s] his less aerodynamic bandana in the air"

---

<sup>1</sup> For other examples of reparative readings in this vein, see Schweitzer and Lassen.

in Douglas Kieve's 1995 documentary *Unzipped*, "he feels like, or wants to feel like, Mary" (60). In doing so, he taps into Mary's "reparative potential"—her "capacity to keep hope alive without caving in to cynicism and despair" (65).

In similar fashion, Robert Diaz, in "Reparative Acts: Redress and the Politics of Queer Undoing in Contemporary Asian/America," recuperates the love many characters feel toward another 1970s American television star in Zamora Linmark's novel *Rolling the R's*. Linmark's protagonist, Orlando Domingo, is a queer Filipino whose identification with Farrah Fawcett of *Charlie's Angels* fame is so intense that he imitates her signature hairdo and answers only to the name "Farrah Flip." Diaz challenges any paranoid reading that would diagnose Orlando's love of all things Farrah as a mere symptom of racial melancholia, as an unfortunate pining for a supposedly hegemonic whiteness into which he will never assimilate. Rather, Orlando's "Farrah flip" marks "other routes to feeling, remembering, and producing nationhood" (43) and demonstrates "how the ethnic-queer subject works himself into the seemingly scripted narrative of 'idealized' whiteness that he is supposed to maintain, incorporate, and 'be'" (40). Like the queer viewer that re-appropriates Mary Richard's iconic beret toss, Orlando becomes, "through the literal flipping of hair, [...] not just the white, blond, and beautiful figure of Farrah Fawcett but something else: a truly Flipped out Farrah" (41). In both Crozier's and Diaz's analyses, the term *reparative* marks a move *away* from projects of demystification and exposure and *toward* explorations of the ways in which marginalized subjects survive, find sustenance, and enact change within repressive social structures. Diaz, for instance, asks, "what could a deepened notion of 'reparation' as a hermeneutics do to our critical projects and their political possibilities" (7). Diaz sets his study alongside and against dominant political frameworks that define *reparations*—"for American slavery, for the Holocaust, for Japanese internment camps



during the Second World War, for human rights abuses during the Marcos regime, for South African Apartheid” (4-5)—in terms of symbolic, juridical or monetary redress. Diaz wrenches these dominant frames by defining *reparation* as a performance “practice” (8), one meant “to undo traumatic violence” (iv). He then explores how such queer performance practices as Orlando’s Farrah Flip enact that “undoing” (9), thus troubling those discourses that center discussions of reparations on material compensation. The object of study here has shifted from the social forces doing the damage to the subject registering and repairing the damage done. “The aim of reparative criticism,” according to Lauren Berlant, “is to sustain the unthought thoughts about desire that are otherwise defeated by the roar of conventionality or heteroculture” (73). Whether it be the tossing of a beret or a toss of hair, reparative readings have “something vibrantly quiet” (73) about them.<sup>2</sup> They entail a different orientation toward their objects of study, one characterized not by suspicion, but by affection. As Sedgwick reminds us, “among Klein’s name for the reparative process is love” (*Touching Feeling* 128).

And yet, *the course of true love never did run smooth*. Deborah Britzman may wax poetic in her essay “Theory Kindergarten” when she refers to the pleasures and experimentations of reparative reading as “the work of love” (137) but in “Truth and Consequences,” Heather Love “admit[s] to some persistent and not necessarily productive confusion about what the work of love is” (236). Her confusion lies in how to read the essay: “reparatively or in a paranoid mode” (237). Love understands that the “‘right’ way” (237) to read the essay is both “as

---

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Sedgwick herself highlights this quietness or “aesthetic of deontological reticence” (“Paranoid Reading” 3) in her introduction to the various essays in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*: “these essays quietly, collectively find alternative approaches” (1) and “it seems to me that an often quiet, but very palpable presiding image here—a kind of *genius loci* of queer reading—is the interpretative absorption of the child or adolescent whose sense of personal queerness may or may not (yet?) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice, aim, site, or identification” (2).

*reparative*” (237) on Sedgwick’s part (as she makes up for damages done by paranoid readings past, most notably *Epistemology of the Closet*) and “reparatively” (237) by the reader (who is to take Sedgwick’s reparation in good faith). She also notes how insistently the reparative gets valued over the paranoid:

It’s true that paranoid reading does not come off well in this essay: [it] is described as a way of disavowing affect in order to claim ownership over truth; it is associated with a highly public and stigmatized manifestation of mental illness; it is described as *rigid, grim, single-minded, self-defeating, circular, reductive, hypervigilant, scouringly thorough, contemptuous, sneering, risk-averse, cruel, monopolistic, and terrible*. (237)

In contrast, the reparative stands heroically “on the side of *multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love*” (237). So you couldn’t blame a reader coming away from Sedgwick’s essay (as many critics, whether sympathetic or skeptical, have done) with the heuristic: *paranoid bad, reparative good*.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> For instance, in his dissertation “Queer Pedagogy: A Reparative Retelling of American Studies,” Nishant Shahani uses the term *paranoid* to describe what he sees as “a negative formulation of sexual citizenship” (i.e., the right *not* to be discriminated against, beaten, or persecuted) and champions “a more reparative notion of sexual citizenship” (ix). Shahani characterizes his project as reparative “since it does not merely expose the operations of queer space as it already exists or queer time as it has already taken place, or continues to take place. Instead, the project explores material relations that are conducive to the creation of queer possibilities that have yet to be imagined in relation to the practice of American Studies” (ix). But despite his many insightful readings of, among other things, Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours*, the film *Monster’s Ball*, and Mark Merlis’ *American Studies*, one has the impression that the term *reparative* could just as easily be replaced by the less theoretical sounding adjective *good* or *better* without the slightest change in meaning. A similar thing happens with the term *performative*. For Shahani, to describe something is always already to expose it, and thus, paranoid. According to him, criticism fails if it simply describes the present (as if accurate, useful descriptions of the present were a dime a dozen); rather, it must always *do* something towards the future. In much the same way that the richness associated with the reparative in Sedgwick’s essay, according to Love, insists on being read *reparatively*, Shahani insists that “[i]n order to move away from the hermeneutic of suspicion that characterizes queer theorizing, I have approached the matter of pedagogical performativity *performatively*” (my emphasis, 187). And

But Love hears something else. In addition to the call to reparation, she hears an invitation “to the kind of paranoid, reflexive, and mimetic thinking that the essay is about” (236). The subtitle itself “produces its own bad objects, readers who take the ‘you’ of the title personally”:

In my case, I am hailed as one of the latecomers to queer theory who picks up paranoid habits of mind as critical tools or weapons but is detached from the living contexts in which these frameworks were articulated (primarily, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s). I also find myself hailed in another less damning, but more embarrassing way. In this scenario, I am not the master theorist-exposer but the exposed: my misrecognition of myself as the essay’s addressee is in the longing, absurdly hopeful mode of the amorous student—looking for love in all the wrong places. (236)

In a strange case of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, Love hears Sedgwick enacting both reparation and aggression—the wolf in grandmother’s clothes. Love, in turn, feels “both aggressive and wounded”—“a shamed and longing student trying to get back her own by being right this time” (237). In this regard, Love admits to practicing the same paranoid modes about which Sedgwick warns. But then again, so does Sedgwick. Love points to such moments as Sedgwick taking D.A. Miller to task as examples of Sedgwick’s acting out and aggressivity. She also points to another essay, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” in which Sedgwick tells of her “barely successful defenses against being devoured by [her] own cycles of greed, envy, rage, and, in particular, overwhelming anxiety” (qtd. in Love 238). Love’s intention, however, is not

---

yet, the whole point of Sedgwick’s essay was that paranoid critical practices had performative effects all their own—some good, some bad. Only Shahani’s idealization of the *reparative* as an unqualified good blinds him to this fact. For criticism skeptical of Sedgwick’s reparative project, see Tucker 82-123.

to “catch Sedgwick in her paranoid mode” (238), although she concedes that she cannot fully disavow such a motive. Rather, Love wants to answer what she hears as Sedgwick’s call “to acknowledge the negativity and the aggression at the heart of psychic life and to recognize that thinking is impossible without this kind of aggression” (238). As Love puts it, “there is a risk in love, including the risk of antagonism, aggression, irritation, contempt, anger—love means trying to destroy the object as well as trying to repair it” (239).

One useful shorthand for conceptualizing these two confounding calls that Love hears might be Robert Diaz’s oxymoron *reparative envy*. In his discussion of Orlando’s Farrah Flip, Diaz reappropriates Melanie Klein’s notion of envy. In Klein, the envy associated with the paranoid position is not so much a hunger to possess something that someone else has or a preemptive paranoid attack on a “bad” or “persecutory” object—be it person, place or thing—but rather, a perverse desire to destroy an idealized good object *because it is good*. The quintessential good object, for Klein, is the mother’s breast; thus, the envious child has phantasies of spoiling the mother’s goodness by projecting his or her “bad” contents (i.e., anxieties, sadism, excrement) into her nurturing body. It is a sadistic act meant to rob the mother of her life-giving qualities and creativity. Among Klein’s names for these envious raids on the maternal body is “excessive hate”—a far cry from the “*consolation, creativity and love*” associated with the reparative. Diaz intentionally misreads Klein in order to recuperate envy for its reparative potential: “envy may operate as a resource of immense usefulness for the raced subject undergoing and working through the pleasures, desires, needs, and anxieties around her racialized position” (34). Like Anne Cheng and David Eng, Diaz sees the Asian American subject as split between the bad racialized self and the good white self that he or she hopes in vain to become. But while Cheng and Eng emphasize the melancholic longing of such a split,

Diaz points to the ways in which Farrah Flip and her friends—Linmark’s narrator makes it clear, “Everybody in Kahlili wants to be ‘Farrah’” (qtd. in Diaz 38)—use parts of their “bad” queer Filipino selves to pollute or taint the goodness of the American idol they mimic:

the bad self—and in the case of Asian American persons their ‘raced’ selves—are integral to the process of creating the idealized whole identity, the seeming product of a fully assimilated body. Rather than an object that the subject wishes to be rid of, her bad self actually becomes a way to muddle, problematize, and in a way spoil the desired good object of “whiteness.” (36)

The very name “Farrah Flip”—with its colloquial use of “flip” as both a derogatory term and a term of endearment for Filipino—spoils the idealized whiteness by smuggling in the marginalized identity: “Orlando’s quotidian performance of a ‘Flipped Farrah Fawcett’ shows us that to want something, to love something, can also mean to play around with it, to mess it up, to camp it out, and to add meaning to it” (41). Diaz does not view such spoiling or messing around as an attack on creativity. Quite the opposite: “what marginalized identity demands from Klein is an understanding of envy as a creative, strategically deployed move that augments what has been idealized not necessarily to destroy it but to question its very exemplarity” (37).

I am inclined to see Love’s essay as a form of reparative envy, as a tender yet aggressive questioning of Sedgwick’s “exemplarity.” Gertrude Stein’s longtime companion, Alice B. Toklas, interpreted every instance of the lower case *may* in *Stanzas in Meditation* as a naming of Stein’s ex-girlfriend May Bookstaver. Similarly, I cannot help but read every iteration of *love* in Love’s essay as a naming of Love herself. Orlando put the flip in the Farrah Flip. By a turn of events equally under-determined and over-determined—what Sedgwick often referred to as the

structure of a joke—Love projects herself into the reparative and then “spoils” it. She already misrecognized herself as the essay’s addressee, “looking for love in all the wrong places”:

Those places are even more wrong now that my teachers are gone, and I can’t indulge my early habits of waiting around cafés and doorways and empty lecture halls hoping for chance encounters—my pedagogical crushes have finally migrated inside the text.

(236-237)

Love’s plaint over the loss of teacher finds its bittersweet consolation in “the final challenge that Sedgwick issues”:

the call to deidealize what must be the most idealized relationship for many of us in queer studies: the relation between student and teacher. For me, much more than the mother-child relationship or romantic love, the teacher-student relationship is an ideal, a model of generosity, repair, and union without loss. (240)

And so Love instructs us—“[she’s] the teacher now” (237)—“recognizing that it is not only reparation but damage at work in Sedgwick’s late essays will let us begin the hard work of deidealization. And that’s love too” (240).

Love *is* right. Sedgwick herself worried about those she would leave behind: “I have an intense wish to be assured that the people and communities I’m leaving behind can take care of themselves—that they don’t need ‘me,’ my thought, my labor of regenerating a first person to keep them going” (“This Piercing Bouquet” 250). Sedgwick’s move to the materiality of textile art was one way of unmooring herself and her followers from a first person she knew was in the process of dematerializing. At the same time, she understood that such concern “corresponds to an insanely grandiose fantasy about [her] importance to others’ lives!—You know, that if there isn’t Mrs. Ramsay the dinner can’t go on” (250). Love gently but firmly reminds us that Mrs.

Ramsay has indeed left the building; that the party must go on. And yet, to steal from Love, “I remain unwilling, unreconciled in my heart to a world this empty” (237). My resistance stems from that “persistent yet not necessarily productive confusion” of which Love speaks. I have always been a rather dense pupil, prone to my own vicious cycles of greed, anxiety, and envy. Klein postulated that envy is innate: that each of us brings our own individual quotient of anxiety and aggressivity into the world with us. Reading over D.H. Hinshelwood’s description of Kleinian envy, I am struck by how easily one can become confused when relating to those objects that give us love and nurture:

‘good’ and ‘bad’ impulses and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ objects appear to be confused. This state, which the infant inevitably suffers, has to be immediately dealt with, though the efforts turn into a lifelong struggle to discriminate between what is good and bad in oneself and in the external world around. (167-168)

Deidealizing the queer exemplarity of the teacher-student relationship sounds reasonable enough. And no doubt, this dissertation, in addition to being an act of love toward its deceased mentor, is to some degree also an act of aggression. But what if, in “trying to destroy the object,” I irreparably damage its goodness? Or worse, what if in loving Sedgwick, I only succeed in raiding and spoiling mother’s body instead? To sync lips with Kate Bush: “Is there so much hate for the ones we love?”

Love and Diaz recuperate paranoia as a valued interpretative tool, and rightly so. After all, paranoia gave us *Gender Trouble* and *The Novel and the Police*, and Sedgwick makes it clear that these are very good things. What concerns me is how at-the-ready those aggressive intellectual muscles are, how atrophied, in comparison, the reparative. In Diaz’s reparative envy, for instance, the term *reparative* seems comparatively static, as if without the propulsive kick of

envy, his argument would never get up and running. Likewise, Love's *tour de force* list of adjectives associated with paranoia brings home the dynamic, or in her words, "energizing force" (240) of paranoid habits of mind. This re-engagement with the paranoid gets repeated in a lot of criticism wrestling with Sedgwick's concept of reparative reading. During the 2010 annual convention of the Modern Language Association, Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant gave a joint-paper (recalling similar two-person performances given by Sedgwick and gay men) entitled "What Survives?" Their dialogue revolved around the question of reparative reading, an incredibly wrought piece whose first section was aptly titled "Fail." Like Love, Edelman and Berlant felt drawn to the thread of "dread" that weaves itself through Sedgwick's work, noting the productivity of that affect and raising the provocative question: "What if we don't repair?" While I find the analyses of Love, Diaz, Edelman and Laurent compelling and true, I am struck by how each of these incredibly agile, creative, smart thinkers feel compelled to re-engage the paranoid in order to speak about the reparative. Dread and aggression seem to be the engine that makes the thinking go. Sedgwick offers no less than five headings in her sketch of paranoid critical practices. That particular sketch has served as a template for understanding both the moves within certain texts and also the dynamics within academia itself. But when the term *reparative*, with its connotations of psychic, economic, political and cultural assuagement, makes an appearance in criticism, it remains as an allusive, and therefore elusive, figure. Most criticism never pushes the term beyond Sedgwick's initial, brief descriptions. The invocation of the reparative seems more invitation than instruction, less a methodology than a motive.

But it was never a problem of motive. "The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative impulse toward a text or a culture," according to Sedgwick, "has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are



willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives” (*Touching Feeling* 150). One of the aims of this dissertation is to proffer a new vocabulary for articulating reparative motives, beginning with retiring the term itself. Sedgwick once admitted (now I’m telling tales out of school) that she regretted using the term *reparative*. I do not know—or don’t remember—if she explained why. Perhaps, the possible idealization of the term worried her. Or, perhaps, the term seemed already too laden with productive and paralyzing legal, political, and cultural debates surrounding postcolonial projects of reparations (although Joshua Chambers-Letson and Robert Diaz certainly push creatively and productively in that direction in their 2006 issue of *Women and Performance* entitled “Repairing Feminism”). Then, there is the unintended and uncanny connection with “reparative therapy”—the highly controversial process by which lesbians and gay men have their homosexuality “cured” and their heterosexuality restored through bible verse, church meetings, or other religious means. The most plausible explanation for Sedgwick’s comment, though, is that the term did not fully resonate with her. Besides the two essays in which it appears, the term holds little sway in Sedgwick’s work. Rather, the terms that do recur throughout her work, and that are freighted with the densest meanings, are *depression*, *depressive*, and *depressiveness*.

I propose that unpacking and interrogating the *depressive* may get us a lot farther<sup>4</sup> than the reparative in not only better understanding Sedgwick’s essay, but also dealing with her loss. After all, Sedgwick’s initial interest in Klein and paranoid critical practices stemmed from the possibility of occupying that *other* position, that of the *depressive*. Sedgwick pithily sums up what makes the depressive position “depressive”:

---

<sup>4</sup> My use of *farther* here, with its suggestions of geographical distance, is intentional.

The threshold to the depressive position is the simple, foundational, authentically very difficult understanding that good and bad tend to be inseparable at every level. ‘The infant,’ as Hinshelwood summarizes this argument, ‘at some stage is physically and emotionally mature enough to integrate his or her fragmented perceptions, bringing together the separately good and bad versions [of the mother]. When such part-objects are brought together as a whole they threaten to form a contaminated, damaged, or dead whole object,’ whether internal, external, or both—what I take to be a description of depression per se. (“Melanie Klein” 637)

One advantage of the term *depressive* is that it disabuses anyone of the notion that the reparative process is an altogether rosy affair. While the depressive position is the place from which reparation begins, it also sets the stage, as Sedgwick notes, for profound depression as one wrestles with the debilitating ambivalence toward a once idealized and loved object. To contain a contaminated, damaged, or dead object inside oneself: that might explain Silvan Tomkins’s astute observation that “the depressive... is not altogether a comfortable person for others with whom he [or she] interacts” (*Shame and Its Sisters* 225). Love reminds us, “Sedgwick taught me to let the affect in, but it’s clear by doing so I won’t only be letting the sunshine in” (239).

The excruciating demands of the depressive position might also account for Love’s confusion over whether to read Sedgwick reparatively or in a paranoid mode, as well as criticism’s tendency to slip back into paranoid habits of mind. Within the depressive position, one experiences “remorse, shame, the buzzing confusion that makes thought impossible, depression itself, mourning the lost ideal, and—often most relevant—a paralyzing apprehension of the inexorable laws of unintended consequences” (Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein” 637). Part of that “buzzing confusion” and “paralyzing apprehension” lies in the depressive’s tropism toward

deconstruction. The paranoid and the depressive: not only are we constantly oscillating between the two positions, we are confounded by the very terms themselves. How quickly the terms want to collapse into one another before we even have the chance to explicate their difference; how easily we might misrecognize as depressive a reading, that is, in fact, paranoid; the unintended damage we do. Such confusion and apprehension can lead to some rather formidable writer's block. In interviews, Sedgwick spoke of "the mild interest and profound depression" that plagued her during the writing of her dissertation, and I have heard a colleague or two echo the shame and anguish of my own writing block with the cry: "I can't! I don't want to!" Faced with such depressive paralysis, no wonder then we retreat to the "energizing force" of paranoid reading.

And yet, the depressive position need not be all doom and gloom, nor must it always lead to writer's block. While it remains unclear in Klein's later writing whether or not she envisioned a position beyond the depressive, Sedgwick still finds it a "uniquely spacious rubric":

Despite its name, it comes to encompass, for example, both the preconditions of severe depression and also quite a varied range of resources for surviving, repairing, and moving beyond that depression. It is the site for Klein's explorations of intellectual creativity; it is also the space in which challenges to normalizing universality can develop. ("Melanie Klein" 637)

But how exactly does one move from the sense of vastation and deadness that ushers in the depressive position toward something like reparation? And how does that position offer a space from which to challenge a normalizing universality? If the depressive position is a "uniquely spacious rubric," then what is the lay of that land, and how are we to scale the "range of resources" of such a depressive landscape?

To get a feel for that terrain, I find it useful to think of the depressive position as a set of holding relations. My use of term *holding relations* is meant to invoke D.W. Winnicott and his concept of a “holding environment.” A contemporary of Klein, Winnicott proposed that the infant needs the mother to “hold” its experience:

[f]or Winnicott, and those who were influenced by his work, psychoanalytic treatment was not exclusively interpretative, but first and foremost the provision of a congenial milieu, a “holding environment” analogous to maternal care. What Paul Ricoeur has called the “hermeneutic of suspicion” in Freud’s work, is replaced by the attempt to establish an analytic setting in which the patient does not undergo authoritative translation—having his unconscious fed back to him, as it were—but enabled by the analyst, as Winnicott wrote, “to reveal himself to himself.” (Phillips 11)

Interpretation serves as a “medium” (Winnicott 188) that holds the patient, so the patient might explore and play safely with ideas and feeling, often difficult ones, and thereby learn how to grow and know himself. The problem, though, lies with the presumed one-directionality of Winnicott’s theory; the mother is always stuck doing the holding. Winnicott also assumes an Oedipal teleology in which a singular “true” self is either liberated from or imprisoned by a multitude of false ones. While I must admit I find myself drawn to Winnicott’s warm analytic “lap” (189), my interest here rests in a set of holding relations that are distinctively queer. For Klein, the depressive position is not only differentiated from the paranoid position; it also contains the paranoid as a possible defense mechanism, among others. Thus, the depressive is both the container and the contained. It reminds me of an image in *A la recherche* that Sedgwick envisioned as emblematic of the holding relations present in Marcel Proust’s novel. Proust’s narrator describes a jar submerged in the river, observing that the water momentarily swirling

inside the jar, though now isolated from the rest of the river, is the same water as the river rushing around it: “the glass jars which the village boys used to lower into the Vivonne to catch minnows...filled by the stream, in which they in turn were enclosed, at once ‘containers’ whose transparent sides were like solidified water and ‘content’ plunged into a still larger container of liquid” (1:37). The depressive position could be thought of as the water briefly contained in the jar, depressiveness the larger river of possibility swirling around it. Or, to give another analogy, the depression experienced within the depressive position as well as the paranoid or manic defenses against that depression might be considered condensations or precipitates within the larger atmosphere of depressiveness.

While such queer holding relations can certainly be a source of confusion, they also hold the possibility of new relations within the depressive position. Sedgwick may have had holding environments in mind when she invokes the figure of “the ultimate teacher” in her essay “Teaching/Depression.” Translating Klein into the language of karma, Sedgwick re-imagines the paranoid position as the place from which bad karma emerges and is sent careening out into the world. The depressive position, on the other hand, is “the endless, heroic but discouraging attempt to turn bad karma into good karma” (3). But alongside that depressing scene of futility, Sedgwick envisions another possibility: “the figure without karma, the bodhisattva, who is able to perceive and be perceived clearly enough that the things they do are efficacious—and no more than efficacious” (4). Sedgwick admits that, “even the invocation of non-karmic possibility will be karmically overdetermined” (4). Nonetheless, that “vision of non-karmic possibility...at least opens a window to give air and light onto scenes of depressive pedagogy” (4). Implicit in that open window is a sense that depressive pedagogy might be housed within a larger world of possibilities, that there might be other regions within the depressive position whence air and light

might come. Love calls this invocation of non-karmic possibility a “fantasy.” But, as my dissertation will demonstrate, fantasy is where Sedgwick lives.

Crucial to this question of holding environments and fantasy is the question of mimicry.<sup>5</sup> If paranoia as a critical stance “takes its shape from a generational narrative that’s characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading” 26), then this dissertation hails from a very different family. When enmeshed in Sedgwick, what I don’t feel is the need for critical distance; instead, “what I most feel are Talmudic desires, to reproduce or unfold [her] text and to giggle” (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 240). But how does one make legible a pedagogical relation *not* indelibly marked by generational lockstep and the anxiety of influence? I certainly have no interest in killing the father, even if only metaphorically, as a rite of professional passage. I’d rather play dress-up, masquerade as mother, and giggle. In short, my dissertation wants to camp it up. *Not* camp as that thing “most often understood as uniquely appropriate to projects of parody, denaturalization, demystification, and mocking exposure of the elements and assumptions of a dominant culture” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading” 27). But rather, camp as that set of formal experimentations and queer cultural practices “motivated by love” (27). Not parody, but pastiche.

And yet, the present project, if it is to demonstrate the depressiveness it purports to describe, must embrace such discredited practices. For pedagogy in a depressive mode is

---

<sup>5</sup> Feminist theorists such as Lucy Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have written quite extensively on the relationship between “femininity” and the act of mimicry. In some ways, my work could be seen as a continuing in the tradition of Cixous’s *écriture féminine*. But while both Irigaray and Cixous are interested in escaping the linear, rigid lockstep of masculine logic and writing, their theories around writing and mimicry tend to emphasize the parodic, inadvertently reifying the category of woman and offering little room for cross identifications, disidentifications, misidentifications, or just plain non-identifications. My *écriture depressive* is up to something different.

decidedly different, in both affects and effects, from those forms of repetition and transmission normally associated with the hermeneutics of suspicion. As such, my writing performs two confounding yet consoling acts: mourning and mimicry. Its tone has something of the heartbreaking hilarity of *Kiki and Herb*, one of Sedgwick's favorite camp acts, whose star—the always half-lit and washed-out cabaret performer Kiki DuRane—has a knack for giving lessons in the obvious. As Kiki is fond of instructing her pupils: “Ladies and Gentleman, people die.” And yet, spanning the distance between knowing that people, in general, die and *realizing* someone you know and love is *actually* dead, or dying, is a learning curve terribly hard to master.

In my desire to play dress up, I bear a striking family resemblance to another of Sedgwick's charges, Jonathan Flatley, who arrived for his job talk at Harvard wearing Sedgwick's tie. After the talk, a member of the search committee snidely remarked how Flatley was working on the same themes, authors, and texts as Sedgwick, and then contemptuously asked, *What makes you different than Sedgwick?* It never occurred to Flatley that imitating Sedgwick, or fantasizing about the possibility of being mistaken for her, would be looked upon as something undesirable, comprising, or scandalous (“Unlike Eve Sedgwick” 228). The accusatory tone of the committee member's question, meant to shut down rather than stimulate conversation, betrays the disavowal and *ressentiment* within an academy where male-to-male heterosexual initiation and imitation is so ubiquitous and accepted as to be invisible, even to the imitated subject. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno instructs us, “if artworks do not make themselves like something else but only like themselves, then only those who imitate them understand them” (125). In *Remarks on Marx*, Michel Foucault famously proffers his books “as invitations, as public gestures, for those who may want eventually to do the same thing, or

something like it, or, in any case, who intend to slip into this kind of experience” (40). But whereas the pedagogic relations surrounding men admit to imitation without the slightest sense of unoriginality, to imitate Sedgwick—to have her serve as the focus of, say, a dissertation—seems myopic, unoriginal, infantile.

Flatley’s unabashed imitation recalls Sedgwick’s own love of and experiments with mimicry and ventriloquism. In *A Dialogue on Love*, Sedgwick revels in the “big, queer, expressive talents” of her longtime friend Michael Moon, especially his “ventriloquism” and his uncanny ability to channel both life and fiction for Sedgwick, as if the world became real only by passing through him:

his people seem more  
real than real people  
never feel as if I’ve  
read a book until  
Michael has channeled  
it for me—really, that goes  
for my own life too. (25)

A medium capable of channeling other texts and other worlds, Michael holds the different strands of Sedgwick’s life together. Sedgwick, in turn, channels another Michael—this time Michael Lynch—in her essay “White Glasses.” Sporting his signature eyewear, she nurses the fantasy that she might be mistaken for him. Her identification is so strong in fact that “it amazes [her] that anyone can tell [them] apart”:

When I am with Michael, often suddenly it will be as if we were fused together at a distance of half an inch from the eye...So often I feel that I see with Michael’s eyes—not



because we are the same, but because the same prosthetic device attaches to, extends, and corrects the faulty limb of our vision...When I am in bed with Michael, our white glasses line up neatly on the night table and I always fantasy [sic] that I may walk away wearing the wrong ones. (*Tendencies* 257)

Lynch would later write an essay channeling Sedgwick's voice speaking on his behalf.

Amidst all this playful confusion of Sedgwicks and Michaels is a set of queer holding relations, a liminal space of identification that Sedgwick describes as the experience of being simultaneously "me and not-me." The invitation that Sedgwick offers is more capacious than Adorno's or Foucault's. It offers the possibility of being both like and unlike her at the same time:

[p]art of the motivation behind [her] work...has been a fantasy that readers or hearers would be variously—in anger, identification, pleasure, envy, "permission," exclusion—stimulated to write accounts "like" this one (whatever that means) of their own, share those. ("A Poem Is Being Written" 143)

Sedgwick's literary executor, Jonathan Goldberg, sees in this fantasy "a tropism towards an identification, towards a writing-like, an attachment, in the first person, to a relationality that could be as much a disidentification. The word here for all this is 'like' and it's in scare quotes, for to write 'like' this is just as palpably to write unlike this" ("Eve's Future Figures"). Unlike the paranoid mode, where imitation is accusatory and symmetrical—following a strong theory of It Takes One to Know One—Sedgwick's mimicry works by way of avowal and asymmetry.<sup>6</sup>

When Flatley regrouped with Sedgwick after his humiliating job talk, the pair thought of

---

<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick and Lynch may share the same prosthetic, but should their prescribed magnifications differ even in the slightest, both would experience disorientation upon walking away with the other's glasses, an unsettling of balance as a source of joy.

possible responses to that hostile committee member. As it happened, Harvard was also considering Sedgwick for a position at the time. So one retort they thought of was: “Unlike Eve Sedgwick, I *would* accept a job at Harvard” (229).

In his discussion of the depressive with regards to teaching, Tomkins writes, “the depressive creates other depressives by repeating the relationship that created his own character” (3:823). But as my dissertation will demonstrate, there is a difference between a strong and a weak theory of imitation. My initial thinking on the reparative was along the lines of Roland Barthes’ concept of bliss:<sup>7</sup>

with the writer of bliss (and his reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text.

This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak on such a text, you can only speak “in” it, in its fashion, enter into a desperate plagiarism. (22)

---

<sup>7</sup> Emily King makes a similar move in “Reconsidering Reparation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and Critical Reading Practices.” According to King, “though Sedgwick’s theorization of reparative reading gestures towards pleasure in an abstract manner, her argument stops short of theorizing an excessive pleasure that is inextricable from the text. She fails, in other words, to make good on her promise of pleasure” (66). King correctly observes that the reparative lies on the side of surplus and pleasure. But King wants more: “I wish to focus on the qualities of addition and accretion: there is, in other words, something *more* to reparative reading. Yet what is *more* if not *jouissance*?” (66). Thus, she interprets Sedgwick’s blacklisting of *jouissance* as “a surprising moment of heteronormative Puritanism” (67) and thus turns to Roland Barthes and his discussion of bliss to “prolong the pleasures of reparative reading” (66). But Sedgwick does not malign *jouissance* per se. She simply states that a strong theory of positive affect that privileges only one or two affects can be just as “totalizing” and stultifying as a strong theory of negative affect. King misreads “totalizing” to mean a consolidation of self or identity, whereas Sedgwick means “totalizing” in the sense of monopolizing one’s resources. King goes on to champion *jouissance* for its ability to shatter the self. But when I am caught in the grips of profound psychic or physical pain and lie broken on the doctor’s slab, I am not exactly in a state of what one would call *bliss*. What happens around self-shattering, the holding relations that obtain, might prove more important than the *jouissance* itself to whether or not the experience is one of pleasure or abjection.

The reparative might be thought of as the untenable text, the impossible text, the one that can only be reached through desperate acts of mimicry. Such desperation seems to rhyme with the buzzing confusion that besets one upon entering the depressive position, a melancholic need to incorporate and fully become the lost ideal object. And yet, I much prefer the weaker theory embedded in Goldberg's and Flatley's accounts where one might be like and unlike Sedgwick at the same time. *Like*, a weaker, less encompassing and exclusive version of love. In Tomkins, weak theory is weak because it is efficacious. In weak mimicry, all it may take is a tie or a pair of white glasses to do the trick.

"I 'love' the work that lets me like the world" (*Fat Art* 148), explains Sedgwick in her poem "The Warm Decembers."<sup>8</sup> My dissertation oscillates between a desperate plagiarism and a weak mimicry of Sedgwick's depressive poetics. Her writing realizes Wallace Stevens's vision that "the best poetry will be rhetorical criticism" (qtd. in Sontag 63)—a criticism that both attends to rhetoric and is itself rhetorical, the performance of a question. In his gorgeous essay, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," Wallace Stevens holds out to the reader the promise of discovering some immutable truth about the nature of poetry, imagination and reality, only to slip the reader's grasp with such queer demurrals as "these may just be words" (647) or "here I am, well-advanced in my paper, with everything of interest that I started out to say remaining to be said" (659). By the time you get this far into Stevens's essay, you can be pretty sure that Stevens is never going to get around to saying it. But he has, in fact, said it in the very act of composition: in his aphoristic tendencies, his obsessional parataxis, his promiscuous citations, his repeated use of illustrations that illustrate nothing, summations that do not sum a thing.

---

<sup>8</sup> Flatley follows his Harvard story with another story of a weak mimicry by Andy Warhol who hired the much handsomer Allen Midgette to pose as him at various functions. Flatley brings in Warhol because of Warhol's reparative project of trying to "like" everything.

Similarly, the reparative in Sedgwick's work is not so much located in its content, but in its form, in the scene of writing itself. Sedgwick may have never fully explicated what she meant by a reparative practice, but she did embody such a practice in her own writing. Ever attuned to mood, both grammatical and rhetorical, Sedgwick eschews the deadening knowingness of paranoia with its insistence that all contingencies be preempted in advance, and instead revels in the subjunctive. What could be more contingent, more depressive, than Sedgwick's almost self-effacing "I'd like to undertake now something like a complete sketch of what I mean by paranoia" ("Paranoid Reading" 9). The subjunctive "I'd like" finds its equivocal echo in "something like." Once again, to be "like" something here is just as palpably to be "unlike" it. Undertaking this tentative sketch, Sedgwick offers five "main headings":

Paranoia is *anticipatory*.

Paranoia is *reflexive* and *mimetic*.

Paranoia is *a strong theory*.

Paranoia is a theory of *negative affects*.

Paranoia places its faith in *exposure*. (9)

Even when framed as declarative sentences, Sedgwick's propositions, like her axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet*, do not demand proof, so much as provide a provisional space for inquiry. As Sedgwick was fond of instructing her students, "that may not be a/ theoretical question./ Just empirical" (*Dialogue* 112).

In "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," Sedgwick explicates the possibilities that the work of Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins hold out for people interested in political and psychological change. As with all of her work, Sedgwick's breathtaking theoretical demonstrations can make you believe *that* is where the lesson lies. But tucked away in a

subordinate clause among all this talk of Klein and Tomkins, the paranoid and depressive position, is the importance of writing: “everything in Klein resonates with issue about vocation, thought, reading, and especially writing” (627). And then later, smuggled in by way of a parenthetical, Sedgwick confides,

sometimes I think of the shape of my present life in terms of a flight from that dangerous-feeling, activist proximity of paranoid/schizoid energies—a flight into depression, occasionally, but on a more reliable basis and more productively and pleasurably, a flight from depression into pedagogy (pedagogy not referring, for me, to the academic institution so much as to a mode of relationality—not only in the classroom, but equally around it and, especially, as a writer). (640)

What if the lessons Sedgwick is trying to teach us are not first and foremost theoretical ones? Would it be too obvious to assert that the thing Sedgwick keeps pointing at, going so far as to include icons of pointing fingers, is the writing itself? For Sedgwick, pedagogy is not an academic institution or mode of knowledge production, but a “mode of relationality.” I propose that this mode of relationality is the mechanism by which one finds new possibilities within the spacious terrain of the depressive position, and it is one characterized by a set of holding relations that makes writing possible. Sedgwick’s depressive energies find their fullest expression in formal experimentations. But to gain access to those energies, to understand how they work and what they do, requires a sort of loose ventriloquism, a weak mimicry.

With that in mind, I’d like to undertake now something like a complete sketch of what I mean by depressive in this connection. My chapter headings are:

*Depressives are dense.*

*Depressives make scenes.*

*Depressives take things personally.*

*Depressives brood.*

First, I should say something about the chapter headings themselves. Throughout this project, I have been struck by how insistently the reparative wants to frame itself as a particular kind of person—that of the depressive. Granted, finding out that the reparative is depressed shouldn't be all that surprising given that Klein saw reparation only taking place after one enters the depressive position. But I *am* surprised by how willing I am to risk essentialism—or, at least accusations thereof—to revel in, of all things, diagnosis. Like Sedgwick, “apparently it's as a patient that I want to emerge” (*Dialogue 1*).

Whereas a split between paranoia as diagnosis and paranoia as critical practice proves indispensable in Sedgwick's analysis, a hard and fast division between a clinical and a “critical” depression has been much harder to assert in my discussion of the depressive—perhaps because depressiveness is not as concerned as paranoia is with questions of truth (i.e., is a particular piece of information true or not and how do you know?) as it is with questions of interest (i.e., how does one stay interested in the world, especially a world that doesn't seem all that interested in oneself?). One might reasonably counter that couching a depressive practice in the actual experience of depression would potentially exclude many critics and readers from such a practice. However, Sedgwick suggests as much in “Teaching/Depression”—an essay interested in the relations between depression, pedagogy and autobiography. In that essay, Sedgwick tells the story of sitting on an admission committee where a colleague “was complaining about a particular applicant whose personal statement focused on being diagnosed with depression in the middle of college”:

“I hate it when they use depression as an excuse,” this colleague said. To which another responded, “Depression is no excuse! Excuse, hell—it’s a prerequisite.” (1)

When Sedgwick recounted this story at public lectures and fielded questions saturated with skepticism toward that second colleague, she made explicit that the person championing depression as a prerequisite for the kind of work we do as scholars and writers was, indeed, herself. But what does it mean for depression to be a pre-requisite for a pedagogic/critical practice?

Diagnosis was never a simple thing for Sedgwick, the question of depression and ontology looming large. As she tells it:

I’ve always taken to heart Thoreau’s guess that quiet desperation characterizes the majority of lives. The question of whether or not mine is part of that majority—though I have plenty of questions about the question itself, including who’s asking it—nonetheless feels crucial to me and many times frighteningly unsettled. (“Melanie Klein” 627)

Sedgwick was keenly aware of the contradiction inherent in popular understandings of depression: “as far as I can tell, current popular thought seems to understand depression in terms of a kind of chronic natural gloominess, on the one hand, or alternatively as a completely exogenous malady, from who knows where, that is liable to descend on its unsuspecting host until heroically routed by medicine and positive mental hygiene” (“Teaching/Depression” 1). This contradiction between a minoritizing and universalizing view of depression already existed in Freud. In his 1917 essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud distinguishes between normal mourning and what he deems pathological melancholia. Only later, in *The Ego and the Id*, he installs melancholia as the very catalyst for subject formation. Recent commercials for antidepressants only dramatize the continuing legacy of this contradiction, portraying depressed

persons as a minority isolated by their affliction from concerned family, friends, and, in one maudlin moment, canine companions, while at the same time, capitalizing on the universalizing understanding that most viewers will self-diagnose, will identify with the depressed protagonist.

To complicate matters further, the same medical establishment that assures patients that the problem lies not “in their heads” (as if psychology could ever be severed from physiology) but in their bodies (as if biological problems were the easiest things in the world to fix) is the very same establishment that undermines biological models of depression, locating the problem not in the body, but in the body politic. A growing number of professionals within the medical community are questioning the very diagnostic category of depression, arguing that sadness is a natural adaptation to the environment and that pharmaceuticals prescribed to buffer people from such suffering have the negative side effect of blunting people’s ability to react properly to changing circumstances.<sup>9</sup> This line of thought, while ostensibly well-intentioned and well-argued, unfortunately echoes those voices—both popular and academic—that deem antidepressants and therapy as the new *opiate of the masses*. Then, of course, there is the entire spectrum of self-help prescriptions and programs, from the most empowering to the most exploitive, of every secular, spiritual, and religious stripe, whose valence stems from centuries-long understandings of depression as *acedia*, a failure of will.<sup>10</sup> The culture that tells us, *it’s not your fault, here take this pill*, is the same culture that exhorts us to *stop malingering and just do it*. After all, in a capitalist culture ever bent on extracting more and more surplus labor from its subjects, non-productivity—whether due to illness or personality flaw—is tantamount to heresy. One wouldn’t have to be paranoid to believe that present forms of capital make their working

---

<sup>9</sup> See Ahuja; Lehrer; Bellows.

<sup>10</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the hypostatization of will within contemporary discussions of addiction, see Sedgwick’s essay “Epidemics of the Will” (*Tendencies* 130-142).



subjects vulnerable to cycles of depressions, both economic and psychological, only then to reap the benefits of those very depressions by selling the antidote. Of course, race and class mediate this tension as those who can afford health care and health insurance are viewed as patients to be treated, while those who can't, are treated as workers whose habitual laziness requires constant cajoling *to get back to work*. Like the sodomite and the opium addict at the turn of the last century, the depressed patient at the turn of this one lies on the razor's edge of competing and contradictory discourses.<sup>11</sup>

The questions that swirl around the depressed—i.e., are there a few or are there many? is it a particular kind of person or a universal state?—have an uncanny resemblance to the ones that propel Sedgwick's discussion of same-sex desire in *Epistemology of the Closet*, and as in much of her early work, she attempts to chart a course between or to the side of this chiasmus. Sedgwick doesn't feel compelled to adjudicate between the universalizing and minoritizing discourses on depression; rather she brings Klein and Tomkins together precisely because their theories allow her to locate a space between the general and the specific. Pairing Tomkins with Klein stems from Sedgwick's intuition that doing so will help her find ways of thinking about depression that make available for use, manipulation, and pleasure those middle ranges of agency that seem woefully absent in present understandings of depressive states.

In trying to answer the ontological question, *What's the Matter with Eve?*, Sedgwick turns to Tomkins, who saw "*depressiveness*, or the depressive personality or script, as a durable

---

<sup>11</sup> At the same time the term *homosexual* was being coined and the modern calculus of the homosexual/heterosexual definition forged, the use of the term *depression* to describe a psychological condition (as opposed to just an economic or meteorological one) was gaining currency in psychiatric and popular literature. Today, as same-sex unions gain more and more visibility and support, it is worth noting the transposition of stigma away from the happy homonormative couple and onto the presumably regressive and depressed queer, as so cogently argued by Heather Love in *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Modernity*. There seems to be an injunction to be gay (in the most pinkwashed way) even if one doesn't feel up to it.

feature of certain people's way of being, a constitutive feature of their best aptitudes as well as disabilities, regardless of whether or not, at a given moment in life, they are experiencing depression" ("Teaching/Depression" 1). Tomkins makes space for thinking about the different relations between a constitutional depressiveness and a clinical depression, without vitiating the reality of either one. Tomkins's account of depressiveness sometimes "seems like a generalized state; at other times, Tomkins give it a specificity that itself seems quite autobiographical" (1). And if Tomkins offers Sedgwick helpful tools for thinking about the relations between individuals and groups, shuttling back and forth between Klein and Tomkins only widens that interstitial space:

To move from Silvan Tomkins's account of the depressive [person] to Melanie Klein's account of the depressive position is like moving from a minoritizing to a universalizing discourse. If Tomkins's depressive is a particular kind of individual who emerges from the contingency of a particular history with the strengths and weaknesses of a particular interpretive and performative strategy, Klein's depressive position, to the contrary, is a developmental phase—a developmental achievement—that is potentially available to everyone. (2)

The fluidity of the term *depressive* here functions in much the same way as *queer* does in Sedgwick's 1992 book *Tendencies*, as "a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*" (xii). Sedgwick's move toward theories of affect was not a turn away from queer theory, but rather a fuller explication of it. Like the river eddying in Proust's submerged glass jars, *depressive* represents an "immemorial current" (xii). As with queer, the term—as it appears in Sedgwick, Klein, and Tomkins—denotes a mode of relationality, one that is simultaneously like and unlike, "antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist" (*Tendencies* xii). Just

as Sedgwick uses the *queer* to negotiate the internal contradictions within hetero/homosexual identity, so I use *depressive* to gain leverage on the disabling contradictions within modern understandings of depression and melancholia.

My intention is to lay hold of the reparative via the queer figure of the depressive. Scholarship grappling with the reparative has done so primarily through Klein, and, in a few cases, Tomkins. No criticism since Sedgwick, however, has read these two thinkers together in any sustained way. This paucity, especially within feminist and queer circles, may have less to do with the perceived strangeness or datedness of either thinker's work, than with the blatant heterosexism and homophobia at work within the primary text themselves or the secondary sources that surround them. Klein was not what one would call enlightened with regards to same-sex desire or gender identity. Homosexuality in her view was the result of excessive envy, her homosexual just as paranoid as Freud's. Kleinian thought has not fared much better. Both Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, for instance, assume a traditional gender dyad and nuclear family structure in their elaboration of Klein's theories, and recent attempts to recuperate Klein for queer projects, such as Esther Sanchez-Pardo's *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia*, have foundered on the shoals of psychology's long history of anti-gay prejudice. As Heather Love observes in her online review of Sanchez-Pardo's book, "one simply cannot avoid 'falling into the trap' of pathologizing homosexuality because homosexuality is like that—it comes pre-pathologized" ("Some Day My Mom Will Come"). Even Winnicott, so pliant and permissive with his holding environments, cannot bring himself to embrace queer subjects, vocally opposing the decriminalization of homosexuality in Britain and blaming the intrusive mother for the allegedly aberrant desire of the son. Tomkins, on the other hand, who had some passing familiarity with Klein's work, offers a more affirmative starting

place for talking about queer subjectivities, but even his work has been taken up in normativizing ways, thereby making his seemingly obsolete theories easier to dismiss. One case in point: in *Shame and Pride*, Donald Nathanson, the former president of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, pleads with his reader to imagine what it would be like *not* to be heterosexual, taking it upon himself to enlighten us on the uniquely tragic situation of “the homosexual,” all the while remaining conspicuously incapable himself of imagining a queer reader.

Given the normativity and phobia circulating through these texts, it seems odd that Sedgwick would pair Tomkins and Klein for a queer project that claims to offer alternatives to paranoid critical habits. And yet, it is my contention that by interleaving these two thinkers, Sedgwick hoped to avoid the trap of pathology and wrest the theories of both from the unexamined and potentially dangerous assumptions of what she considered “psychoanalysis in its Oedipal mode”—paranoid ways of thinking, prevalent both in psychoanalysis and in the culture at large, that privilege gender difference, genital desire, teleological narratives of development, and “the logic of zero-sum games and the excluded middle term, where passive is the opposite of active and desire is the opposite of identification; and where one person’s getting more love means a priori that another is getting less” (“Melanie Klein” 631). In its search for non-Oedipal modes of thought, this dissertation accepts Sedgwick’s invitation to continue reading Tomkins and Klein alongside one another. Like Flatley, I return to the same terrain, the same texts, the same themes as Sedgwick. One justification for doing so is that Sedgwick only began the hard work of bringing Tomkins and Klein together. So I build upon her, extending both her insights and her blockages. In that regard, my dissertation could be read as an extension of her unfinished work. To the snide job search committee member who quips, *What makes you*

*different than Sedgwick?*, one hubris-filled reply might be, *I finish what she started*. But I want to push back against such a paranoid reading.

My dissertation is not so much an extension as it is a recitation—an homage, a channeling, a dharma. My relation to Sedgwick is not unlike that of Sogyal Rinpoche and his teacher, Jamyang Khyentse, who in the opening pages of Rinpoche’s popular book, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, recognizes Rinpoche as his old deceased master. Like Sedgwick’s impromptu haiku where I am both son and grandson, the transmission of knowledge in Rinpoche’s book is not linear or lockstep, but “recurrent, eddying, *troublant*”—in a word, queer. Such queer transmissions open up possibilities for knowing things differently. Sedgwick regularly questioned the presumption embedded in historicizing projects that confidently proclaimed an irreparable rift between the homosexuality of yesteryear and the homosexuality “as we know it today.” She resisted the assumption that we today in fact know it and argued that present understandings of sexuality could be just as obtuse, just as strange, just as full of alterity, surprises and discontinuities as those of the past. Similarly, I resist the assumption that I, in fact, know Sedgwick—that her name signifies a body of thought and rhetorical moves so transparent it need not be gone over again. Indeed, I thought I knew Sedgwick—as a person, as a presence, as a teacher, and as a text—but death made her strange. It is through this depressive project that I seek to know her again and to know her differently.

In Chapter One, I address the particular challenges and pitfalls inherent in such a project. If, like paranoia, the depressive represents “one way among others of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge,” then how does the depressive’s relation to knowledge differ from the paranoid? The first half of the chapter unpacks the fraught relationship between knowledge and stupidity in Klein and Sedgwick and maps out the methodological problems that depressive

modes of inquiry bring. The second half recuperates Tomkins's outdated notion of neural density in order to reframe those problems and understand the depressive need for, and value of, knowing something again, and knowing it differently. In Chapter Two, I analyze the difference Tomkins makes by tracing the long, complex career of the depressive within his prolific, repetitive, and highly theatrical work. Chapter Three then sets the stage for queer understandings of integration and affluence by putting Tomkins's concept of scenes in conversation with Klein's concept of *phantasy* whose unusual spelling, for the uninitiated, will make more sense as that chapter unfolds. Finally, in Chapter Four, I explore what it means for scenes of depressive pedagogy to be embedded in acts of writing and how these acts involve a special kind of "emotional stretching." In doing so, I hope to open up possibilities for queer agency around issues of depression and better understand the scenes of queer writing. My aim here is to open that "window to give air and light onto scenes of depressive pedagogy."

Before continuing on to my chapters, though, let me say a few more words about the queer scene of my own writing. Heather Love points out that reparative reading "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" ("Truth and Consequences" 236). Flouting academic standards, however, poses particular challenges for a project that strives both to read reparatively *and* answer to the professionalizing rigors of a dissertation. In many ways, my dissertation does not look like a dissertation. A disaffected pupil, it broods over a singular text, that of its deceased mentor. An orphan too, it wanders all over the conceptual and literary map, looking for home in a seemingly random set of literary and theoretical thinkers: Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins, chief among them, but also Oscar Wilde, Fred Halsted, Anne Carson, Roland Barthes, Walter

Benjamin, Tennessee Williams, and Jean Genet, to name a few. Some of these writers have been at the heart of queer intertextuality over the past century, and their inclusion does grant the dissertation a certain queer gravitational force. Some of these writers also speak palpably to issues of depression, pedagogy, and writing. But my readings of these historically and formally disparate texts are not meant to serve as either exhibit or way station in a literary-historical narrative. Rather, their inclusion is meant as *medium*. By medium, I mean both the raw materials for play (think Deborah Britzman’s “Theory Kindergarten”) and a method for communicating with the dead. Such a claim might sound a little too mystical or esoteric to be taken seriously. And yet, Sedgwick flirts with such mysticism when she speaks of her friend Michael Lynch who later died of AIDS:

If what is at work here is an identification that falls across gender, it falls no less across sexualities, across “perversions.” And across the ontological crack between the living and the dead. (*Tendencies* 257)

If the root of queer means *across*,<sup>12</sup> then this queer project means to reach across that crack and commune with its deceased mentor. While I can imagine this project resembling James Merrill’s literary experiments with the Ouija board in “The Book of Ephraim”—yes, I am that queer child “reading for important news about [himself],” whose reading is “more speculative, superstitious, and methodologically more adventurous” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading” 3)—the mysticism I mean is much more mundane.

---

<sup>12</sup> In the foreword to her book *Tendencies*, Sedgwick notes:

The word “queer” itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English (*athwart*). Titles and subtitles that at various times I’ve attached to essays in *Tendencies* tend toward “across” formulations: *across genders*, *across sexualities*, *across genres*, *across “perversions.”* (xii)

Perhaps, a story might help clarify. When I was writing a paper on the works of Theodor Adorno for José Muñoz's class, I went to the Strand Bookstore in New York. Scanning the shelves, I came upon Lambert Zuidervaart's monograph *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*. Because the abbreviated title was gold-emblazoned on the spine, I mistook the book for Adorno's, and pulling it from the shelf and opening its cover, I discovered a folded letter hidden within. Written in blue crayon, the letter bore the following inscription: *I love you*. Isn't that the surprise of recognition we long for and often find in the texts we read? And isn't it interesting that such love and recognition comes to us by way of misrecognition, mistaken identities, missives meant for other lovers? At the same time, enfolded within that letter are the depressive anxieties to which any project of love is prone. From the English translator of Adorno's unfinished work I learn how "unpalatable" his difficult prose was to the faculty at Frankfurt University who rejected his *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life*

as unscholarly and the whole of [his] work as essayistic and fragmentary... Only under coercion did they grudgingly bestow on him... a faculty position made not because he merited it as a philosopher, but in reparation to a Jew who had been deprived by the war of his property, of his teaching post. Barely two decades after his return, leftist students who had idolized him and embraced his works rioted in his seminars because he refused to lead them to the barricades. Adorno's freedom to teach was forcibly rescinded, as it had been in the thirties. (Hullot-Kentor xix-xx)

Neither reactionary nor revolutionary enough—a queer and precarious position in which, I would hazard, most people spend their lives as they negotiate the daily demands of living and dying—Adorno died of a heart attack shortly after, leaving his *Aesthetic Theory* unfinished. His history gives one pause with regards to not only the limits of reparation, but also the precariousness of



pedagogy as a mode of relationality—one vulnerable to rupture, disappointment, and abandonment.

In the last decades of her life, Sedgwick immersed herself in a material practice that involved gathering, cutting, repurposing and interleaving texts and textiles to create works of art that she might hold and be held by in return. Among the materials Sedgwick used was an English translation of Japanese death poems as well as an English translation of the works of Marcel Proust. What attracted Sedgwick to Proust was his mysticism, “a mysticism that, unlike many uses of Buddhism, is made up out of dailiness; a mysticism that doesn’t depend on so-called mystical experiences; that doesn’t rely on the esoteric or occult, but rather on simple, material metamorphoses as they are emulsified with language and meaning” (*Weather* 113). Thus, she titled one of her exhibits “Works in Fiber, Paper, and Proust”:

not works “on,” but works “in,” reflecting [her] interest in using Proust’s language and thought as a medium, one with a texture and materiality comparable to other artistic media, that can be manipulated through various processes to show new aspects. (113)

My dissertation is not so much a work *on* Sedgwick, Klein, Tomkins and others, as it is a work *in* them. “In their fashion,” as Barthes would say. Like those white glasses that Lynch and Sedgwick share, they are the prosthetic devices I use to extend my faulty limb so that I might hold and be held by the dead.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Depressives Are Dense

“Depression is one of the unknown modes of being.”

Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

In the recent film *Limitless*, a disheveled, out of shape, blocked writer discovers a new pharmaceutical that will allow him to tap into that eighty percent of the brain scientists say we never use. In short order, he gets himself back in shape and into designer suits, repairs his relationship with his estranged girlfriend, games the financial system to the tune of millions, and becomes a senator with presidential aspirations. And he does all this after finishing his book in four days. The film plays on the paranoid fantasy that the only thing between us, fame, fortune, and a finished manuscript is the ability to never be surprised. As our winning writer tells his nemesis at the film’s close, “I see everything. I’m always fifty steps ahead of you.” From Wall Street executives to college students, Modafinil, the real pharmaceutical upon which *Limitless* is based, has become the drug of choice for those seeking “cognitive” or “neuroenhancers.” Dubbed “the smart drug,” it is the latest instance of a paranoid fantasy of limitless production. Equating business cunning with unbounded intelligence, this fantasy animates our celebrity culture where stars open restaurants, launch clothing lines, take degrees, pen memoirs, all while maintaining lucrative careers and happy families. (Of course, such productivity is a lie, the real labor done by obscure and obscured hands. But it is a lie that drives our present political economy). Paranoia, it would seem, is *endlessly* productive, offering anyone looking to make an authorial claim the precocious thrill of worldliness, or “truth telling,” what Sedgwick in

*Epistemology of Closet* calls “a dangerous enabling poetics and politics of exemption” (223).

Paranoia allows one to write the great work, the ambitious one, the one that gets it right. Faced with the promise of such professional precocity, who *wouldn't* want to take such a pill?

Depressives, on the other hand, are lamentably slow. Sedgwick, for instance, begins “A Poem is Being Written” with the admission “this essay was written late: twenty-seven years late” (110). And speaking of her “saturnine and complicated” friend Michael in *A Dialogue on Love*, she commiserates with his depressive tardiness: “He came out late, finished college late, started his career late—there are places in his life that are still raw with abjection and anger” (25).

Michael’s sense of belatedness rhymes with Sedgwick’s excruciating tableaux of hell:

*Too late* the Gothic bellstroke

tumbling and tumbling over these dread dreams

too late in knowing, that is, or too late in making the act real to myself.

Too late ever again to make it different. (95-96)

She names this terrible feeling of belatedness: “depression, a name for the swale where nothing can turn out differently” (96). If paranoia fears anything arriving on the scene *as* a surprise, the depressive *is* the thing that arrives surprised. Depressives come late to the scene. They lag behind their peers. They are living anachronisms.

Paranoid protocols have the advantage of being “infinitely doable and teachable” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid” 21). Depressive lessons are harder to come by, let alone teach. The depressive’s grammar rubs its hapless pupil against the very grain of stupidity. Like the speaker of Adrienne Rich’s “Planetarium,” who self-describes as

a galactic cloud so deep so invo-

luted that a light wave could take 15

years to travel through [her]... (14)

the depressive appears dense—both in the sense of exhibiting a kind of stupidity and in the sense of possessing a certain gravity, a star collapsing in upon itself. You can see Sedgwick grappling with this dilemma throughout *Touching Feeling*: “in writing this book I’ve continually felt pressed against the limits of my stupidity, even as I’ve felt the promising closeness of transmissible gifts” (24). I certainly have felt stumped, stuck and stupid, brooding like Rodin’s poet over how to even begin answering Sedgwick’s call for reparative reading. Or, perhaps, a less grandiose but more apt analogy would be Anne Carson’s classically inspired, little red-winged monster Geryon from *Autobiography of Red*. In Greek Mythology, Geryon is the three-headed monster whose herd of red cattle Herakles steals as part of his twelve labors. In Dante’s *Inferno*, Geryon is the Monster of Fraud upon whose back the poet and his guide Virgil descend to the eighth circle of Hell. But in Carson’s retelling, Geryon is a queer little boy who experiences the hell of heartbreak when abandoned by a fraudulent and less than heroic Herakles. Abandonment is nothing to new to this Geryon. In his youth, his mother, and then older brother, would lead him by the hand through the corridors of school, the building’s layout paradoxically requiring him to pass through the higher grades before reaching the room where kindergarten is housed. One day, his brother abandons him to find his way alone:

Geryon had always been stupid

but nowadays the look in his eyes made a person feel strange.

*Just take me once more I’ll get it this time,*

Geryon would say. The eyes terrible holes. *Stupid*, said Geryon’s brother

and left him. (24)

A Dante bereft of his Virgil, Geryon must plumb his inferno alone. But his abandonment leaves him dumb: “peering hard Geryon made his way through the fires in his mind to where/the map should be. / In place of a map of the school corridor lay a deep glowing blank” (24). Enraged by his own stupidity—“Geryon had no doubt *stupid* was correct” (24)—he feels forever barred from school. Unable to pass through the main doors, he creeps along the outside of the building instead, passing the windows of the other grades, and “position[ing] himself in the bushes outside Kindergarten. There he would stand / motionless / until someone inside noticed and came out to show him the way” (25).

Like Geryon, depressives stand outside the usual academic protocols. In this chapter, I will explore the depressive’s special relation to learning and limits, especially with regards to stupidity. Geryon’s greatest fear is *not* that he will be ridiculed—life as “a winged red person” (83) has inured him to such attacks. No, it is the “blank desertion of his own mind / that [throws] him into despair” (84). In this, he feels a special kinship with Walt Whitman who assures him “[t]he best I had done seemed to me blank and suspicious, / Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil” (qtd. in Carson 106). The same blankness of the mind, and the paralyzing despair it brings, haunts this dissertation as a whole. But this blankness need not have a negative valence. It may take—in fact, “has taken” (14)—fifteen years for light to travel through the speaker of Rich’s poem, but the light *does* eventually pass through her.<sup>13</sup> And despite his intellectual and physical disorientation, Geryon does go on to study abroad, slugging his way through Pascal, Leibniz, and Heidegger. However dense Carson’s Geryon or Rich’s speaker may appear, powerful intellectual work *is* being done. That work takes place in the stuttering enjambments and prolonged caesurae that riddle Rich’s poem and in the strange, blank stare of Geryon’s eyes.

---

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Kat Savino for pointing this out to me after reading an initial draft of this chapter.

The present chapter interrogates that blankness and privileges a mode of being and inquiry best described as *slow, belated, thick, and dense*. In this regard, my approach has much in common with Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's concept of "surface reading." Best and Marcus counterpose surface reading against the symptomatic reading popularized in literary studies by Fredric Jameson in his landmark book *The Political Unconscious*. Marcus and Best see themselves following in the tradition of Sedgwick's "reparative reading," Timothy Bewes's "reading with the grain," and Jane Gallop's "ethics of close reading" (11). They describe surface reading in terms of its "slow pace, receptiveness, and fixed attention" (18). They also take as their point of departure Samuel Otter's New Formalist privileging of the "linguistic density" of literary texts as well as I.A. Richards' point that such criticism "is very largely...an exercise in navigation" (10). Geryon's disorientation and density would suggest that such navigation is neither elegant nor fast-paced. I would add that such "linguistic density" is not a property of "literary" texts per se, but a property of one's approach, a certain difficulty with regards to verbal processes, as one navigates the intellectual frustrations and blockages inherent in everyday discourse.

This density, the backwardness and stupidity it suggests, is distinctly queer. It is no coincidence that Best and Marcus represent a second generation of queer scholars, coming after Sedgwick, after Butler, after Warner, to name only a few queer pioneers. In "Post Sex: On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon," Kate Thomas speaks of coming to graduate school and queer theory after the 1993 publication of *Tendencies*, *Bodies that Matter*, and *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Looking at the date 1994 that she scrawled in her copies of those foundational texts, Thomas describes that queer feeling of arriving late to the scene: "[l]ike a younger, shorter-legged sibling, it seemed to me that I was trotting-to catch up, excited but definitely flustered,

my scratchily penned *1994* a reminder that I was lagging behind” (66)<sup>14</sup>. Lagging behind, as Thomas points out, is a queer formation, “a tacit consent in queer theory and culture that queer time is predominantly about being late, or seeking lateness, whether through turns to antiquity, cultural disobedience, or affective allegiance to mourning, memory, and melancholia” (73). At the same time, such belatedness or backwardness is “suggestive of stupidity—a quality that [queer theorists] have been, until recently, less ready to embrace” (67).

If arriving late to the scene is a queer formation, it is also a historical one. The years preceding 1994 were marked not by queers arriving too late, but rather by queers leaving this world much too soon. Accounting for the paranoid reading privileged in those early texts of queer theory, Sedgwick speaks of the dread and terror that suffused gay life during the 1980s and early 1990s, a time

when AIDS was a new and nearly untreatable disease—bringing sudden, worse than Euripidean horror into the lives of urban gay men and their friends.... when, despite the hecatombs of dead, the word “AIDS” didn’t cross the lips of the US president for the first six years of the epidemic, while prominent legislators and complacent pundits busied themselves with fake-judicious, fake-practical, prurient schemes for testing, classifying, rounding up, tattooing, quarantining, and otherwise demeaning and killing men and women with AIDS. (Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein” 638-639)

Like Thomas, Best, and Marcus, I came late to the scene of queer writing. Arriving in New York in 1994 after the first waves of the epidemic had taken their toll, I scrawled dense, blank verse:

---

<sup>14</sup> For work that attempts to revalue stupidity, Thomas points to Judith Halberstam’s “Dude, Where’s My Gender? Or, Is There Life on Uranus?” and Jordana Rosenberg’s “Lesbian Phallus; or, What Can Deconstruction Feel?” Outside the field of queer studies, she names Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as well as Avital Ronell’s *Stupidity*.

twilight and snow press against the window  
 while a trickle of blood winds its way  
 down his leg like a memory and I  
 remember watching those who had survived  
 shell-shocked sift through the rubble of their lives  
 no longer can I see our reflection  
 just a blank canvass of snow and his dick  
 pressed against my ass a blanket of white  
 falls upon this bleak, bombed city in stiff  
 white sheets boys play on the fields of the dead

Faced with a political and psychological landscape ravaged and razed, the depressive marks a moment, movement, and motive after *Reports from the Holocaust*. It exhibits not the dread of the paranoid, but the blankness of Geryon. It is Whitman on the battlefield after the battle, figuring out how to write poetry after Auschwitz.

The problem with the depressive—its original sin and saving grace—lies in methodology, in how to proceed. Whereas Sedgwick’s tour de force analysis in *Epistemology of Closet*—a work both interested and implicated in the paranoid workings of modern understandings of same-sex desire—revolves around “the steely beam of . . . distance” (223) between the closet viewed and the closet inhabited, her later work on Melanie Klein and depressiveness affords neither the reader nor critic such a comfortable remove. Klein may prove particularly stimulating for Sedgwick and other thinkers, but as Sedgwick points out:

engaging closely with Klein often feels like getting stoned [and here I think of Geryon whose “eyes were terrible holes”] in the sense that the unchecked proliferation of the



reader's sense of recognition, endlessly recursive and relentlessly architectonic, quickly turns into a kind of fractal ineffability, resistant to the linear formulations of ordinary exposition. ("Melanie Klein" 629)

Slickness and easy uptake are not the depressive's forte. Faced with the task of teasing Klein's fractal ineffability into clear lines of argument, I have often felt like Carson's Geryon, crying out, *Just take me once more I'll get it this time*. "With Klein," Sedgwick continues, "the additional, unmediated charge of all that thematized bad affect—anxiety in particular—can be genuinely disabling to cognitive function" (630).

This disabling quality of Klein's work partly stems from the inseparability between reader and text in a depressive mode. Klein infamously wrote in a manner that made little, if any, distinction between the subjective description of her patients and her own conceptual apparatus. Unlike "the clear order and the diagrammatic, explanatory topographies so beloved by Freud," writes Meira Likierman, "Klein's key chapters express, far more than they explain, the unruly, highly complicated processes of mental life" (13). One of the difficulties in reading Klein is ascertaining whether she is providing a description of emotional phenomena or delineating a theoretical framework.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the confusion surrounding her concept of internal objects stems from "Klein's tendency to use a term both to describe the subject's internal experience and simultaneously, to offer a technical psychoanalytic designation of a phenomenon" (Likierman 108). There is little in the way of objective distance that one finds in Freud who "advocated a completely different approach... one which makes clear distinctions

---

<sup>15</sup> This confusion raised the hackles of many of Klein's contemporaries who "complain[ed] that she seemed to be confusing descriptions of subjective experience with the objective designation of mental phenomena, as if mere description of mental contents were automatically explanatory" (Likierman 10). Klein's lack of critical distance gave her detractors ammunition to discredit her more challenging ideas as unscientific.

between the patient's subjective experiencing and the theoretical framing of his mental state by the psychoanalyst" (Likierman 108).

Like Klein, Silvan Tomkins also makes no distinction between the kind of theorizing scientists do and the kind of quotidian theorizing people in general do as they navigate their daily lives. "One of the things [Sedgwick] value[s] most in Tomkins...is the sense of irreducible continuity between what people with affects do, on the one hand, and on the other, what experts—people like Tomkins—do when they think about affects" (Sedgwick, *Weather* 146). But if Sedgwick worries about the uncanny congruence between the paranoia structuring critical thinking in academia and the paranoia structuring the everyday theories of, say, "a homophobic white-supremacist Christian Identity militia member who would as soon blow [her] away as look at [her]" ("Paranoid" 21), I fret that my own depressive project comes dangerously close to the popular and suspect genre of self-help. After all, as Jonathan Flatley wryly noted during a symposium honoring Sedgwick, "trying to offer emotional help to your readers is not the most common motive in academic writing." ("Unlike Eve"). "But for Eve," Flatley added, "it was" Indeed, Sedgwick insists, "[I]ike Proust, the reparative reader 'helps himself again and again'" ("Paranoid" 34). This difficulty with maintaining critical distance—between subject and object, between the academic and the popular—upsets the usual protocols of professional rigor. It can be profoundly humbling to realize that one's scholarship may be no different than the latest bestseller on happiness. You don't even get to enjoy the smugness "of being brainier than everybody else" (qtd. in Sedgwick, "Paranoid" 25).

And yet, Sedgwick courts such close encounters with her readers. In *Regarding Sedgwick*, James Kincaid admits,

Now I know why no one in love with Eve Sedgwick (all of us) can write about her.

Consider that—“write about her”: We are all able to write and we all are inspired by her; it’s the about we trip over. Who can get the distance or wants to?” (229)

Like many of Sedgwick’s friends and students who have spoken or written on her work since her death, Kincaid can’t help but address Sedgwick in the rest of the essay, not, as is customary, by her surname, but by the name that is most familiar to him: Eve. That has certainly been my first impulse. To publicly address Sedgwick as “Eve” doesn’t so much commit the centuries-old crime of addressing women writers by their first names while religiously paying homage to the surnames of male authors, so much as shamelessly flaunt my inclusion in some private inner-circle (sometimes staged for the benefit of those not in the club, other times serving as secret code) much in the same way as *Judy* or *Liza* or *Kiki* functioned, and still do function, within queer subculture. To address Eve as Sedgwick seems strange, shameful, as if I can no longer recognize her and, by extension, myself. To call her by her surname is to lose her all over again. But keeping “Eve” alive is problematic. For, as Michael Moon asks with “a lot of Proustian skepticism of the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* variety”:

What if the person we knew, her tastes, her behavior, her manner of dressing, walking, laughing, speaking, has precious little, perhaps nothing, to do with the more effectual and enduring aspects of what she wrote, made, thought. (“On the Eve of the Future”)

Engaging closely with Eve, even despite (or is it because of?) all her thematized *positive* affect, may be just as “genuinely disabling to cognitive function” as engaging closely with Klein. Our love for her can make us dumb.

*Dumb*: the term bubbles up repeatedly in *A Dialogue on Love*. Sedgwick constantly frets that her therapist Shannon may be “too dumb,” often asking herself, “Is Shannon stupid?” (11).

It is striking how insistently Sedgwick comes back to this refrain whose “overarching theme is stupidity” (11): “how dumb would someone have to be...” (11), “Shannon / just being too dumb” (51), “too dumb or too nice” (51), “don’t go being all stupid” (51). After one particularly numbing session in which Sedgwick tries unsuccessfully to engage Shannon in an intelligent discussion on the “wrackingly depressive topic” of race—“I mean it wasn’t so bad, not evil, but it was...dumb!” (119)—Shannon asks Sedgwick, “what would it have felt like to you to have to keep talking to somebody that dumb?” (121). Sedgwick answers by disimpacting three tightly bound feelings she is likely to have “[w]hen someone gets *blank* / in that particular way” (121, my emphasis). The first is the feeling of assault from the insipid mix of platitude and indifference. I recall a severely depressed friend who once confided in a colleague the emotional turmoil she was experiencing, only to be met with the well intentioned, if tactless, blank imperative: “Cheer up.” But “talking to someone that dumb” can also feel “like a kind of depressive stonewalling” (121). Here *dumb* denotes more a muteness than an assault. Earlier Sedgwick asks Shannon if he has “been somewhat muted lately,” to which Shannon replies, “I have been muted/depressed” (98). This muteness on Shannon’s part is contagious as Sedgwick:

mutes some herself, grays out her needs and affect, some in the service of a joining/merging with the depressed person... (98)

To identify with this “depressive deadness of attention and interest” (161) is to be struck dumb, and this “banefully” familiar “braid” of assault and muteness finds its third metonymic plait in death: “being dumb/ and dead can both seem/ like cheap tricks of refusing/ recognition” (122). For Sedgwick, stupidity, depression and death feel like being dropped, abandoned. Perhaps, that is why the bereaved feels that everything in the world, including oneself (recall our poor Geryon and his blankness of mind) is irreducibly, irredeemably dumb.

Literary critic Roland Barthes would self-diagnose such dumb abandon as “abandonitis.” In the “mourning diary” he kept after the death of his beloved mother, he notes how such abandonment leaves him stupid. Six nights into his grieving, he writes, “Sometimes, very briefly, a blank moment...this terrifies me” (*Mourning Diary* 26). This terrifying blankness returns as a blunting of thought, a susceptibility to the very platitudes and bourgeois artists he once made fun of: “listening to Souzay sing: ‘My heart is full of terrible sadness,’ I burst into tears” (47). For this lapse in taste, he berates and literally brackets himself with the damning epithet “[Stupid]” (47). As the diary continues, his reproaching refrain matches Sedgwick’s: “Last night, a stupid, gross film...” (125), “life, *stupid* life, continues” (127), “the stupid notion that time will do away with such a thing [as suffering]” (142), “for the moment a *stupid* life” (150), and again bare-bracketed “[Stupidity]” (251). At the same time, his abandonment renders him mute: “[d]epression comes when, in the depths of despair, I cannot manage to save myself by my attachment to writing” (62). The fragmentary, arrested nature of his entries—no more than scrawled lines on quartered typing paper—attest to “the indescribability of [his] mourning” (84), how “[i]mpossible to write this kind of discomfort” (87), how “[w]riting is no longer possible” (213). His depressive muteness leads him to the despairing conclusion, “*Actually, as a matter of fact, always that: as if I were as one dead*” (italics in original, 108). Stupid, muted, dead, Barthes completes the metonymic chain of a terrifying blankness—the scene of his dumb lament is a reenactment of my own: “[t]he desires I had before her death (while she was sick) can no longer be fulfilled, for that would mean it is her death that allows me to fulfill them” (18).

But there is another way of being dumb—another way of grappling with one’s density and that of others—that seems less deadening to Sedgwick. In the incredibly compact “Socratic

Raptures, Socratic Ruptures: Notes Toward Queer Performativity,” Sedgwick recounts her experience of fainting in front of a group of students, friends and newscasters during a demonstration protesting the refusal by the local PBS station to air *Tongues Untied*. She describes the uncanniness of her splayed out body in the hot Durham sun:

a mountainous figure, supine, black-clad, paper-white, weirdly bald ([her] nice African hat had pitched to a distance), Silence=Death emblazoned, motionless, apparently female, uncannily gravid with meaning. (127)

This body—“so dense, too dense” with meaning to be “usable” either to herself or to others—is one over which Sedgwick likes to “brood” (127). It is queerly an *un*-teachable moment, fraught with dizzying condensations and displacements around race, gender, ability, and sexuality, perhaps most palpably in “a classroom space regularly reconstituted by threat and mourning” (128). What lessons learned, what teaching possible, in the presence of an absent teacher? The figure of the lifeless teacher, unrecognizing, unrecognizable, dense and dumb, can leave a pupil paralyzed. No use in being smart when teacher is dead. No late papers will be accepted.

And yet, the Randall Jarrell poem prefacing Sedgwick’s essay suggests that somewhere around the figure of the (dumb? depressed? dead?) teacher is “Hope” (122). Sedgwick intersperses her story of fainting with instructions that her friend and fellow teacher of white glasses fame, Michael Lynch, left for his own memorial service: “As people arrive, no music, only silence. I like such awkward silences, though many resist them, especially in my classes. But a lot goes on during them” (127). From memorials to therapy sessions to classrooms, Sedgwick is accustomed to “such awkward silences.” *A Dialogue on Love* is filled with them: “I remember my long silence” (43), “There’s a long silence” (108), “There’s a long, odd silence” (87), “A long, long silence” (38). And Sedgwick knows

this silence—of [hers], of Shannon’s—from [her] creative writing classes. Where someone reads a piece, and there’s the fraught pause, its length increasingly comic and suffused, which [she lets] go on and on ... (41)

Sedgwick asks us to inhabit uncomfortably long, inarticulate spaces, “assum[ing] that the most useful work of this sort is likeliest to occur near the boundary of what a writer can’t figure out how to say readily, never mind prescribe to others” (*Touching 2*).

Of course, this “Jacoblike wrestling—or t’ai chi, as it may be—that confounds agency with passivity, the self with the book and the world, the end of the work with its means, and, maybe most alarmingly, intelligence with stupidity” (*Touching 2*) sounds great in theory, but Sedgwick is keenly aware that “in the real world, stupidity isn’t a lack but an aggressively positive, entitled presence” (*Dialogue 11*). In a nation where public figures vociferously pride themselves on being anti-intellectual, politicians wield power through open displays of ignorance, and corporations cynically instruct their customers to, as one Diesel ad once put it, “Be Stupid,” a politically engaged criticism that regularly confounds intelligence with stupidity sounds foolhardy, if not downright complicit. And perhaps, Sedgwick’s depressive pedagogy should come with a warning label of the Whitman variety when he insists, “Nor will my poems do good only, they will do just as much evil, perhaps more” (100).

But I think the stupidity we are being asked to sit silently with here is of a different sort. Unlike the near constant white noise of the paranoically-structured inanities of, say, Glenn Beck or Sarah Palin (whose spectacular stupidity—as wisened-up and precocious as the intelligence it seeks to outsmart—only exposes in its blatant, boorish display paranoia’s misplaced faith in exposure), the depressive is dumb in the sense of being mute. The depressive refuses to flood the world or the web with violent, aggressive projectiles. The Glenn Becks and Sarah Palins of

the world resemble Geryon's boor of a brother who abandons by way of paranoid projection. Geryon is not the one who is stupid; rather, it is the brother who calls him stupid that is obtuse. And yet, Geryon is nonetheless rendered dumb. His stupidity is one of involution. I once attended a public lecture on Andy Warhol in which Wayne Koestenbaum commented on how some people respond to a Warhol piece they don't understand with the contemptuous projectile, *It's stupid!*, while his first response is always one of recognition, followed by the self-reflective, Geryon-like, *I'm stupid*. Obsessing over his own prescriptions, the depressive remains stubbornly involuted.

The critical difference between a paranoid stupidity that lashes out and a depressive one that turns in lies with language. The garrulous paranoid is deaf to the pain of others, while the depressive is struck dumb. The paranoid only plays dumb. The depressive isn't playing. As much as I might want to slap *Stupid!* on the self-help proselytizing of Oprah and her ilk, doing so would merely recapitulate the same paranoid disavowal and distancing that Beck, Palin, and Geryon's brother enact. My problem with self-help is not with its motivations, but with its language, a language couched in positivity, will, and the "power of intention." The unintended (or is it intended?) consequence of such a discourse is to place the blame solely on the suffering individual, not the society around her. Limits—physical, psychological, or political—are not admissible in a world where "anything is possible." What depressives long for is another language. And yet, for the depressive, language is the very thing that falls apart. When Geryon seeks solace in self-help, he comes upon this discomfiting definition:

Depression is one of the unknown modes of being.

There are no words for a world without a self, seen with impersonal clarity.

All language can register is the slow return



To the oblivion we call health when imagination automatically recolors the  
 landscape  
 and habit blurs perception and language  
 takes up its routine flourishes. (107)

Such a definition registers the incapacity of words to convey the depressive's experience. Unlike the prolixity of the paranoid, depressives are bereft of language. The presence of language itself marks the depressive's dumbness, its slow oblivion, the impossibility of its expression. But if depression is an "unknown mode of being," how do we come know that mode without falling prey to paranoid epistemologies? Without the crutch of language, how do we articulate and transmit a depressive pedagogy?

The difficulty with articulating and transmitting something other than paranoid ways of knowing finds its way into the form of Sedgwick's writing, in its "structural recalcitrance" (*Touching 2*). *Touching Feeling*, for instance, is written in chunks, with little in the way of transition from one chunk to the next, except for the occasional icon of a pointing finger. Sedgwick's book stands "in contrast to the democratic optimism of American education in assuming that every lesson can be divided into ever more bite-sized, even more assimilable bits"; rather, Sedgwick's writing "assume[s] that students have already surmounted a fairly high threshold of recognition" ("Pedagogy" 178-179). Her structural recalcitrance is reminiscent of Whitman's seductive pedagogy in "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." In contrast to, say, the rapacious speaker of Andrew Marvel's "To His Coy Mistress"—whose insistent demands for precocity and alacrity rivals the paranoid fantasies found in *Limitless*—Whitman's elusive speaker seduces by way of indirection and indiscretion, absence and presence, refusal and yielding, captures and escapes, shyness and dress up. Instead of rolling everything up into

one ball, his seduction is a more densely populated scene in which speaker and reader alternatively play teacher and student, seducer and mistress, husband and comrade, poet and book. And unlike the clever condescension and linear logic found in Marvel, Whitman's recursive pedagogy admits to a depressive stupidity: "in libraries [he] lie[s] as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead" (100).

Sedgwick's writing would seem to say along with Whitman, *Your novitiate will even then be long and exhausting*. Its scale is larger, its apprehension requiring a gestalt after countless failures, an achievement as miraculous and mundane as learning to walk, or to write. When she taught "Experimental Critical Writing," Sedgwick would often ask her students to "focus on effects involved when more or less discrete units of the same form (sonnet, haiku) keep happening again and again.... [and then] write something that plays with the concept of modularity—of more or less detachable and/or formally interchangeable units" ("Teaching Experimental" 113-114). Such experiments with modularity marks much of Sedgwick's later writing and reflects her need for "something chunkier" ("Melanie Klein" 627). In "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," Sedgwick explains,

that's the way I now am about ideas. I like them pretty chunky.... big, big and palpable; big enough so there's no swallowing risk, and also so I won't forget them ... (628)

What draws Sedgwick to Klein is her "invitingly chunky affordances" (629), and Sedgwick enacts such chunkiness in the modular sections in which the essay is written. In a culture of increasingly glib sound bites and text messages, this roughly hewn chunkiness offers some resistance to quick assimilation and easy commodification. This chunkiness also promises to be resilient. As Sedgwick puts it,

I'm happy with ideas where you can do a lot of different things with them and be in many relations to them, but they'll push back against you—and where the individual moving parts aren't too complex or delicate for daily use. (628)

Like Klein, Sedgwick's chunkiness is resilient enough to withstand “my distraction, forgetfulness, casual brutality, my desire to please, or absence of mind” (*Dialogue* 96). I don't run the risk of swallowing it whole; I can chew on it for a long time.

Sedgwick's density—as Barber and Clark observe, “malicious charges against the density and abstraction of Sedgwick's ‘formalist’ prose abound” (41)—goes hand in hand with her literal fatness. In *Fat Art, Thin Art*, Sedgwick mulls over “The Use of Being Fat”:

I used to have a superstition that  
 there was this use to being fat:  
 no one I loved could come to harm  
 enfolded in my touch—  
 that lot of me would blot it up,  
 the rattling chill, night sweat or terror. (15)

One has only to experience exhaustion, illness or pain of any kind to know how unresponsive and dumb the body can be. But the chunky recalcitrance of Sedgwick's body—“dense, too dense”—resists the paranoid desire to master, manage and manipulate this insentient mass through some higher critical power. Whether it be a fleshy body blotting up pain or a gravid body lying in the hot Durham sun, Sedgwick's body promises to withstand our sadism and our stupidity.

“The will to change begins in the body not in the mind.”<sup>16</sup> Adrienne Rich’s words are the antidote to a self-help literature that privileges limitless cognition over bodily constraint. One of the assumptions behind my work has been that the body, far from being a monolith of raw material to be molded and crafted by cultural forces, is in fact a complex system involving a set of subsystems that operate in different degrees of independence, dependence, and interdependence with one another and the external world. In its chunky affordances, the body has its own language, its own mode of expression, its own structural recalcitrance. Sedgwick herself gestures toward the expressive muteness of the body in “Queer Sex Habits, Oh No! I mean, Six Queer Habits.” In this collection of unpublished notes, Sedgwick unpacks the complex ways queer identity is negotiated through the interrelationship between the six denotative levels of habit. Attending to the first three levels of body, dress, and gesture, Sedgwick borrows sociologist Cindy Patton’s term “queer kinesthetics” to tease out “forms of movement and kinesthetic proprioception” constitutive of queer identities and cultures:

What does it mean, how does it occupy time and space, to “feel” or “act” butch? or queeny? or cruisy? clone-y? To vogue, get arrested (in a protest; in an entrapment), snap!, have attitude, play pool, march in a parade (St. Patrick's? Pride?), stand with the spectators? How do different kinds of dancing work? What does it mean to a well body to walk into a hospital? To a sick body? The body experienced as endangered: from

---

<sup>16</sup> Writing these words in 1969, Adrienne Rich imagines the physical turmoil of Vietnam War demonstrators tear gassed by police for protesting the torture of G.I. prisoners at Fort Dix. Entitled “Tear Gas,” Rich’s poem reflects on the connections between bodily, personal, and political protests. The poem was not collected until the 1984 publication of *A Fact of a Doorframe*. The fifteen years between composition and collection uncannily echoes the fifteen years it takes for a light wave to pass through the speaker’s involuted body in “Planetarium.” If I am over-reading, I find consolation in Rich’s inscription to that 1984 collection: “for my teachers—present and gone” (vii). My own superstitious reading: no one I love can come to harm when wrapped in the fold of my texts.

inside, from outside. Kinesthetics of memory; of loss; of rage. Dignity, indignity, and movement in the self-experienced body.

In composing these fragments, perhaps Sedgwick had in mind the body of her student Gary Fisher who lay in a San Francisco hospital dying of AIDS. It is his body whose “night sweat and terror” Sedgwick hopes to blot up with her adipose folds. In another poem, she tells Fisher how he reminds her of the Hindu god Ganesh, his “lovely snout” made redundant by the “proboscis” of green oxygen mask and blue tubing (*Fat Art, Thin Art* 13). Muzzled so, Fisher silences Sedgwick with the “lethal” benediction, “Must there be so much speech” (14). He then vogues (14). His hospice habit of “green mask” and “magical blue trunk” finds its descant in his ravaged habitus as the dance

of hands begins again

so elegant, and he specifies,

“Inimitable.

The dance is inimitable

because it is so refined

and it is going on at every level, all the time.” (14)

Walter Benjamin is the writer I most want to read alongside Sedgwick’s queer habits and Fisher’s inimitable hands. No doubt, I am over-identifying with Benjamin’s “labyrinthine involutions” (Steiner 11), his “every-increasing density” (10), his tragic habit of being too late.<sup>17</sup> His work, like mine, is haunted by a “sense of belatedness, of coming after” (Butler,

---

<sup>17</sup> Trying to escape Vichy France, Benjamin arrived at the Spanish border only to find that it had been closed “that same day.” From Hannah Arendt’s introduction to *Illuminations*: “One day earlier Benjamin would have got through without any trouble; one day later the people in Marseilles would have known for the time being it was impossible to pass through Spain. Only on this particular day was the catastrophe possible” (18). Too late, too soon, he committed suicide that very night.

“Afterword” 468). Hamstrung by bouts of depression that, by his own admission, “seemed to occur with greater regularity” during the writing of his thesis (Benjamin, *Correspondence* 193), his habilitation “crawled forward” (Eiland and Jennings 214) so slowly that the “its proper reader” (qtd. in Eiland and Jennings 215)—the Christian theologian Florens Christian Rang—died before its completion. Confounding his self with his book, Benjamin “laboured to reconcile the technical demands and tonal manners of a *Habilitationsschritt* with those of an uncompromisingly personal, even lyric statement” (Steiner 15). His lyricism fell upon deaf ears, his labor of love ultimately deemed unscholarly and un-rigorous by an obtuse Frankfurt faculty. For Benjamin, the silence with which he was met, not only from a hostile academy but also from a mentor made dumb through death, must have felt “like cheap tricks of refusing/recognition” (Sedgwick, *Dialogue* 122). But what draws me most to Benjamin is his depressive foregrounding of the body.

In *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin posits that the *Trauerspiel* registers the loss of history through “the transposition of the originally temporal data into a figurative spatial simultaneity” (81). Benjamin’s uses the word *figurative* here in much the same way as Barthes uses the word *figure* in *A Lover’s Discourse*—as viscera. Shadowed by his mourning diary, Barthes’ book restages the various dramas to which the lover is prone through a series of alphabetically ordered fragments, or what he calls *figures*. The term is meant not in its rhetorical sense, but in “its gymnastic or choreographic acceptance” (3). As Barthes puts it, “the figure is the lover at work” (4). Similarly, the figural in Benjamin is the depressive’s body at work.<sup>18</sup> As

---

<sup>18</sup> Barthes’s labor of love obsessively close reads a single text, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and unpacks Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s epistolary novel with every figure. At the same time, “in order to compose this amorous subject, pieces of various origin have been ‘put together’”(6)—ranging from the philosophical works of Plato and Nietzsche to the psychoanalytic writings of Freud and Klein, from the literary works of Proust and Genet to

Judith Butler observes, mourning in Benjamin brings “bodies to the foreground. This is, in fact, a loss registered as a certain motion of bodies” (“Afterword” 470). Like Fisher’s dance of hands, “more than one movement is happening at the same time and these movements are ‘choreographed’ and they take the form of ‘pantomime’” (Butler 470). This mournful pantomime “relies on the gesture, . . . one that operates through a non-mimetic semiotic of its own” (Butler 470). *Inimitable*, Fisher would say. These “voiceless mimes” (Butler 470) border on slapstick, since comedy, according to Benjamin, “is the essential inner side of mourning which from time to time, like the lining of a dress at the hem or lapels, makes its presence felt” (Benjamin 125-126). Here, at the intersection of body, dress, and gesture, “the dress is,” in Butler’s words, “laughing” (470). Sedgwick’s folds, Barthes’ figures, Benjamin’s laughing dress, Fisher’s inimitable hands—these are the queer habits of a depressive kinesthetics, or, to mime Benjamin, a depressive *bearing*.

But what would it mean, *how does it occupy time and space, to “feel” or “act”* depressed? Think depressed? Read depressed? Write depressed? While a depressive kinesthetics is potentially available to anyone, I think it is important to acknowledge that differently situated readers will come to any text with different needs and desires. What might sound obvious, trite, platitudinous to a “healthy” body might sound very different to a body in distress, a “sick” body, a body in pain. It is the difference between Barthes laughing at Souza and Barthes weeping with him. One reason I cringe whenever I hear anyone call other people’s religion, self-help, medication, drug use, sexual pleasures, welfare check, or whatever, “false comfort” is that almost by definition it is only ever someone *else*’s comfort that is false, one’s own comfort being self-

---

snippets of conversations with friends and family. In similar fashion, my dissertation stitches together various literary, theoretical and autobiographical sources to trace the figures of the depressive. Sedgwick plays Goethe to my Barthes as I study the depressive body at work.

evident, irreproachable, true. The tone is usually one of contempt, disavowal, the smug assurance of privilege. Benjamin knew all too well the particular need a depressive bearing brings, the way one's reading and writing rub up against the limits of the body. But if this depressive bearing remains hermetically sealed behind a voiceless pantomime, how do we incite that mute body to speak? How do we articulate these dumb articulations?

One way around this dumbness is Tomkins's concept of postures. His taxonomy of postures promises a rich language with which to articulate the depressive's mute world. Even more than *habit* and *bearing*, Tomkins's *postures* speak to the question that Geryon, Rich, Whitman, Klein, Sedgwick, Fisher, Barthes, and Benjamin, not to mention this dissertation, all beg: namely, how does one bear oneself in this world? Like Sedgwick's *habit*, Tomkins's *posture* is an incredibly expansive term. At the level of habitus, it can describe one's characteristic facial expressions, physical orientations, idiosyncratic gestures, or bodily movements. The depressive's body, for instance, possesses a certain queer *avoirdufois*:

the tonus is gone from his body....[h]is arms do not swing much when he walks. There is little wasted motion in any of the movements of the body which are normally executed with verve. He crosses his legs slowly. He lights a cigarette listlessly. His speech may be quite retarded....The body acts as if it were incapable and unwilling to support the normal tension in the muscles and unwilling to burn energy at a normal rate. (Tomkins, *AIC* 3:833)<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Tomkins published *Affect Imagery Consciousness* in four separate volumes. *Volume I: The Positive Affects* and *Volume II: The Negative Affects* were published in 1962 and 1963, respectively. But *Volume III: The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear* and *Volume IV: Cognition: Duplication and Transformation of Information* did not find their way into print until shortly before his death in 1991. Since these separate volumes are currently out-of-print, I have chosen to use *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* printed by Springer Publishing in 2008. All citations are from this complete edition, abbreviated as *AIC*.



The depressive's posture, like all postures, is "the result of systematic differences in the socialization of affect" (3:632) and has far reaching implications beyond how the depressive bears his body. I will speak in more detail about the vicissitudes of the depressive posture in the next chapter, but here I want to highlight how the term *posture* bridges the gap between phenomenology and theory, between what we experience and how we interpret that experience. The term may refer to not only a physiological and psychological bearing but also a particular personality and a particular relation to the world. Interested in the psychology of knowledge, Tomkins believed that "the individual resonates to any organized ideology because of an underlying ideo-affective posture, which is a set of feelings and ideas about feelings that is more loosely organized than any highly organized ideology" (3:764). With regards to distress, for instance, the parent "following his own ideo-affective posture and more articulate ideology" may teach the child, either through comfort or confrontation, "a very basic posture toward suffering" (3:632). This connection between articulate ideologies and their less than articulate ideo-affective postures has far-ranging consequences "quite remote from the nursery and home" (3:632). Since ideology "abounds at the frontiers of science" (3:632), one's ideo-affective posture can have tremendous bearings on one's methodological biases.

From the vantage point of current science, Tomkins's ideas may sound naïve, quaint, risible in their reductiveness. Take, for instance, his notion that our affective and ideological postures, not to mention our very consciousness, is rooted in the "the density of neural firing." Immersed in the cybernetics theories of the mid-twentieth century, Tomkins conceived of consciousness as a "hypothetical inner 'eye,'" what he referred to as "the central assembly, which receives messages from all sources, both external and internal, and at the same time transforms them into conscious reports" (4:1173). Think of one of those old-fashioned automats

from the 1950s in which the inventory of sandwiches constantly changes as old sandwiches are removed and new sandwiches are put on display. The central assembly is an ever-changing automat as stimuli—whether sensory, affective, or cognitive—slip in and out of consciousness. This automat, however, is not limitless. Tomkins posited that the central assembly has a “limited channel” (1:151), that at any given moment only a finite number of sandwiches can find their way into our automatic. What determines whether or not one message becomes conscious over another—this sandwich over that one—is “the relative density of neural firing of competing messages” (4:1173). By density, Tomkins means the intensity of neural firing multiplied by its duration. Thus, a sudden, sharp pain, if intense enough, might trump the dull pangs of chronic hunger, but should that hunger grow in *both* intensity and duration, it can block out any other competing stimuli from consciousness, including pain.

One of the central ways that incoming sensory information becomes dense enough to capture our attention, according to Tomkins, is through affect. Affects are the building blocks from which our emotions, moods, cognition, even theories about the world spring. Unlike Freud, who placed drives at the center of his theory, Tomkins saw the affect system as the prime motivational system in humans. Contrary to many cognitive theorists, both then and now, Tomkins also believed that cognition does not precede affect.<sup>20</sup> Rather, it is affect that is primary and innate. Such a stance placed him at odds with two historical tendencies within psychology:

---

<sup>20</sup> Tomkins saw his theory of affect as intervening on a decades-long debate within psychology. As Tomkins explains, “there had been a deep polarization between Hull’s conception of the importance of drives as primary motives and Tolman’s more informational theory, stressing as it did, cognitive maps” (“The Quest” 7).

psychologists interested in the body...tended to stress drives over affects, and  
 psychologists interested in the mind... tended to stress cognition over affect. (Tomkins,  
 "The Quest" 5)

Within such a binary framework, "animals learned either because they were 'driven' or because they 'thought' about what they needed to learn" (7). Neither theory gave much credence or attention to consciousness. Affect theory, on the other hand, allowed Tomkins to chart a course between the Scylla of drives and the Charybdis of cognition. "His theory as a whole," explains Adam Frank, "can be taken to refocus our attention on the middle ranges of affects themselves, between the constraining inevitability of the drives and the seemingly limitless, but ungrounded, freedom of cognition" (18).

In Tomkins, there are only eight paired affects hard-wired into human beings: 1) interest-excitement, 2) enjoyment-joy, 3) surprise-startle, 4) distress-anguish, 5) fear-terror, 6) shame-humiliation, 7) contempt-disgust, and 8) anger-rage. (Tomkins would later distinguish disgust from contempt, thus raising the total of innate affects to nine). Tomkins considers the first two affects (interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy) positive ones, experienced by the human subject as highly rewarding. The last five, on the other hand, comprise the negative affects. Surprise-startle acts as a sort of neutral, resetting affect, seizing the central assembly and clearing it of all previous information. All of these affects serve as amplifiers to internal and external stimuli (i.e., drives, sensations, perception, cognition, memories) much like a stereo amplifies the sound on a record player. Such amplification ensures that important incoming information becomes conscious. In other words, affect makes us pay attention, both to the world around us and to ourselves.

What distinguishes one amplifying affect from another is the density of neural firing:

Any stimulus with a relatively sudden onset and a steep increase in the rate of neural firing will innately activate a startle response...if the rate of neural firing increases less rapidly, fear is activated; and if still less rapidly, then interest is innately activated. In contrast, any sustained increase in the level of neural firing, such as a continuing loud noise, would innately activate the cry of distress. If it were sustained and still louder, it would innately activate the anger response. Finally, any sudden decrease in stimulation which reduced the rate of neural firing, as in the sudden reduction of excessive noise, would innately activate the rewarding smile of enjoyment. (Tomkins, *AIC* 3:651-652)

Density plays a part not only in differentiating paired affects (for instance, anger is triggered by a higher density of stimulation than distress), but also in parsing out the more nuanced differences within the pairs themselves (say, between startle and surprise); “[t]hus a change from one loudness to another might startle, frighten or interest, depending on the gradient of change of stimulation, but whether it evokes surprise or startle, or interest or excitement, or fear or terror would depend on the absolute density of stimulation involved. A gunshot would startle whereas a toy cap pistol would surprise” (1:140-141). Each affect has its own quale, its own nuance, depending on whether the density in question is increasing, decreasing, or staying constant. Affect density registers change, or lack thereof. It is what situates us in history. The density with which each of these paired affects is experienced ultimately produces “radically different personalities with gross differences in expectations and in responsiveness” (1:175). In short, the density of one’s affective experience determines the physical, psychological, and political postures towards oneself and the world.

With brain-imaging technology, a growing understanding of neurotransmitters, and a more sophisticated appreciation of how neurons actually work, today’s neuroscience—which is

enjoying a particular prestige at the moment within both the humanities and the social sciences—no longer speaks in terms of units of neural firing or density of stimulation. Even before the current turn toward biology, when the truth-value of any given theory, unlike today, was in direct proportion to how far it distanced itself *from* the body, Tomkins held little sway within critical theory. Anticipating the “reflexive anti-biologism” of her readership in the mid-1990s, Sedgwick introduced Tomkins’ affect theory by conceding, “you don’t have to be long out of theory kindergarten to make mincemeat of, let’s say, a psychology that depends on the separate existence of eight (only sometimes it’s nine) distinct affects hardwired into the human biological system” (“Shame” 2). Despite attempts by such critics as Sedgwick and Frank to disseminate his ideas more widely, Tomkins’ work is still little utilized, if not suspect, within present critical theory.<sup>21</sup> I imagine past and present theory viewing Tomkins as a kind of grown up Geryon. In seventh grade, Geryon conducts a science experiment to confirm that his own synesthesia is not a sign of madness:

[...] those he interviewed for the science project had to admit they did not hear  
the cries of the roses  
being burned alive in the noonday sun. *Like horses*, Geryon would say helpfully,  
*like horses in war*. No, they shook their heads.  
*Why is grass called blades?* he asked them. *Isn’t it because of the clicking?*

---

<sup>21</sup> Outside the field of psychology, Tomkins has received relatively little attention from scholars and critics. The tide, however, may be changing. The last seven years have seen an increasing number of articles (see Bak; Flatley; Frank; Meyer; Shmurak; Tissari) as well as books (see Elspeth; Flatley; Leys) applying Tomkins’ theories to questions of language, literature, theory, and criticism. However, the best indication that Tomkins is gaining ground in literary and cultural studies is the plethora of recent dissertations (numbering in the hundreds) that either cite Tomkins or take up his ideas in more substantive ways. For the most promising of these, see Baxter; Crean; Faunce; Frank; Gordon; Hatch; Lucas; and Manderfield.

They stared at him. *You should be interviewing roses not people*, said the science teacher. Geryon liked the idea. (Carson 84)

No doubt, Tomkins was met with similar blank stares as he tested the complex relationship between the idiosyncratic personalities of individuals and the experience of human beings in general. Despite winning over a devoted following (some of whom, like Carroll Izard and Paul Ekman<sup>22</sup>, went on to great academic and commercial success), his most interesting and compelling concepts such as ideo-affective postures never quite entered academic parlance in America, either in his lifetime or now. Admitting that Tomkins was never “comfortably at home in academia” (6), M. Brewster Smith, his graduate student at Harvard, laments that “mainstream general psychology and the psychology of personality have paid insufficient heed to his contributions” (1). In 1956, his first major paper challenging Freud’s drive theory was rejected by “every American journal of psychology”; in 1964, an editor returned a monograph by Tomkins already accepted for publication with the explanation that it “did not meet minimal scientific standards” (Tomkins, “The Quest” 3). *American Psychologist* rejected his paper outlining his new script theory, given at a symposium during the 1980 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, even though two other papers from the symposium were published by the journal. Writing in 1998, friend and colleague R. Carlson tells how “two students wrote to [her] asking where in the United States they might pursue graduate work in a program in which Tomkins’s theory is systematically studied; [she knew] of none!” (298).

---

<sup>22</sup> Popularizations of Tomkins’s ideas can be found in Malcolm Gladwell’s bestselling book *Blink* and in the accessible but more scientific work of Paul Ekman and Carroll Izard. These authors build on Tomkins’s idea that the expression of affect resides mainly in the face, but only cite Tomkins in passing.

Unfortunately, Tomkins still stands with Geryon outside Theory Kindergarten. His theories seem more scientism than science, his “density of neural firing” sounding dense, indeed.

At first glance, “the density of neural firing” may seem too blunt a tool, too mired in obsolete understandings of brain and behavior, to offer any kind of chunky affordance or theoretical plasticity. But it is precisely Tomkins’s depressive density and belatedness—according to another of his mentees, Irving Alexander, Tomkins underwent “a seven-year psychoanalysis...for which the immediate stimulus was a severe reading block” (“Silvan S. Tomkins” 254). As well, a twenty-five year lag separates the first two volumes of his masterwork from the remaining two—that alone marks him as an ideal candidate for thinking through some of the cognitive and affective blockages previously discussed. I have already written about the aporia one faces when trying to explicate the Kleinian scene, “endlessly recursive and relentlessly architectonic” (Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein” 629) as it is. One of the difficulties of reading Klein is ascertaining what is primary and what is derivative. Sometimes, it is unclear whether anxiety causes aggression, or the other way around, or if they are mutually arising. Like a Benjaminian pantomime, simultaneity seems to be the order of the day in the child’s first few months. As a result, conceptualizing how these different primary and/or secondary processes relate to each other can be difficult. Tomkins solves this conceptual dilemma by positing a set of nine innate affects that can operate together in various combinations of independency, dependency, and interdependency. One affect may or may not activate another. For instance, distress need not activate anger, but if it is intense and enduring enough, it very well may lead to rage. At the same time, affects are “specific activators” of themselves. I may fear my own fear, be enraged by my own rage. The feedback mechanisms inherent in Tomkins’s affect system lend theoretical support to the recursiveness of Klein’s descriptions.

Tomkins' density also helps us reframe Klein's highly metaphoric language within a larger debate about what constitutes sound methodology. During the Controversial Discussions of 1943-1944, when Klein's theories and professional reputation were on the line, Marjorie Brierly famously attacked Klein for less than scientific methods: "If we persist in equating mental functions with our subjective interpretations of them, we forfeit our claim to be scientists and revert to the primitive state of the Chinese peasant who interprets an eclipse as the sun being swallowed by a dragon" (qtd. in Kristeva 175). Besides its thinly disguised contempt for the working theories of workaday people, Brierly's remark displays an incredibly obtuse sense of what science can be. Her blatant Orientalism recapitulates a long history of European bias against alternative modes of thought, both in the East and in the West. In *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, medical historian Shigehisa Kuriyama describes the bafflement of Europeans at encountering the "queer, perplexing otherness of Chinese 'allegorical' discourse" (63). Even the eighteenth century champion of traditional Chinese medicine, John Foyer, admitted that the "gay luxurious imagination" of Chinese medical discourse was "fitter for poetry and oratory, than philosophy" (qtd. in Kuriyama 62). The history Kuriyama tells is instructive, for it puts into relief differentials of practice and language, and the ideological biases that underpin them. The Chinese conception of meridians and twenty-four variations of mo differed radically from the Western conception of musculature and pulsing arteries. While one does find similar "fanciful metaphors" in Galen (for instance, Galen differentiates pulses according to whether they are "antcrawling" or "mouselike" or "gazelling"), European medicine would come to disparage such figurative language and instead seek "clarity through literalness" (76). Unlike the "crisp categories" of "size, speed, rhythm, and frequency" prized by European sphygmology, the language of Chinese pulse taking, or quiemo,



conveyed “a dense, tangled mesh of interrelated, interpenetrating sensations” (94). Like Klein, Chinese doctors did not seek to distance themselves from their own perceptions or the perceptions of their patients:

When doctors in the *Neijing* subsequently spoke of qi rising in anger, sinking in fear, seeping away in sorrow, they weren't so much trying to explain emotions, objectively, as relating what they knew from their own bodies, describing what they felt, subjectively, within themselves...It was the intimate everyday familiarity of such sensations that made the traditional discourse of vital flux so compelling. The deepest certainties about qi were rooted in knowledge that people had of the body because they were, themselves, bodies. (103)

This subjective approach to the body allowed for a multiplicity of interpretations, a multiplicity that stoked the anxieties of European scientists who were constantly flummoxed by paranoia's paradox. In their quest for impersonal clarity, paranoid interpretative practices seek to render interpretation obsolete. But what the Greek medical tradition saw as a failing of perception and language—that is, “people don't all feel things in the same way” (66)—Chinese medicine embraced as axiomatic. Affirming the “more unbudging limits” of body and language, the eleventh century physician Xu Shuwei once said, “The principles of the *mo* are mysterious and hard to clarify. What my mind can comprehend my mouth cannot transmit” (qtd. in Kuriyama 72). “Like clouds floating in the sky....quiet and whispering like falling elm pods....tense and taut, like a freshly strung bowstring” (qtd. in Kuriyama 98)—these descriptions of *mo* relied on similes and metaphors, since “[u]nderstanding a *mo* entailed seeing what it was *like*” (99). It was only through metaphor and indirection that Chinese doctors could articulate their understanding of the body.

Brierly was correct; Klein's mandarin science does conflate subject with object, the figural with the literal. But such methodology in Tomkins's estimation would in no way discredit her theories. As with Klein and the Chinese peasant she resembles, Tomkins allows for interesting slippages between subjective experience and objective designation, his truth answering more to the descriptive density of traditional Chinese medicine than the clean, elegant line of Western science. He understood scientific inquiry as "a delicate balance between methods which aim at purity and methods which aim at power" (*AIC* 3:641). The former values simplicity, clarity, and verification; the latter complexity, ambiguity, and exploration. He labeled these two different ways of knowing *normative* versus *humanistic*. Underlying these two divergent methodologies are particular ideo-affective postures "loosely" matched to particular ideologies. Individuals with different ideo-affective postures resonate differently with "the varieties of cognitive styles, with the types of evidence that the individual finds persuasive" (3:631). In the case of Greek versus Chinese medicine, "Europeans prized sober rational precision; the Chinese were fanciful and poetic" (Kuriyama 62).

Tomkins's allegiances lie on the side of the fanciful and the poetic. His depressive methodology values the elasticity of words, their capacity to hold densely packed meanings. His is not the rigor of science, but the rigor of poetry. Not the purity of precision but the power of the pun. His postures are figurative, both in the literal and literary sense. The body in Tomkins does not stand outside metaphor. Rather, the body works as a metaphor. "How can one response of our body amplify another response?" he asks. "It can do this by being similar to that response—but also different. It is an analog amplifier" (3:620). Affects are analogues to internal and external stimuli, amplifying stimuli by way of "duplication" (4:1174) and "simulation" (3:621). To be more precise, affects are metonyms, mimicking a specific quality of a particular stimulus:

namely, its density. It is through affective density that the body can know something again, and know it differently. Instead of reading Tomkins's "density of stimulation" as a physiological function of neurons firing—Tomkins himself conceded that "the problem of defining in a general way what constitutes a 'unit' of density of neural firing is a difficult one" (4:1188)—I propose reading his density as a descriptive term for a way of paying attention, of becoming conscious.

Like the twenty four varieties of mo in traditional Chinese medicine, Tomkins's language of different postures and the affective densities offers ways of talking about the body that, from the point of view of "normative" science, may sound dumb, but are, in fact, incredibly attentive to nuance and individual difference. His phenomenology certainly answers to a gut check.

Take, for instance, his description of how plastic affect can be when compared with drives:

If I do not eat, I become hungrier and hungrier. As I eat, I become less hungry. But I may wake mildly irritated in the morning and remain so for the rest of the day. Or one day I may not be at all angry until quite suddenly something makes me explode in rage. I may start the day moderately angry and quickly become interested in some other matter and so dissipate anger. Affect density (the product of intensity times duration) can vary from low and casual to monopolistic and high in density—intense and enduring. (3:660)

The concept of affect density has the advantage of accounting for a wide variety of affective states. For instance, the innate trigger for fear-terror is a steep gradient in stimulus density, somewhere between the sudden density demands of surprise-startle and the more modulated density increases of interest-excitement. Tomkins hypothesized that "the sudden reduction of intense, enduring fear... if incomplete releases excitement" (1:160). This proximity of fear to interest may be what led Freud to conflate the two when theorizing about sexual excitement. Whereas Freud postulated the libido as an anxiety-producing tension in humans that had to be

either repressed or sublimated, Tomkins argued that art, science and politics are not pale substitutes from sublimated desire; rather, sexual excitement is just one scene involving the affect of interest. For instance, one could just as easily experience scenes of sexual disgust, sexual anger, sexual surprise and the object of those scenes might vary across genders, sites, aims, and acts. This decoupling of sexual arousal from any particular affect performs the queer affirming, anxiety-mitigating task of taking the epistemological pressure off sexuality as being at the root of all knowledge. Tomkins allows for a variety of epistemologies and pleasures outside the confines of conventional sexuality, giving us back the nuances and multiplicities of our sexual and affective lives.

Density also does justice to how differently we perceive things at different scale—“when an individual pays closer attention to something within the visual field (e.g., goes from looking casually at a person to examining the face in great detail), this change from a wide angle to a microscopic lens usually sacrifices breadth for density of information” (4:1183). Privileging density over breadth can certainly slow down one’s cognitive functioning—whether it be taking twenty-five years to complete a book or twenty-seven years to compose an essay. Of course, “there are rules governing the total amount of density of neural firing that may be permitted in the central assembly and therefore in consciousness,” Tomkins warns. “If these limits are exceeded, the assembly excludes all messages, and the individual faints or becomes unconscious” (4:1021). Recall Sedgwick’s fainting spell during that summer protest in Durham, when the vertiginous array of competing messages “so absorbing and so radically heterogeneous” left a “gaping, unbridgeable hole... in [her] own consciousness” (“Socratic Raptures” 126, 127). Or, consider how Geryon’s distress not only creates a “deep, glowing blank” in his mind where a map of the school should be, but also grows in intensity to an even

denser, more monopolistic anger: “[his] anger was total/The blank caught fire and burned to baseline” (Carson 24).

What I am arguing here is that Tomkins’s density provides well-articulated tools for understanding and expressing a depressive poetics. He helps us make sense of the mental blankness and cognitive confusion that reading Klein can engender and gives us a way of re-contextualizing her dense concepts. That is not to say that Tomkins isn’t just as dense. Indeed, his proponents have stressed how “densely written” (Alexander, “Forward” ix) and “densely packed with ideas” (Demos, “Affect Revolution” 17) his prolific writing can be. Nonetheless, his more systematic approach provides a much-needed ballast to Klein. His prose is certainly more amenable than hers for acknowledging and wrestling with issues of stupidity and density. Klein’s style demands precocity: “[h]er impatience can still communicate itself via her rushed prose, tempting both writer and reader to hasten the learning process by skipping over demanding areas of text” (Likierman 6). In contrast, Tomkins’ style is more deliberate, less impatient. Describing “the limitations of present day automata” in 1962, Tomkins berates the automaton designer for acting like “an overprotective, overdemanding parent who is too pleased with precocity in his creations...Such precocity essentially guarantees a low ceiling to the learning ability of his automaton” (1:65). Tomkins places a high value on error:

Cognitive strides are limited by the motives which urge them. Cognitive error, which is essential to cognitive learning, can be made only by one capable of committing motivational error, i.e., being wrong about his own wishes, their causes and outcomes.  
(1:64)

The value of being nontransparent to oneself, of being wrong—in short, the value of being dense—finds itself expressed in the different densities of Tomkins’s descriptions and

interpretations. Sometimes, his prose is packed with abstruse generalities and abstractions. Other times, he dilates into the most accessible biographical or autobiographical mode. In doing so, he allows his readers to relax, to be dumb about things. Noting his complete lack of embarrassment about repetition, Sedgwick and Frank observe, “phrases, sentences, sometimes whole paragraphs repeat; pages are taken up with sentences syntactically resembling one another ...sentences not exemplifying a general principle but sampling—listing the possible” (3). In his redundancy, Tomkins promises to deliver chunky affordances. Just as Sedgwick enjoys Klein’s chunkiness for its “no swallowing risk,” Tomkins “cannot be swallowed whole” (Smith 11). His personality theory is modular, conceived and written in chunks. Not only do affects combine in modular fashion to create our emotions and moods, but also the affect system itself is modular, endlessly combinable with drive, cognitive, motor, and perceptual systems. These modular systems work in differing degrees of independence, dependence and interdependence with one another. They are, in Tomkins’ words, “mismatched”—this mismatch allowing for a great deal of “play” (4:1015).

His repetitive prose is itself a repetition of his repetitive process. Tomkins often wrote several handwritten pages only later to discover in a desk drawer pages, written months earlier, in which he had come to the same conclusions. Like Gertrude Stein, who claimed to write for herself and strangers, Tomkins often “wrote to himself” (Carlson 297), compelled to keep going back over his thoughts again and again. Strangers to his work, in turn, must keep returning to his text. Carlson encourages “readers who may find his theory too dense and difficult to understand on a first reading” that “it yields to thoughtful rereadings” (297). Tomkins, it would seem, understands the Geryon need to be taken through something just one more time. His outmoded, backward theories allow us to know ourselves again, and to know ourselves differently.

Tomkins was ever attuned to the paralyzing effects of a culture that demanded precocity and productivity, at the same time threatening fear and humiliation should such demands not be met:

“Hurry up, stupid” is the prototypic message I have found in such cases of recurrent fear. Characteristically, these verbal pressures are “heard” more and more often even in the absence of actual pressure. Such phrases become internal persecutors, which panic the individual by urging him to speed up just as his competence is being slowed.

*Hurry up, stupid*: that is the paranoid projection of Geryon’s brother, one that our little red-winged monster cannot help but internalize. Such a humiliating and humiliated posture is not confined to a domestic drama. To show the terrifying reach of such a punitive posture, Tomkins cites the iconic scene of Charlie Chaplin on the assembly line in *Modern Times* as well as the “publish or perish” world of his own academic life:

It does not matter whether it is an overly coercive parent who pushes a child beyond his rate limits or a social or economic system which insists on up-or-out in rate and quantity of productivity, threatening humiliation and loss of status or economic support for failure to “keep up”.... [f]or the child, for the academic, for the executive, or for the lumpen proletariat, terror is critically tied to demanded excessive rate of performance. Under such conditions all become phobic to the “rat race” and therefore dream of and seek the peace of relaxation and the slowdown of the pace of living either in slower space or time, or in drugs, or in quiescence. (3:963)

Thin, punctual, prolific and smart: these are the ideal attributes of a job candidate. Thick, tardy, barren and dumb: these are the things that will get you fired, if you’re lucky enough to even have a job. The high valuation placed on the reparative in Sedgwick’s work might have less to do

with its inherent “feel goodness” than the real need to place value on ways of being and working that are at odds with a society that finds mistakes (that is, other people’s mistakes) risible, considers deliberate slowness bad for business, and regards consistent lateness grounds for termination.

Despite a plethora of more politically correct alternatives, the queer cabaret duo Kiki and Herb often took pride in being “diagnosed as retards.” In characteristically gauche fashion, Kiki explains, “Retard: we OWN that word, baby!” Sedgwick understands what every drag queen knows: the best way to make an entrance is to arrive late. Her involuted prose and dense corpus does not reward precocity. Rather, it retards the reader. Precocity comes at too high a price: the joys and rewards of being a slow learner. Unlike the hubris valorized in the film *Limitless* and in the culture at large, Sedgwick offers a very different notion of what makes writing happen. Shortly before she died, she confided in a friend how she felt sorry for the “*under-impaired*.” The answer to writer’s block is not the elimination of limits. On the contrary, limits, even the limits of one’s stupidity, are what make writing possible.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Depressives Make Scenes

So many hearts I find, broke like yours and mine  
 Torn by what they've done and can't undo  
 I just want to hold you, won't you let me hold you  
 Like Bernadette would do

Leonard Cohen, "Song of Bernadette"

*That's enough; you can stop now.* Isn't this the blessing into whose enfolding arms every complaint of suffering bounds—in its dreams?

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *A Dialogue on Love*

In a clip circulated widely on YouTube, a disheveled Judy Garland rehearses for her 1966 performance at The Hollywood Palace. She looks as if she has just gotten out of bed. She is wearing no make-up, her hair is unkempt, and her oddly hunched shoulders seem to barely support the rather dumpy pullover she has chosen for the occasion. She is singing Burt Bacharach and Hal David's "What the World Needs Now (Is Love Sweet Love)," but there is not a shred of love in her voice. She is clearly strung-out and exhausted, the tonus gone from her body, her eyes and limbs listless. Everything in her voice and body speaks of a person in the depths of depression. The clip then cuts to the actual live telecast and an Ovidian metamorphosis has occurred. She is no longer a wreck of a human being. Her make-up and dress are flawless,

her performance riveting. She is once again Judy Garland—giving and receiving love and respect from her audience.

In sentimentalizing this cliché of the suffering actress “turning it on” for her audience, I realize I am more than flirting with the epithet of drama queen. If so, I wouldn’t be the first friend of Dorothy to tune into that unmistakable note of depression in “Over the Rainbow,” nor would I be the first proto-queer kid to sing along with Queen,

I’ll top the bill, I’ll overkill

I have to find the will to carry on

On with the—

On with the—

On with the show<sup>23</sup>

I am a lot less concerned, though, with risking the title of drama queen than with dismissing the appeal, richness, and resourcefulness of such a performance out of hand.

My interest in Garland, as befits any drama queen, stems from my own depressive drama. *I want to hold all of Eve’s people really tight*. That is what a mutual friend posted on Facebook the day Sedgwick died. I was one of Eve’s people, the beneficiary of her depressive habit of “scattering sequins all over” (Sedgwick, *Dialogue* 108) those she loved. Because of her I left the world of theater and returned to the halls of academia to pursue a doctoral degree. And in her presence, I felt “glamorous and numinous...the light shaking out of [my] wings” (108). I knew she had metastatic breast cancer when I met her. I knew, or at least I thought I knew, that this meant her death would happen sooner rather than later. Of course, breast cancer, as with AIDS,

---

<sup>23</sup> Freddy Mercury, the lead singer of Queen, would die of AIDS shortly after the release of this song whose lyrics tell the story of his struggle to put on a brave face and keep performing despite debilitating illness and fatigue.

has to some extent become a manageable disease, advances in medicine keeping many alive far beyond what was imagined even a decade ago. I prepared myself for her death, nonetheless. I told myself, even convinced myself, I would be all right. That the sequins would stay. *I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

Sedgwick left me with hand raised, questions unanswered. *What is reparative reading? How do I know if I am practicing it? Is my dissertation dumb?* Sedgwick presents me with two very different scenes of depressive pedagogy now. In one, she is an animated and animating presence, blotting up her dying student's pain with her generous folds. In the other, she lies by the road lifeless, exhausted by heat and protest, surrounded by fellow protesters and a television crew. The chiaroscuro of the deathbed, the televised glare of political protest, how to reconcile these irreconcilable scenes? In her oscillation between a depressive absorption and a depressive extroversion, Sedgwick, who was once dubbed "the 'Judy Garland' of gay studies" (Duggan 24), resembles Garland's own depressive transformations, a punishing work ethic in which her body either does everything, or nothing. In his third volume of *Affect, Imagery and Consciousness*, Silvan Tomkins offers a case study of Judy Garland in order to "illustrate the depressive posture among actors" (3:826). Using interviews with Garland in *Look* magazine, Tomkins sketches out Garland's "depressive ambivalence toward holding onto her children and making them independent enough to leave" (3:826). He, then, draws a connection between Garland's depressiveness and her performance ethic:

She must work her "hardest," not cheat, give her utmost concentration, and then she will evoke from her audience the love and intimacy which is "a marvelous love affair." This is one variant of the depressive script in its purest form: I will work for you and we shall be as one! (3:826)

As Garland herself would famously say: “I’ll sing ‘em all-- we’ll stay all night!” (*Judy at Carnegie Hall*).

The present chapter explores the depressive’s labor—the physical, affective, and cognitive kinesthetics that their bodies perform in order to meet the internal and external demands placed upon them. Whether engaged with others or absorbed in their own work, the faces of “individuals of a manic-depressive personality structure” are “highly animated” (2:318). But when alone—*behind the curtain, in the pantomime*, the dying Freddy Mercury sings—they “assume the expression of the frozen cry” (2:318). Here, in Tomkins’ rendering, we find Benjamin’s dumb pantomime, those mournful, mute figures whose postures express what words cannot. Theirs is “the look of depression...the head is not only allowed to drop forward, but at the same time expresses the frozen mute cry of distress” (2:365). Tomkins speaks poignantly of the ubiquity of such suffering, those public moments or performances, “as in a subway train in a metropolitan area” (2:318), when we feel most alone—silent straphangers shuttling back and forth to work bound by our solitude,

thousands of such  
faces in repose which are  
crying silently.<sup>24</sup> (2:318)

If the last chapter was interested in a depressive poetics, this chapter is concerned with a depressive performativity—with the depressive at work.

---

<sup>24</sup> The actual text in Tomkins is not enjambed. I have chosen to enjamb his prose here not only to harken back to the depressive poetics of the last chapter, but also to begin understanding the act of quotation as more than an evidentiary move. I want to explore quotation, especially chunky block quotes, as something akin to the enjambment found in Sedgwick’s *A Dialogue on Love* and in that essay she wrote twenty-seven years late (“A Poem is Being Written”) as well as Walter Benjamin’s citation experiments in *The Arcades Project*.

With his notion of script theory and the ease with which he shuttles back and forth between acting as a metaphor and the lives of real actors, Tomkins—who majored in playwriting, completed graduate work in psychology, but then earned a doctorate in philosophy, only to return to psychology years later to elaborate a new theory of affect over the course of four volumes and four decades—is perhaps the best theorist for thinking about the various intersections between depression, performance, and pedagogy. Admittedly, it is never quite clear how depression works in Tomkins. Tracing the Daedalian thread of depressiveness that winds its way through his voluminous, repetitive, and labyrinthine work presents a daunting task. Like some Gordian Knot resistant to any Alexandrian solution, whether by stroke of sword or pen, depression is variously described as an emotion, a personality, a posture, and a script. Sometimes, depression seems little more than fatigue or exhaustion, “any great reduction in energy” (3:822), as Tomkins would have it. For individuals in the throes of depression, “[t]he body’s energy expenditure is at low ebb. The zest for work is gone and there is a felt loss of ‘power and capacities.’” (2:511). At the same time, we are all, healthy or not, vulnerable to the “diurnal variations” of energy “capable of producing temporary depressions” (2:392). Tomkins seems particularly astute in recognizing that “an individual with the same ‘personality’ may be a very different person at the peak of his energy cycle [than] at the bottom of his variations in free energy” (1:299). The manic-depressive figure of Garland would suggest as much. But even this simple diagnostic gives way to a more complex feedback system of distress and shame:

one of the reasons why, we think, depression is more frequent in old age and at the menopause and after the birth of a child [is that in] all of these conditions there is a reduction in free energy available to the individual. Since such a reduction of free energy is ordinarily followed by a subjective awareness of being “tired” and since such a

bombardment of what is essentially low-level pain is an innate activator of distress, the combined loss of [energy] and distress readily act as an activator of shame and self-disgust, and the individual is thereby “depressed.” (3:822)

Tomkins believed that classical psychoanalysis had neglected the pivotal role shame plays in depression. While he considered fatigue an “unlearned activator of distress” (2:297), the affect of distress in and of itself need not necessarily lead to depression. Rather, it is the combination of distress and shame—what Tomkins calls the “distress-shame bind” (2:338)—that is most determinative of depressive states:

It has frequently been reported to us that upon encountering difficulties in problem solving many adults suddenly feel quite tired and even exhausted to the point of falling asleep. In addition many also report that when they feel this way under these circumstances they also feel somewhat ashamed and that their head is likely to drop a bit... Depression is therefore an oscillation between increase and decrease of positive affect which alternately activates distress or anger and shame. (2:340)

This circuit of cognitive frustration, physical exhaustion, distress and shame is perhaps one reason why students, teachers, workers—or any person in a high-powered learning environment—are particularly susceptible to bouts of depression. It is also why even highly rewarding activities, if too stimulating or too manic, can leave one in a rather depressed state:

the creative individual, suddenly bombarded with a whole new set of ideas, and their fanning out implications, ordinarily experiences excitement. But if this production of ideas continues at a very high rate and continues to evoke excitement, the combination of ideation and excitement may eventually produce a density of stimulation which activates distress and finally weariness and exhaustion. (2:303)

Actors and academics often experience just such a “depressed” state during a highly stimulating but highly exhausting run or read. When Sedgwick reads Klein, for instance, the “unchecked proliferation of [her] sense of recognition, endlessly recursive and relentlessly architectonic” (“Melanie Klein” 629), while initially exciting, ultimately leaves her exhausted and distressed, beset by “painful dreams and painfully crabby days” (627).

Tomkins cites the “distress-shame bind” as one possible socialization of distress—occurring when a parent has somehow socialized the child to feel ashamed at feeling distressed. Had the child or adult been socialized differently, Tomkins notes, “he might otherwise have simply felt distress in response to illness, or failure, or loneliness” (2:340). Tomkins understands the power of a good nap, especially when one has taxed one’s cognitive and affective capacities:

[t]here is...an ultimate consequence for the intensity and duration of affects. Although it is possible to maintain affects at a maximum intensity and duration to death, as we have seen with Richter’s rats, if the individual’s longevity is held constant then we may expect that there will be refractory periods proportional to the debts generated. In one sense sleep is just such a refractory period. (1:167)

When faced with fatigue or difficulty in an endeavor, one might simply choose to rest or take a nap, instead of feeling ashamed and becoming depressed. In their introduction to *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, Sedgwick and her co-editor Adam Frank do just that when reading Tomkins: “Once, one of us fell asleep reading and afterwards explained, ‘I often get tired when I’m learning a lot.’” (2). And yet, fatigue or exhaustion or “a reduction of free energy” would all necessarily imply a partial reduction or withdrawal of interest from the object or task at hand. In that regard, a body fatigued looks a lot like a body shamed.

Here it might prove useful to specify what exactly Tomkins means by shame. Shame-humiliation is one of the eight affects that Tomkins claims are the irreducible elements of our emotional and cognitive lives. But shame holds a special place in Tomkins' periodic table of affects. Like contempt-disgust with which it is closely related, it functions as an auxiliary, or switch point, between the positive affects of interest and enjoyment and the negative affects of distress, fear, and anger. For Tomkins, shame innately arises whenever one experiences a partial reduction of interest or enjoyment. As a physical posture, it is marked by the eyes cast downward, the head hung in shame. Such deflation occurs when a familiar or attentive face—say, that of a parent, lover, or teacher—becomes unresponsive, dead, or strange. A commonplace example would be hailing a familiar figure on the street, only to discover, much to one's embarrassment, that one is looking at a stranger. One's initial interest and excitement would be attenuated, and the resulting affect, however slight, would be one of shame. A more profound instance would be the strangeness of seeing one's teacher splayed out unconscious by the side of the road. While shame, in its many manifestations, can run the gamut from shyness to guilt to abjection, it is at its core a corollary to interest. Tomkins' unique definition of shame as a temporary reduction of interest helps explain why shame plays such an important role in his understanding of depression. For without the affect of interest, Tomkins points out, “[a] state similar to the plight of the psychotic depressive would become commonplace” (2:188).

This circuit of exhaustion, distress, and shame is what constitutes depression in Tomkins. Beset by frustration and fatigue, the individual becomes more and more distressed until interest in the world gives way and the head drops in shame. Tomkins returns to this formulation again and again throughout the four volumes of *AIC*: “[w]e conceive depression to be a syndrome of shame and distress, which also reduces the general amplification of all impulses” (2:355);



“[d]epression, in our view, is a state in which there is conjoint shame, distress and reduction of level of amplification” (2:392); “[t]he depressive psychosis is two parts affect and one part attenuation...along with shame and anguish there has been a serious reduction in nonspecific amplification of all neural messages, especially involving the motoric” (3:831). Tomkins defines this “general reduction in amplification” (2:355) as a function of the reticular formation, the part of the brain he understands as being responsible for sleep-wake cycles, pain modulation, metabolism, muscle tone, and physical posture. A sort of systolic/diastolic relationship exists between the attenuation of these vital processes and the affective amplification of shame and distress. The contraction of one feeds into the dilation of the other, and vice versa. Tomkins hypothesizes that “the high state of energy expenditure of intense affect” can ultimately lead to “an exhaustion depression” (1:167). He likens this exhaustion depression to that “seen in children who have been permitted to cry themselves to the point of exhaustion” (1:167). The distress cry that goes unanswered serves as both a metaphor for depression and its etiology. Crying to exhaustion activates shame because “interest in the parent [who does not help] is sufficiently attenuated...[that] the child feels that the parent is in a real sense a stranger to him” (2:340). The child who cries to exhaustion becomes the adult who is vulnerable to feelings of “shame along with weariness and sleepiness” whenever they are faced with “illness, failure, or loneliness” (2:340).<sup>25</sup> The drama of the depression lies in the distress and shame experienced when one’s interest in the world cannot be maintained.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the paranoid who fights those

---

<sup>25</sup> Tomkins repeats this formulation later in Volume II, but in a slightly different way, highlighting the wide-ranging effects of a distress-shame bind: “if the cry of distress is controlled by shame, the resultant bind can evoke shame whenever the individual is distressed whether by hunger, pain, fatigue or failure or frustration of any kind” (2:410).

<sup>26</sup> I need to think through this a bit more, but a radical attenuation of interest would imply not only a reduction of general amplification, but also a serious reduction in *affective*

epistemological battles over Truth, the struggles of the depressive are more existential and much more mundane. The depressive asks: *how do I stay interested in a world that is not interested in me?* Faced with such indifference, “[t]he depressive cries in anguish. His head and eyes are lowered in shame, and the tonus is gone from his body” (3:831). The depressive knows the shame of crying itself to sleep.

Thus far in my analysis, I have used the terms *depression* and *depressive* interchangeably. So entangled are these two concepts in Tomkins, it is difficult to pry them apart. But the two are far from synonyms. Depression is a general physiological/psychological state. The depressive, or what Tomkins calls the *depressive posture*, is a particular personality structure. This distinction is what will allow Tomkins in later volumes to speak quite unproblematically of “the psychotic depressive in his non-psychotic state” (3:823)—the implication being that depressives need not necessarily suffer from depression. Such a possibility is a piece with Tomkins’s rather stunning conclusion that one need not change a person’s personality structure to cure mental illness: “It is our belief that two individuals may have identical personality structures, and one be relatively sick and the other relatively well if one, for whatever reason, suffers continual activation of his negative affects and the other does not.” This decoupling of depression and the depressive accounts for both the aporias and the affordances of Tomkins’s work and is what captured Sedgwick’s attention upon first reading him. So if we are to circumvent the paranoid and lay hold of the reparative, we need to understand what exactly constitutes the depressive posture and how it differs from depression.

---

amplification. Affective amplification works by way of analogy or mimicry, in which the affect response mimics the rate of change in stimulus. A severe reduction of affect would suggest as muting of one’s ability to mimic one’s surroundings, to project oneself into world or to take the world in, to know something again and know it differently. Crying to exhaustion can lead to just such an affectless abjection, that blankness of abandonment our little Geryon so dreads.

Tomkins never explicitly states how the depressive posture and depression are related—whether they are one and the same, variations on a theme, or related but radically different phenomena. Like depression, the depressive posture hinges on the affect of shame. Because shame is caught up with questions of interest, it is a keenly relational affect, bridging the gap between self and other, inside and outside, self-absorption and performance. As Sedgwick explains in “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” whenever a person, whether it be an actor, an activist, or academic, offers themselves to the eyes of others, “the stage is set” (8) for that person to experience either shame when the other responds with indifference, or interest and enjoyment when the other returns the gaze with a “mirroring regard” (8). Shame explains the performative nature of the depressive—both its showmanship and its involution—since “[s]hame, it might be finally said, transformational shame, is performance” (6). It is through such shame that Garland and Sedgwick transform their bodies from human wreckage to celebrated divas. Unfortunately, such depressive transformations can be quite costly to maintain as “[d]epressives are in a very real sense forever ‘on stage’ gambling heavily for accolades against the risk of indifference and censure” (1:240).

The figure of the actor is exemplary in Tomkins’s description of the depressive posture—perhaps because “depressive socialization both employs and teaches mimicry” and “the dramatist and the actor are first of all mimics” (3:824). Tomkins delineates the three “serious unintended consequences” (1:245) of any socialization based on love, reward, and mimicry. The first is the tendency for the child to overachieve, “an overweening wish to excel beyond present capacity” (2:245). The second is the child’s need to commune with the parent or loved one. The third is an intense feeling of distress and shame when “the child fails to imitate or achieve perfectly, or when the child fails to evoke attention and appreciation” (1:246). These three consequences

happen both concurrently and consecutively, so that mimesis, over-performance, distress and shame all get quickly fused in the depressive. The depressive child desires to imitate a demanding but otherwise loving parent, but despairs when that mimicry fails or when the child faces the parent's censure. Tomkins complicates the old theater adage that those in show biz were never loved enough as kids. (One iteration of this adage can be found in Bob Fosse's musical hit *Chicago*, when the fame-hungry star Roxy wryly patters, "[M]y audience loves me. And I love them. And they love me for lovin' them and I love them for lovin' me. And we love each other. And that's cause none of us got enough love in our childhoods. And that's showbiz, kids"). It is just because a child is socialized through love and identification that the child finds his or her way into the depressive posture.

Like all postures, the depressive posture is the result of a particular kind of affective socialization. While Tomkins discusses the socialization of all the different affects, he dedicates a disproportionately large amount of his *magnum opus* to talking about the socialization of interest and distress, for "[b]etween them they account for a major part of the postures of human beings towards themselves, towards each other, towards the world they live in" (2:313-314). Tomkins is particularly interested in how a parent responds to a child's distress, either with comfort or with confrontation. How a parent responds depends, in large part, on that parent's ideology, which in turn loosely matches his or her own ideo-affective posture. Writing on the depressive posture of young Anton Chekhov, Tomkins tells how the famous Russian playwright was repeatedly beaten and shamed by his sternly ambitious father for "being lazy" (3:825). *Stop malingering. Keep working. You are only acting sick* were the lessons behind the beatings. The father's imposing posture, both his physical violence and his "set of feelings and ideas about feelings" (3:632), privileges a normative ideology—i.e., *It is disgusting to see an adult cry—*

over a more rewarding, humanistic one—i.e., *It is distressing to see an adult cry*. Chekhov, however, responds to the beatings “not by crying, nor by anger, nor by fear but by shame” (2:405). He is a “child who loves himself as well as his parents” (2:405) and “who loves the one who so offends him, and who is confident enough of the love of the other so that he is not frightened by the physical attack” (2:546). Using his highly developed dramatic skills, Chekhov retaliates through mimicry: “mimicry is the method of choice of any child who is at once close to others but who has also been humiliated by them. It is a prime way of the depressive for expressing contempt and concern at one and the same time” (3:825). Chekhov not only mimics his father by chiding the elder Chekhov in his age for being lazy himself, but he also protects his younger brothers from similar abuse and works “very hard (but not always successfully) not to humiliate others...since as one who had suffered so much he was very quick to experience shame vicariously” (3:806). A physician by trade, “he lived his life as a healer of the limitations of the body and as a repairer of the damages it suffered” (3:806).

As with Chekhov, most of the other subjects in Tomkins’s case studies experience a socialization of suffering that is essentially punitive. The last time I taught Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* I was struck by the fatal dexterity with which we teach ourselves such punitive postures. Many of my students sided with the abusive Stanley. While they ostensibly disapproved of his violence, they felt compelled to criticize Blanche for being maudlin and melodramatic, in essence, for making scenes—as if the violence visited upon her was a scene of her own creation. (I can hear the smug tone of a self-appointed guru asking her: So what are *you* doing, Blanche, that such violence keeps manifesting itself in your life?). But while my students joined Stanley in his normative critiques of Blanche’s hysteria and tiaras, I could not help but identify with Blanche’s pedagogic body (she *is* an English teacher by trade)

and how many times that body is described in the stage directions as either “hunched” (18), or “shaking” (19), or “exhausted” (43). When her sister Stella asks her if she “wants” Mitch (her would-be suitor and Stanley’s best friend), the first words to slip from Blanche’s lips are “I want to rest!” (81). Hers is clearly a depressed body. Her long baths, her furtive drinking, her poetic posturings are ways of managing the pain and staying interested in a world that doesn’t seem all that interested in her. While Stanley’s blunt style signals his paranoid desire to get to the bottom of things, Blanche’s overwrought performance is a depressive attempt to capture and maintain the interest of others, her desperate need to “turn the trick” (79). I soon came to realize that my students could dismiss Blanche’s psychic distress only by dismissing her distressed body as well—a body marked as unfit, off-limits, and queer.

Most criticism on the play inadvertently recapitulates this dismissal, juxtaposing Blanche’s ethereal body against Stanley’s “bestial” one. Blanche remains a disembodied figure, relegated to an ephemeral world of paper moons and lanterns, while Stanley’s imposing figure, so effectively packaged and sold in the iconic physique of Marlon Brando, seems to be the only body that matters. His is a normative posture—his appeals to order and the Napoleonic Code ultimately legitimated. *His* cries of distress—those bellows of “STELL-LAHHHHH” (60) heard round the world—are always answered. The posture of Stanley and every other character in the play—a posture disturbingly consistent with our present rape culture—is bent on disavowing and dismissing the existence of the depressive’s suffering body, even, or especially, when that body is violated. Blanche’s cries of distress must be silenced, either through “hard knocks [her] vanity’s been given” (81) or by “blows” she takes, both metaphorically and viscerally, “in [her] face and [her] body” (26). The scene of her rape leaves her a limp, exhausted, “inert” (130). Her hypotonia is, to borrow from Tomkins, “a consequence of that reduction in amplification which

is characteristic of intense and enduring shame... accompanied by equally intense and enduring distress” (2:355)—in short, severe depression.

Shamed, beaten, and finally gaslighted by her brother-in-law and estranged sister into believing that her “brutal desire”—and not the brutality of others—is what drove her to this tragic end, the seemingly melodramatic Blanche is relegated to the status of drama queen. *Drama queen*: the epithet traditionally refers to a histrionic gay man or woman who creates turmoil for him- or herself, who overreacts, whose distress seems self-imposed, artificial, performed. *Stop being a crybaby* might be its analogue in the world of straight fathers. Or, in the case of Chekhov’s father, *Stop being lazy*. But whereas Blanche’s depressive posture ends with her institutionalization, Chekhov never fully succumbs to psychosis, despite the many depressive episodes throughout his life. The different trajectories of these two depressive personalities cast into relief the subtle but profound differences between depression and the depressive posture.

Regardless of their differences, both depression and the depressive posture involve a binding of distress and shame. Yet, shame and distress, like the other six affects, are immediate responses to stimulation dense enough to enter the central assembly, or consciousness. Shame or distress could flood our consciousness one moment and be gone the next. So how does shame and distress—which could be experienced as no more than fleeting phenomena, those “temporary” (2:392) or “minor depressions” (3:822) caused by diurnal variations of energy—get amplified and magnified into the temporal experience known as depression or that posture peculiar to the depressive? One place to look for answers is Tomkins’s concept of affect theories.

A child may cry in distress and neither know why she is crying nor what she might do to stop it. “Exhaustion depression,” thus, might occur when feelings of abjection become divorced

from feedback—one is conscious of feeling helpless without knowing why or what one might do to escape it. On the other hand, depression might be not an absence of feedback, but rather too much of it. Tomkins foregrounds such feedback loops in his elaboration of affect theory. As an individual experiences different affects triggered by different stimuli, “information about affects may become organized into what we call theories, in much the same way that theories are constructed to account for uniformities in science or in cognition in general. An affect theory is a simplified and powerful summary of a larger set of experiences” (2:411). These emerging affect theories are guided by a set of four images or goals, what Tomkins calls “General Images” (1:181). Given the rewarding nature of positive affect, such as interest and excitement, and the punishing nature of such negative affects as distress and shame, Tomkins believed that most, if not all, humans inevitably develop four General Images or goals: 1) the maximization of positive affect, 2) the minimization of negative affect, 3) the minimization of affect inhibition, and 4) the power to achieve all three. These four goals are neither mutually exclusive nor co-extensive with one another. Shame theory, for example, stitches together a disparate set of experiences in which shame is the dominant affect. It generates both warning systems and avoidance strategies for handling similar situations in the future, thus answering most forcefully to the second General Image: namely, that negative affects such as distress and shame should be minimized. At the same time, the positive affect of interest-excitement may be maximized each time possible. When humiliation is encountered but averted, the thrill of the narrow escape. Or, conversely, one might seek out multiple opportunities to experience and express humiliation, thus realizing the third goal that the expression of one’s affect not be repressed. Finally, a given shame theory might seek to accomplish all of the above.



We might think of the depressive posture as the formation of particular shame theory—an affective theory that extends in time the distress-shame bind that arises from a strong desire to mimic the other, and a history of successes and/or failures to do so. Such a shame theory can either be casual and “weak” or “strong” and monopolistic. By weak, Tomkins means that a given shame theory is successful in anticipating, warding off, or minimizing the affect of shame. In such a case, shame may not be experienced at all. However, if such a theory fails to consistently minimize or ward off shame, it may grow stronger, interpreting more and more situations as holding the possibility of humiliation. To clarify the difference between weak and strong theory, Tomkins offers the analogy of crossing the street. Most people when pausing on the curb before crossing the street do not experience anxiety. It is precisely because affect theory works so efficaciously that it remains weak: “the individual’s affect theory enables him to act as if he were afraid or ashamed, so that he need not in fact become afraid or ashamed” (2:459). Thus, in the case of a weak shame theory:

The individual’s daily encounters with the few possibilities of shame are handled so silently and effectively that he rarely knows that he was even in potential danger. He stands at the curb of shame, confident that he knows when to commit himself to the risks of passage, while at the same time he enjoys the passing traffic which is colorful and exciting even though it could be dangerous. (2:460)

Perhaps, this is one way in which actual theater serves as a kind of weak shame theory for those who practice it. A performer acts *as if* he or she is depressed without actually experiencing depression, with the added bonus of achieving that third General Image of minimizing affect

inhibition.<sup>27</sup> Another helpful analogy might be the dropping of one's head in exhaustion. The turning inward of the self to recuperate might look as if one were shamed, but to the extent to which such an action is effective in allowing a person to regenerate, the pernicious bind of distress and shame, i.e., the beginnings of depression, may, in fact, be avoided.

Trouble arises, however, when an affect theory fails to ward off such negative affect. If the pause at the curb fails to keep feelings of anxiety at bay, then “the individual might be forced, first, to avoid all busy streets and then to go out only late at night when traffic was light; finally, he would remain inside, and if his house were to be hit by a car, he would have to seek refuge in a deeper shelter” (2:461). Similarly, if standing on the curb of shame, an individual finds the passing traffic is no longer colorful but in fact dangerous, threatening humiliation around every corner that can neither be avoided nor counteracted, then that individual's shame theory might become so strong that it blots out the entire conceptual landscape.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, the less effective a theory is in containing these accidents of humiliation, the stronger it becomes. Everything may become a source of shame. And even if one seeks “deeper refuge” by curling up in one's bed, “isolated memories of shame from different sources may be retrieved in sufficient density to both sustain shame, to amplify and deepen it and to organize it into a more unified

---

<sup>27</sup> As Tomkins puts it, “[f]or the depressive, the theater provides the opportunity of expressing and experiencing vicariously the state of depression in all its despair; its bittersweet longing; its soul-searching penetration; its half-plaintive and half-angry regrets for sin, for failure, and for the loss of innocence; its demands for rescue; and its imperious insistence on love and respect” (3:834).

<sup>28</sup> Tomkins speaks of this blotting out in terms of reaching a critical density of humiliation: “in such a case the individual may suddenly encounter humiliation much more often than he can readily assimilate. These in turn act as names for long-forgotten similar experiences which now increase the density of the total set of such experience until critical density is reached which is either self-igniting or requires only the slightest discouragement to accelerate into monopolistic humiliation theory” (2:503).

theory” (2:510). Thus, depression in Tomkins’ view becomes both “a sign of the formation of a more powerful shame theory, and a prime condition for... producing a monopolistic [one]” (2:511).

As an example of a weak humiliation theory becoming stronger and more monopolistic, and thus resulting in a deepening depression, Tomkins presents the hypothetical case of “one type of manic-depressive personality” (2:470)—a personality that hits very close to home. As a child, the individual in question—let’s call him Silvan—receives a fair amount of love and respect from his parents who encourage him in all his pursuits and achievements, with one notable exception. Whenever this child “feels beaten, discouraged and wants to give up” (2:471), his parents hold him in contempt. Faced with his parents’ punitive posture, the child loses face and hangs his head in shame, for which he is further punished with more contempt. To counteract these negative affects, he develops, throughout childhood and adolescence, a robust schedule of achievements and activities, evoking interest and enjoyment from his parents. His few encounters with defeat and discouragement only deepen his resolve to perform more, and better. In essence, the child has assumed a depressive posture, but because of the limited number and duration of these distress-shame experiences, his humiliation theory remains relatively weak, intruding on his personality only occasionally. The depressive child enters adulthood with “a firm sense of his own identity as the master of his own destiny, as one capable of achieving what he wants, of eliciting respect from others for his efforts and of generally enjoying his interpersonal relationships” (2:471). As an adult, however, this individual suffers “a long siege of enforced passivity through the loss of his savings and business through an economic depression” (2:471) and thus “confronted with deep and enduring distress for which he has learned only one reaction, that of shame and humiliation” (2:331). The individual falls

victim to a pernicious and ever-tightening distress-shame bind. His old strategies for counteracting shame and contempt no longer work:

the once unconquerable one is now defeated by passivity, and the shame and self-contempt which feed on each other, recruiting cognitive elaboration so that the self learns more and more to hold itself in utter contempt with a strong humiliation theory. Such a one can ultimately become deeply depressed, or may become manic in a desperate assertion of the worth of the self. (2:471)

Although it takes a bit of piecing together various disconnected and repetitive passages (Tomkins returns to this hypothetical case in different guises again and again throughout the second volume), the relationship between depression and the depressive posture seems fairly straightforward. Like an actor on stage, the individual who assumes a depressive posture seeks to mimic and be mimicked by those around him, by those he loves. When that “mirroring regard” disappears—either through indifference, hostility or death of the other—the depressive experiences a combination of distress and shame. Should the depressive attempt to re-commune with the loved other and fail in that attempt, the depressive may not only experience further distress and shame, but also fatigue as he over-performs to recapture the attention of the other, until he pushes against the very limits of his affective, cognitive, and motor capacities. Such “great reduction of energy” can lead to even denser shame and distress, and even greater physical-psychic exhaustion. With each failure to rectify the situation, the depressive develops a stronger and stronger theory of humiliation, until finally depression sets in.

The only problem with this line of thinking, though, is that depression can come to sound very much like paranoia. Tomkins even admits that while many neuroses and psychoses may be marked by a monopolistic, snowball theory of humiliation, “it is particularly common among

those bearing the diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia” (2:475). The hyper-vigilance, over-interpretation and over-avoidance strategies ascribed to a monopolistic humiliation theory does seem more akin to the paranoid posture than the depressive one. Indeed, almost all of Tomkins’ examples of strong humiliation theory, save the aforementioned manic-depressive case study, are in fact paranoid. We learn of the monopolistic humiliation theories of such legendary paranoids as Dostoevsky, Freud, Nietzsche, Strindberg, Shaw, O’Casey, and O’Neill—Tomkins’s theatrical bent once again making an appearance with this (Irish) playwright-heavy cast of characters. We are also schooled in the harrowing cycles of humiliation, distress, terror, contempt, self-contempt, anger and violence experienced by exploiters and the exploited alike, particularly in relation to Jewish people in Nazi-era Germany and African Americans in the American South of the mid-twentieth century. Tomkins focuses so much on paranoia with regards to humiliation theory that he feels compelled toward the end of the second volume to clarify: “[n]ot all of these patterns of humiliation and other affects constitute the paranoid posture” (2:544).

Before the case study of the hypothetical manic-depressive, Tomkins gives an almost identical account of a “patient” who experiences not distress and *shame*, but distress and *fear*, at the hands of the parent. As with the manic-depressive, the case study sounds highly autobiographical, Tomkins tipping his hand when he casually remarks that he “knew the son from earliest childhood” and “it was only accidentally that [he] heard from [the] parents the account of [the patient’s] socialization” (2:337). (Pray tell, how *exactly* does a doctor “*accidentally*” hear from a parent the details of his patient’s early upbringing?) The father, a scientist who believed the cry of distress to be an irrational response in both children and adults, took it upon himself to hit his two-week old son every time the infant cried. This punitive

socialization was reinforced by a home life where illness, passivity, and distress were all met with hostility and indifference. Tomkins's patient quickly learned to suppress his distress, and instead find enjoyment and excitement in a number of pursuits, thereby learning and exhibiting a cheerful posture toward the world. However, this sunny disposition radically changed when, as an adult, the patient "first confronted sustained suffering in the economic depression of the 1930s, which he could not avoid or reduce" (2:337). Like the hypothetical manic-depressive, this patient's repeated attempts to avoid and counteract his suffering fail, plunging him into vicious cycles of failed countermeasures and further self-contempt. He "apologiz[es] continually for his own existence" and "beat[s] and sham[es] himself for the next twenty years" (2:337). We might imagine this patient reciting Blanche's self-recriminations and profuse apologies: "I won't stay long! I won't, I promise I won't, I promise, I'll go! Go soon! I will really!" (80). Fortunately, unlike the destitute Blanche, this patient's suffering, Tomkins assures us, has diminished "in recent years" as his economic status has improved. And yet, had this patient's distress-fear bind not been loosened by an improving economy but rather snowballed into a monopolistic humiliation theory, Tomkins suggests that the result would have been paranoid schizophrenia—another Blanche mistaking his doctor for a kind stranger. But how can depression be one of "[t]he major mechanisms by which monopolistic humiliation may be initiated and maintained" (2:500) at the same time that a monopolistic humiliation theory seems most concomitant with the development of paranoid schizophrenia—in presumably the same person?

In those first two volumes of *AIC*, Tomkins expends a great deal of rhetorical energy trying to keep depression and paranoia conceptually apart. The manic-depressive is bound by

distress and shame; distress and fear bind the paranoid-schizophrenic. The depressive is shamed and *loved*; the paranoid is shamed and *terrorized*:

For the depressive there is always a way back from the despair of shame to communion with the loving parent who ultimately feels as distressed as does his child at the breach in their relationship. For the paranoid there is no way back. Like the member of a truly persecuted minority group, his shame is imposed with a reign of terror. (1:240)

This critical difference between humiliation softened by love and humiliation hardened by terror lead to vastly different postures when interacting with others. The paranoid fears attracting the eyes of others; the depressive dreads those same eyes turning away. If the depressive falls ill due to chronic performance, the paranoid suffers from acute stage fright:

the paranoid knows that if he were to go on stage he would invite both humiliation and the loss of his life. His audience would be both hostile and contemptuous. It is as though he were the lone survivor of a minority group which been exterminated for daring to protest their inferior status and to oppose the majority. (1:240)

The depressive and paranoid postures may be held together by a common affect—that of shame-humiliation—but Tomkins is clear: “humiliation and love, and humiliation and hate or fear, are fundamentally different syndromes which produce disorders as distinct as depression and paranoia” (2:447).<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> “Both depressives and paranoids have been shamed by their parents, but depressives have been loved as well as shamed, whereas paranoids have not been loved but have been terrorized as well as humiliated... If he resists the inferior status, he does so at a threat to his life. Shame is reinforced by terror. In contrast to the paranoid, when the depressive talks and exhibits himself he enjoys this deeply since he has had a long history of being looked at, listened to and generally appreciated. This enjoyment has been heightened by intermittent rejection from these same adoring parents, who caused the child deep shame. In the delight in holding the breathless attention of the adoring parents then, there is both relief from shame and some dread lest they

But humiliation is a slippery term in Tomkins. It sits at one pole of the paired affect shame-humiliation. At the same time, it serves as a general term for both shame-humiliation *and* disgust-contempt. Under this larger umbrella are huddled together different constellations of affects that make up either depression (i.e., shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, and *distress-anguish*) or paranoia schizophrenia (i.e., shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, and *fear-terror*). It can be confusing to ascertain at any given moment in Tomkins's text whether he means a humiliation that distresses or a humiliation that terrorizes. There is also the added ambiguity caused by the complete lack of definition with regards to terms *love* and *hate*—an odd oversight for a text dedicated to cataloguing and classifying the subtleties of affective life. The syntactically equivocal phrase “humiliation and hate or fear” may mean that hate and fear are two different affects, or that they are synonymous ones, in which case *love* would find its homological partner in *distress*. And perhaps, that is what love is—a constant state of shared distress. But this ambiguity and confusion becomes more pronounced when Tomkins compares the depressive posture of Chekhov with the paranoid posture of another nineteenth century Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky. Both writers were beaten by their fathers. But while Chekhov responds with shame and anguish, seeking to repair the ruptured relationship with the abusive but beloved parent, Dostoevsky responds with a mixture of shame, anger, fear and contempt. Fear, however, seems minimal in Dostoevsky's case. Rather, it is the preponderance of contempt and anger that give him the paranoid posture of “a defiant, sullen, brooding mouse” (3:547). In describing Dostoevsky's paranoid posture, Tomkins parses out the subtle shades of difference between the depressive posture, the paranoid posture and paranoid schizophrenic:

---

turn away....When dread exceeds enjoyment their speaking becomes compulsive” (1:240). No doubt, Blanche's “chattiness” stems from such depressive dread.



In contrast to the depressive posture, there is not so much love that contempt is suppressed. In contrast to the paranoid schizophrenic, there is not so much fear that anger is completely suppressed. (2:546)

But as the affect of fear drops out of the paranoid equation, whither goes Tomkins's firm opposition between paranoia and depression?

In typical Tomkins fashion, we are invited to speak not of paranoia in the singular, but of a plurality of paranoias. Variants of the paranoid posture seem to exist on a continuum of shame and contempt, depending upon relative presence and absence of fear and love, the limit case being when "[e]xcessive humiliation or contempt alone" exist, but "without terror and without balancing positive affect" (2:445). Such a limit case remains just "this side of the paranoid posture" (2:445), while paranoid schizophrenia lies on the other. Tomkins leaves unanswered whether or not paranoid schizophrenia represents "a special case of the paranoid posture" (544) or a completely different syndrome. He also leaves open the possibility that "there may be two variants of the paranoid syndrome—one based upon oppression, unrelieved by love, and one based upon the fantasy of betrayal, with or without auxiliary reinforcement from a threatening father" (583). In other words, what happens in the nursery may be very different than what happens on the street. And yet, Tomkins stresses the possible continuum between paranoia-schizophrenia and the paranoid posture as well as between a paranoid posture caused by oppression and one brought on by betrayal. Strindberg's paranoia may differ radically from Freud's (Strindberg would ultimately succumb to paranoid delusions), but "had Strindberg been blessed with less actual censure, his paranoid posture might have been combined with more happiness than he ever enjoyed, and the contrast between his life and that of Freud might be been markedly attenuated" (2:582). At the same time, Freud's betrayal at the hands of the mother

may play an important role in the development of his paranoid posture, but no less important is the anti-Semitism he faced on a daily basis. In Freud's case, the nursery and the street can make for interesting bedfellows. With Freud, as with Dostoevsky, we see how "the oppressed have always responded, with anger, with terror, with humiliation, with contempt for the self and for the oppressor, and with distress and misery—in short, with one or the other of the variants of the paranoid posture" (2: 553). Like the twenty-four variations of mo that "[define] themselves and each other, clustering closely, and differing by fine, gossamer veils of sensation" (Kuriyama 94), paranoid postures in Tomkins differ by fine shades of affect.

What knits all these variations of paranoia together, regardless of the relative terror and anger involved, is an "unrelenting posture against the oppressor who humiliates" (2:544). "Unrelenting opposition" marks the beginning and the end of the paranoid continuum, both "constituting the paranoid posture" (2:544) and "defin[ing] the final phase of [it]" (2:543). The over-interpretative strategies of a monopolistic humiliation theory may eventually lead to either "a mushrooming chain reaction of nuclear magnitude" or "complete withdrawal, mutism, and complete immobility" (2:530). But before the world ends with a bang or a whimper, the paranoid posture is most defined by "unrelenting warfare in which the individual generates and tests every conceivable strategy to avoid and escape total defeat at the hand of the humiliating bad object" (2:530). Tomkins's chapter on monopolistic humiliation theory ends with this "unrelenting" posture. The suggestion is that should either the oppressor or the oppressed—the betrayer or the betrayed—relent, the paranoid posture would dissipate. Presumably, what emerges in its wake is the depressive posture. Among the patterns of humiliation he enumerates at the end of this chapter, the depressive posture is the only one in which the oppressor does relent. With the depressive posture, the child who is humiliated is also loved, and the

humiliating but otherwise loving parent ceases to humiliate “if the child will atone or make restitution” (2:544). Tomkins never says as much, but the depressive posture seems to be the result of a weak humiliation theory, one less monopolistic than the unrelenting counter-offensives of the paranoid posture. Unfortunately, this difference between the paranoid and the depressive—the former unrelenting in all its different postures, the latter not so much—does not explain away the disconcerting confusion between depression and paranoia. Earlier, I inferred from Tomkins’s case study of the manic-depressive that depression results from the development of a stronger and stronger humiliation theory within the depressive posture. But here, the movement from a weak to a monopolistic humiliation theory marks the very boundary between the depressive and paranoid postures, firmly placing depression both phenomenologically and conceptually within the purview of the paranoid.

One could argue that this confusion can be traced back to that initial ambiguity housed within humiliation. Recall Tomkins’s firm opposition between “humiliation and love” and “humiliation and hate.” Would it not have been more precise for Tomkins to oppose *shame-humiliation* and love with *contempt-disgust* and hate. After all, “shame-humiliation is the negative affect linked with love and identification,” according to Tomkins, while “contempt-disgust [is] the negative affect linked with individuation and hate” (2:362). While both affects suggest a disruption in interest and enjoyment, shame-humiliation signals a temporary rupture in an otherwise loving relationship, while contempt-disgust marks a permanent break, a spitting out of the once loved, but now reviled object. In that regard, a strong shame-humiliation theory (“To see an adult cry is pathetic”) might feel very different than a strong contempt-disgust theory (“To see an adult cry is disgusting”). Depression and the depressive posture would lie on the side of shame; paranoia and the paranoid posture firmly on the side of contempt-disgust. And yet, that

opposition proves tenuous, since “[d]espite the importance of the distinction between contempt and shame, it not always or necessarily so absolute a distinction”:

When shame proves too painful to be tolerated—as, for example, when the love object heightens the gulf between himself and the one he shames or the shamed one despairs of ever achieving communion again, as, for example, in the jealousy provoked by the birth of a sibling—then the shamed one may defend himself against his longing by renouncing the love object and expressing contempt for the love object and expressing contempt for the person he cannot have, and becoming in fantasy his own mother or his own father.

(2:363)

Not only can shame slide so easily into contempt, but “oral disgust, that is, attraction and then disenchantment” is not part and parcel of the paranoid posture as one would think, but rather “a prominent feature of the depressive posture” (2:416). Even the depressive Blanche can’t help but level at her young lover the projectile, “I saw! I know! You disgust me” (96). So much for the critical difference between shame and contempt.

In Volume Two, all roads lead to paranoia. The paranoid posture mushrooms into multiple variants whose propulsive kick drives the narrative of Tomkins’s humiliation theory. For all its poignant drama, the depressive posture remains a weak and underdeveloped theory, subsumed by its much stronger and more potent paranoid sister. The two thinly disguised autobiographical case studies that Tomkins presents—one depressive, the other paranoid—more than beg the question: what *is* the difference between depression and paranoia? The question is not just of medical import. In my introduction, I discussed at length the alacrity with which the reparative and the paranoid collapse into one another—that unproductive confusion whereof Love speaks. Sometimes, I wonder if what goes by the name of *melancholia* in critical discourse

is not just paranoia in disguise. Reading both Kristeva's biographical study on Melanie Klein and Sánchez-Pardo's *Cultures of the Death Drive*, I came away with the distinct, nagging, and mind-numbing impression that Klein's depressive position—that *melancholia in statu nascendi*—was none other than paranoia incarnate. But if that is the case, if the depressive offers no real alternative to the paranoid (was Sartre was right? Is there no escape?)—from whence does change, political or personal, come? Like Tomkins, I feel a severe case of “reading block” settling in.

It will take another twenty-five years and hundreds of pages for Tomkins to fully develop his theories regarding the depressive. He does so by admitting he made a mistake. His mistake was in positing contempt-disgust as a primary and unitary affect. At the beginning of the third volume, Tomkins carefully parses out the temporal and spatial differences between shame and contempt:

Shame involves more tolerance for intimacy and closeness than does contempt-disgust.

Shame also involves a temporary distancing rather than the permanent distancing of contempt-disgust. (3:637)

Translated into the vernacular of *Sesame Street*, shame-humiliation is close up; contempt-disgust is far away. At the same time, though, Tomkins registers an analogous relationship between disgust and contempt. If disgust is far, then contempt is farther still. To limn these nuances, Tomkins introduces a ninth affect and in the process coins the neologism *dissmell*. If shame is an affect auxiliary set in motion once interest or enjoyment has been activated and then interrupted, disgust and *dissmell* are *drive* auxiliaries, activated upon encountering bad food, drink, or air. Both represent a permanent distancing from a noxious object. But while disgust represents a good relationship gone sour, *dissmell* never deemed the relationship good in the first

place, and therefore kept its distance. Tomkins pithily concludes with this analogy, “to be a taster was to being a smeller as the ashamed one was to both the smellers and the tasters” (3:638). Shame, disgust, and dissmell lie on an affective continuum, from the most intimate and temporary to the most distant and permanent. The introduction of dissmell as a separate affect allows Tomkins to draw more distinct boundaries between shame and contempt. In this new formulation, contempt becomes a secondary affect, “a mixture of dissmell and anger in which the individual either stands his ground or even moves closer to the offending other with hostile intent to offend, to denigrate, to besmirch” (3:631). With these new affective shades, Tomkins is able to paint a more nuanced picture of the depressive posture and its relation to the paranoid. The more shame and disgust involved, the more depressive. The more contempt—that sneering mix of anger and dissmell—the more paranoid.

In addition to this new and improved periodic table of affects, Tomkins builds a robust theory of depressiveness with the introduction of his “script theory.” With script theory, Tomkins revises and expands his earlier concepts of affect theory and ideo-affective postures as he grapples with the relationship between affect and cognition. Cognition plays a secondary role to affect by magnifying and extending in time affective responses through what Tomkins once called postures, but now calls “scripts.” In script formation, “very dense [cognitive] constructions [...] are maintained by, controlled by, and produce dense feeling” (Tomkins, “Inverse archaeology” 290).<sup>30</sup> Tomkins proposes that all humans operate according to a set of scripts they have developed. Scripts are the “set of ordering rules” (3:669) by which we predict, interpret and understand our interactions with the world and ourselves. They are extensions of

---

<sup>30</sup> They are “compressed constructions which basically are minitheories that each of us generate in order to deal with the regularities and the changes in the world as we live it” (Tomkins, “Inverse Archaeology” 289).

the four General Images from Volumes I and II, those “centrally-generated blueprints which control the feedback mechanism” (*AIC* 1:180). Although the use of the term *script* sounds dramaturgical, Tomkins insists that a dramatic script, while an example of a particular kind of script, does not fully exhaust his meaning. He uses “script” in much the same way Judith Butler uses the term “performativity”—to map a queer space between the extroversion of the actor in theater and the introversion of the sign in deconstructive theory.<sup>31</sup> Like performativity, scripts do not necessarily denote conscious role-playing or deceit, though such possibilities are not altogether ruled out. Rather, in their broadest meaning, scripts mark a way of being.

Scripts allow us to talk about how our personal dramas intersect with larger political ones. The relation between scripts and ideology resembles that queer asymmetrical mimicry in which two things are both like and unlike at the same time. Our personal ideo-affective postures, or scripts, and the political environments in which they emerge may not be the same, but they must have some correlation if both the individual and society are to function. A democratic society, for instance, is most compatible with individual and political scripts that privilege shame and distress over contempt and fear:

[i]n a democratic society, contempt will often be replaced by empathic shame, in which the critic hangs his head in shame at what the other has done; or by distress, in which the critic expresses his suffering at what the other has done; or by anger, in which the critic seeks redress for the wrongs committed by the other. (3:637)

Shame, distress, anger—these are the affects of Chekhov’s depressive posture. The depressive responds to a beating with the shaming and ashamed, “How could you?” (2:546). By contrast, normative, hierarchical societies harness the power of contempt, “the mark of the oppressor”

---

<sup>31</sup> For a fuller discussion of the competing, often contradictory, meanings held in tension by the term *performativity*, see Sedgwick and Sullivan 1-4.

(3:637). Contempt teaches self-contempt. That is why political activists from Gandhi to King speak of not giving into contempt. Otherwise, we bear the oppressor's brand. Shame, on the other hand, teaches empathic shame. ACT UP famously tapped into this kind of depressive politics of shame, distress, and anger by taking to the streets and chanting *Shame! Shame!* They demanded that people with AIDS be recognized as actual people, not lesser beings condemned to die. Like the aggrieved Chekhov, ACT UP had a habit of making scenes.

Indeed, the basic unit of any script is "the scene" (3:668). And to make a scene, according to Tomkins, all you need is at least one affect and one object of that affect. The object may be a person, a thing, a memory, or another affect. The plot of a life is no more than a series of affectively charged scenes in which we relate to the world around and inside of us. As an example of an early scene in many of our lives, Tomkins speaks of the affect of enjoyment experienced while feeding at the breast or bottle. This rewarding scene, however, can give way to the punishing scene of distress and anger when the breast or bottle is withheld. The child experiences both these affectively dense scenes as transient, since the early infant has only a limited capacity to link the two scenes. The nursing child is content, but doesn't know how to maintain or duplicate the happy scene. The hungry child cries, but neither knows why nor how to stop it. In time, however, the infant begins to connect and organize these positive and negative scenes into "scripts":

Like Charlie Chaplin, [the child] will try to write, direct, produce, criticize, and promote the scenes in which he casts himself as hero. (3:665)

Scripts are the theories by which we interpret, evaluate, predict, produce and control scenes of both positive and negative affect. Like theories in science, scripts select some scenes, while excluding others; they are sometimes accurate, sometimes not; and they depend on new,



incoming information, including information from other scripts, in order to be complete. These characteristics make scripts highly contingent, relational, and open to revision. Like the chunky affordances of Sedgwick's writing, "scripts have the property of modularity. They are variously combinable, recombable, and decomposable" (3:670). We can have many scripts in play—some competing, some colluding, for entry into our central assembly, that automatic of consciousness—as we attempt to maximize those scenes that give us pleasure and minimize those scenes that cause us pain.

Of the many different scripts one can have over the course of a life—i.e., affluent scripts, addictive scripts, anger scripts, damage-repair scripts—the one most pertinent to my discussion of depression is the depressive script. The depressive scene is one in which the child is either rewarded with love and respect for correctly mimicking and identifying with the parent or reproved with shame and distress for failing to do so. An individual with a depressive script attempts to commune with and hold the attention of a loved object through hard work and achievement: "the individual alternates between heaven and hell, between paradise lost and paradise regained, by atonement through good works" (3:813). The scene of Judy Garland "working her hardest" to please her audience and her children, thereby winning their love and respect, is one example Tomkins uses to demonstrate the depressive script. Another is the classroom. Following right on the ruby-slippered heels of Judy Garland, Tomkins discusses the depressive script in educators. Although he concedes that different people find themselves called to teaching for different reasons, Tomkins insists that "the call to the depressive" (3:827) is particularly strong. The classroom provides the depressive a stage upon which students sometimes act as substitute parents and other times act as substitute children thereby

“permit[ting] the depressive parent-child reproof-reward theme to be repeated again and again with endless variations”:

The teacher not only uses the students as substitute parents who are to be impressed, to be excited by their common interest and to thereby achieve intimacy, but their boredom, their censure, and their turning away constitute an enduring threat and challenge which convert the classroom into a theater in which the depressive teacher, because he can never be sure of his audience, is put on his mettle to convert the audience to him and to his ways. He oscillates between good and bad performances in which he and his students are alternately transported and depressed. (3:827)

These scenes of depressive pedagogy where students and teacher are “alternately transported and depressed” resonated deeply with Sedgwick who often spoke of the uncanny surprises, unsettling role reversals and pedagogic near misses within her own classroom.<sup>32</sup> Like Garland, Sedgwick displayed a depressive ambivalence toward both “holding onto her children” (she wanted to envelope her dying student Gary Fisher in her protective folds) and “making them independent enough” (she fretted about those she would leave behind upon her own demise). At the same time, Sedgwick’s students often acted as substitute parents, or therapists. Transposing the scene of the classroom to the psychoanalytic couch, Sedgwick admitted, “sometimes I feel like my students’ analyst; other times, floundering all too visibly in my helplessness to evoke language from my seminar, I feel like a patient being held out on by 20 psychoanalysts at once” (“Teaching/Depression” 1). While such an analogy might hang the warning “Abandon all hope ye who enter here” over the depressive teacher’s door, Tomkins is quick to note that depressive scripts are found “among the great actors, the great educators, the great jurists, the great

---

<sup>32</sup> See Sedgwick, “Pedagogy” 162-187.

statesmen, the great writers” (3:823). Indeed, the depressive script among educators sounds less ominous than Tomkins’s earlier account of the depressive child being “lectured and reproved by a more loving but more ambitious God” (3:821). In Tomkins’s description, teacher and student take turns mimicking and instructing one another with the invitation: Try it my way. “In either event both teacher and student will feel drawn into intimacy through the shared adoration excellence” (3:828). While one could imagine teacher and student feeding into one another’s depression as each over-performed to keep the attention of the other, Tomkins’s scenario suggests not only that teacher and student shoulder the burden of maintaining positive affect, but that both succeed in doing so. Depressive scripts are inter-subjective in nature; they are built upon scenes of desired mutuality, mimicry and communion.

That is not to say that all depressive scripts have happy endings. Like the Austinian performative, the Tomkinsian script can be unhappy to the extent that it fails to achieve its aims. Tomkins highlights such infelicities by grouping scripts under one of two headings: nuclear or non-nuclear. The difference between nuclear and non-nuclear scripts is analogous to the earlier difference between strong and weak theories. Like weak theory, non-nuclear scripts run efficaciously in the background, with little or no thought. These scripts are happy in the sense that they get the job done. The previous example of safely crossing the street would be an example of a non-nuclear script at play. We cross the street, the script serves its function, and we move on. In contrast, nuclear scripts occupy large swaths of our affective and cognitive lives: “they are the scripts which must continue to grow in intensity of affect, in duration of affect, and in the interconnectedness of scenes... They matter more than anything else, and they never stop seizing the individual” (3:676). Here is where cognition comes in. For it is our cognition—those nonce theories of how the world works—that link together disparate scenes of

great affect density over time and space. Nuclear scripts bring together and attempt to undo the damage done in the “nuclear scene,” an affectively dense scene or set of scenes in which one’s relation to an object has, more often than not, gone from good to bad, or bad to worse.

According to Tomkins, “a nuclear scene occurs whenever there is a descent from heaven to hell, from magnified, dense positive affect to equally magnified, dense negative affect” (Tomkins, “Script theory” 380). In a nuclear depressive scene, the love and respect from an important other has been attenuated, the paradise of intimacy and communion lost. For the actor, it may be the hostile silence of an unresponsive audience. For the educator, it is may be the uncomfortable silence of classroom death. For the student, it is may be the actual death of the teacher. The nuclear depressive script attempts to reverse this nuclear scene through overachievement or performance. Unfortunately, such a script grows in density with each failure to turn that bad scene back into a good one. The more ineffective the nuclear script, the more it organizes and interprets an ever-expanding set of experiences, adding more and more seemingly unrelated scenes to its repertoire. And “because the change from a very good scene to a very bad scene is so momentous, all the cognitive powers are inevitably brought to bear on it” (3:810).

A strong shame theory attempts to minimize negative affect and to gauge how well it succeeds in achieving this General Image. The vicious cycle of heroic attempts, failure, followed by even more heroic attempts to achieve that aim, is what marks such a theory as strong. But the source of a nuclear script’s mind-numbing ineffectiveness is its double aims of minimizing negative affect and maximizing positive affect. The depressive is particularly susceptible to just such a failure, for “he is interested in maximizing the twin affects of excitement and enjoyment simultaneously in others and in himself and in minimizing the anguish and humiliation and the attenuation of all effort which occurs when the positive communion is

ruptured” (3:821). This mini-maximizing strategy potentially places the depressive forever “on stage”: “because a perennial audience cannot be guaranteed without excessive effort, [the depressive] is involved in a punishing ‘rat race,’ evoking rage from fatigue and the indifference and absence of a responsive or sufficiently responsive audience” (3:706). Garland’s own rat race—her pharmaceutical nightmare a flipside of that wonder drug in *Limitless*, her stage fright “the terror of evoking contempt rather than love and respect, and so being plunged into hopeless depression” (3:826)—is a piece with the nuclear script’s ineffectiveness at warding off those moments of contempt or indifference. It is just because one feels one has failed to capture the attention of one’s audience that one keeps performing. Such a vicious cycle can lead to the most depressing drudgery for both the teacher and the student: “it becomes possible for the individual to reduce the quest for excitement in knowledge to the most unexciting kind of drudgery, distress, and shame—drudgery to assure competence and shame lest it not be achieved” (1:183). Thus, the Oedipal one-upmanship of academia with its insistent demands for mastery and precocity takes its toll.

Nuclear scripts, as I mentioned, are modular in nature, endlessly combinable with other scripts, as when a nuclear celebratory script subtends a depressive one. Celebratory scripts are those scripts “addressing scenes of such very high affect density that it is believed and felt some affect and/or action *must be expressed or communicated*” (3:682, emphasis in the original). Like the expansive, voluminous first person of Whitman’s poetry, “it is the singing of the self to the self or to the other” (3:683). These are the scripts that celebrate the various scenes of a life, or lives, and as such create a sense of bonding either within groups through rituals of festivity and mourning or between individuals through a shared remembrance of things past. The celebratory script “represents the self as judge, as historian, as commentator, as playwright” (3:683). But

whereas the non-nuclear celebrations of, say, *Song of Myself*, celebrate a life, or many lives, punctuated by a veritable kaleidoscope of expressions, from joy to anger to excitement to distress to sadness, “nuclear celebrations are perennial, more often negative than positive, and proving the same thing over and over” (3:683). A nuclear celebration is not so much Whitman’s *Song of Myself* as it is Auden’s “Funeral Blues” in which the speaker laments his lover’s death, reinscribing with every line the nuclear scene: “He Is Dead” (78). (That is the nuclear scene that Blanche keeps playing in her head, the waltz that always ends with a gunshot). Even celebratory scenes of comfort and joy only serve to reinforce the nuclear depressive script by invidious comparison:

As an example, an unexpected visit may provide an extraordinary lift for an individual with a nuclear depressive script, but the same guest’s departure may nonetheless deepen a nuclear depression substantially. (3:683)

Like a strong shame theory, a nuclear depressive script brings more and more experiences into its gravitational force as good scenes of celebration repeatedly end in distress and shame. Here, depression is an ideo-affective feedback loop in which the conceptual landscape is leveled and where everything comes to mean the same thing. The very phrase “nuclear depression” conveys the sense of vastation. A person caught in such a feedback loop is not unlike the child who suffers but neither knows why nor how to stop it, for the depressed person “characteristically does not know why he feels as he does .... He is victimized by his own high-powered ability to synthesize ever-new repetitions of the same scene without knowing that he is doing so” (3:677). With its tendency to agglutinate an ever expanding set of scenes in its “increasingly viscous psychic glue” (3:692), a nuclear depressive script can leave one feeling confused, dumb, thick with redundancy.

A year after Sedgwick died, I curated an exhibit featuring book art that she and her students had created in one of her experimental writing classes. I didn't realize it at the time, until we were breaking everything down, that a fantasy had fueled my desire to mount the exhibit in the first place: the fantasy of her return. Or, rather, the fantasy I would feel and experience the world the same way I felt and experienced the world in her enfolding presence. How dense a pupil I was to take a year to realize she wasn't coming back. That the glamorous, numinous person *I* was when she was around wasn't coming back either. Sedgwick's warm light had fooled me. I was no star, just a dull rock, reflecting on her brilliance. Her light extinguished, I was left a cold moon. One by one, the sequins fell. Each attempt to master the densely packed corpus of Klein and Tomkins is an attempt to return to the warm light of Sedgwick's office. The nuclear scene: she is dead. The Orphean script: bring her back. But when cognition fails and my shame, distress, confusion and exhaustion threaten to swamp this project, the nuclear depressive script makes its impossible demands: an over-performance for a person who is no longer there.

So what are we to do with the depressive's tendency to over-perform, over-act, to be, in essence, a drama queen? Is there a way to attenuate the demand that communion and achievement be so insistently glued together? In his genealogy of the depressive, Tomkins offers "a fourth consequence of the gap between the wish to imitate and the ability to do so":

This is the delight in the discovery that there exist other creatures exactly like himself.

Here the wish to commune . . . can be enjoyed immediately and effortlessly. The excitement and the smile of recognition between two sociophilic youngsters has a quality *sui generis*. (1:246)

*Sui generis*. The excitement and smile of recognition of every queer kid or adult who realizes for the first time that he or she is not alone. Friendship is one place where depressives can have their

fill of love and attention without having to perform, as it were, for their supper. The performance required may simply be a recitation of the day's events as two depressive express their daily joys and sorrows. Such a performance might take place during a psychoanalytic session or an office hour. Both settings provide the depressive with a holding environment, a safe stage where attention and care are guaranteed; both can be effective means for changing one's nuclear depressive script into a non-nuclear one. Unlike its nuclear counterpart, a non-nuclear depressive script actually succeeds in repairing the rupture in communion between the depressive and his or her audience: "[t]hus, in a depressive reparative script, an individual who has failed to meet the expectations of a beloved other both knows how to do so and wishes to do so and often succeeds, thereby repairing the damage and lifting the depression" (3:679). One way psychoanalysis can intervene in a nuclear depression is by changing the depressive's affective strategies from the ineffective nuclear ones of mini-maximizing to the more effective non-nuclear ones of optimizing or "satisficing" (3:682).<sup>33</sup> Sedgwick relates such a needed intervention in *A Dialogue on Love*:

I come to a scenario: a kid is getting a bit hyper, showing off, talking loud, acting funny or something, who is—no, not told to cut it out—but instead, rebuked (deliberately or absent-mindedly) by being, after a certain point, ignored. So the kid is somehow stuck in this behavior without having anyone to let them know: that's enough, you can stop now.  
(69-70)

---

<sup>33</sup> Satisficing works according to "the principle of good enough matching" (3:658). With satisficing strategies, "the individual intends to enact scripts which are *high* in probability, relatively *low* in positive-affect payoff, and relatively *low* in negative-affect costs" (3:682). Such a strategy involves "a radical reduction in what one demands from life" (3:777). Optimizing strategies, on the other hand, "attempt to equalize probability, cost, and benefits at a *moderate* level so that one is *most likely* to optimize *both* positive-affect rewards and possible negative-affect costs" (3:682). Optimizing strategies prove more rewarding than satisficing ones because "one is willing to take greater risks for more rewards *and* more negative-affect costs" (3:682).



The kid stuck in histrionics because no one seems to be paying attention is not unlike the overachieving depressive stuck performing his nuclear depression. What is needed is a voice saying, *That will suffice*. Or, in Sedgwick's mother tongue, *That's enough. You can stop now*.

*Stop being such a drama queen*: that is one way of making a child or adult feel ashamed of their distress. In Tomkins, depression involves an entire drama around glances, returned or unrequited: "an exaggerated awareness of the humiliating consequences of not being looked at and of losing the attention of the other" (2:386). But drama queens don't need to be looked *at*, so much as they need to be looked *after*. Indeed, one might expect a better turn of events "when distress has not been linked with shame or fear and when it has been softened by linkage with sympathy and help" (2:347). In the film *All About My Mother*, Pedro Almodóvar's retelling of *Streetcar*, we get a glimpse into how different Blanche's story might have been had she been shown the kindness of strangers, instead of the strangeness of kin. Indeed, the teacher or analyst who heeds the cry for help with understanding and assistance rather than contempt or indifference might very well save the student or patient from unnecessary suffering.

At her memorial service, Sedgwick reappeared, if only as an apparition, like Bernadette's Queen of Heaven. Her image fleeted across a large movie screen. A home movie from her Durham days, she and her students perform in drag. She flawlessly lips syncs to "Mama" Cass Elliot. The otherwise shy Sedgwick now sings with mute abandon, "Dream a Little Dream of Me." I dream of going to her, my head hung in shame, my mouth mute, my frozen cry. She stops, takes me into her arms. *That's enough*, she tells me. *We can stop now*.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Depressives Take Things Personally

And when the crowd bent over him at the edge of the coffin, it saw a thin, pale, slightly green face, doubtless the very face of death, but so commonplace in its fixity that I wonder why Death, movie stars, touring virtuosi, queens in exile and banished kings have a body, face, and hands. Their fascination is owing to something other than a human charm, and, without betraying the enthusiasm of the peasant women trying to catch a glimpse of her at the door of the train, Sarah Bernhardt could have appeared in the form of a small box of safety matches.

Jean Genet, *Funeral Rites*

Sedgwick first appeared to me in the form of a book. Having driven into Washington, D.C. to peruse the shelves of Lambda Rising, a bookstore in Dupont Circle that catered to the LGBTQ community in the early nineties, I happened upon the handsome dust jacket—a man in Victorian drag, standing at the luminous threshold of an opened door. Like many before and after, I picked up *Epistemology of the Closet* and, thrusting it beneath my clothing in Whitmanesque fashion, carried it home with me. Soon I began carrying it around with me everywhere—letting its leaves rest upon my hip, obsessively dog-earring its pages, scribbling in its margins, searching the dictionary in vain as I parsed out its neologisms, fantasizing over a set of hieroglyphs that seemed addressed only to me. This book would go on to have quite a career

in my fantasy life, tumbling about in my head along with various other objects plucked from my college days:

wax-covered wine bottles  
from candles burned,  
misremembered lines  
canonical works and casual conversations,  
the slant of light in the November sky.

By the time I met Sedgwick in person nine years later, the book I chanced upon in Lambda Rising would seem no mere book, but a magic lantern, my constant rubbing of its leaves having conjured up Sedgwick herself in human form. Another nine years would pass before Sedgwick returned to being just a book. That book dumbly sat upon the shelf. And for a long time, I could not bring myself to read it, for now it was the book of the dead.

In Chapter One, I spoke about the affective and cognitive blockages surrounding the dense figure of the depressive within Klein's and Sedgwick's work and argued that Tomkins's outdated theory of the density of neural firing might help us account for such blockages. In Chapter Two, I teased out the complex career of the depressive within Tomkins's voluminous body of work, demonstrating how the depressive marks a particular way of being in the world. In this chapter, I want to bring Klein and Tomkins together in a more substantive and sustained way. As I mentioned earlier, it is not yet common practice to read these two thinkers alongside one another. With few exceptions, most scholars read Klein either through a Lacanian-inflected lens, thereby privileging gender difference and an irrevocable split between the symbolic and the real (see Bersani), or domesticate her more radical concepts by keeping her married to a heterosexist Oedipal metapsychology (see Kristeva). Tomkins, on the other hand, is barely read

at all. However, I want to return to Sedgwick's invitation to read Klein and Tomkins together. Translating Klein's paranoid and depressive positions into the depressive personalities and paranoid postures of Tomkins can help us wrest her ideas away from the many tendentious and pathologizing assumptions around gender and sexuality within traditional psychoanalysis. At the same time, the recursive, relational, and just plain strangeness of Klein's ideas can keep Tomkins's theory of personality from falling prey to normalizing, developmental narratives. Such a bifocal vision, I believe, will offer more affirmative, non-normativizing tools for thinking through each theorist's work, especially with regards to queer persons. Ultimately, the weaving together of the different strains of depressiveness within each writer's work will allow us to better understand the queer figure of the depressive and its special relation to pedagogy and writing.

Granted, mapping Tomkins onto Klein and vice versa is not without its problems. A depressive posture is not quite the same as a depressive position. The two theoretical structures center on two very different affects. Tomkins revolves around shame. Anxiety is the cynosure of Klein. And yet, both grapple with the same theoretical dilemma: how to adequately distinguish the paranoid from the depressive, whether posture or position. Klein posits a difference between paranoid and depressive anxieties. Tomkins works hard to separate shame out from contempt in his extended discussion of humiliation. The homology in Tomkins seems to be that shame is to the depressive what contempt is to the paranoid. Such a schema would line up nicely with Klein's alternating depressive and paranoid positions. Just as one might oscillate between paranoid and depressive anxieties in Klein, so too might one alternate between shame and contempt in Tomkins. And yet, Tomkins admits, "shame is often intimately related to and easily confused with contempt, particularly self-contempt; indeed, it sometimes not

possible to separate them” (2:351). Similarly, Klein acknowledges “how difficult it is to draw a sharp line between anxiety-content and feelings of the paranoiac and those of the depressive since they are so closely linked up with each other” (1:269). So how are we to proceed in navigating this morass of confounding anxieties and humiliations?

As the chapter’s epigraph—or is it an epitaph?—intimates, one place to begin such a problematic mapping is with how each theorist understands the complicated relationship between persons and their things. In *Funeral Rites*, from which the epigraph is taken, Jean Genet eulogizes his young lover, Jean D., who was shot and killed during the Liberation of Paris in 1944. Driven by his own streetcar named Desire, Genet cannot help but make scenes saturated with distress, shame, humiliation, terror, rage, and physical exhaustion. Everyone and everything in the novel is “exhausted.” He suffers from the same “abandonitis” as Barthes or Blanche, and he encounters the same stupidity in the funereal proceedings: from “the imbecility of the pine board” that houses Jean’s corpse to the “those ridiculous yellow flowers that are called marigolds” laid near the tree where the youth was gunned down. This refrain of stupidity is countered by “the black arm band, the strip of crape on a lapel, the black cockade on the brim of workman’s caps”—all those symbols that “previously seemed ridiculous” to him:

Suddenly, I understood their necessity:  
 they advise people to approach you with consideration,  
 to be tactful with you,  
 for you are the repository of a divinized memory.” (42-43)

It is during the funeral that Genet reaches into his pocket and finds a miniature corollary to the divine repository he carries within himself—a little, empty box of matches:

I was carrying his coffin in my pocket...It did not contain a particle of Jean's body but Jean in his entirety. His bones were the size of matches, of tiny pebbles imprisoned in penny whistles. (33)

Like the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century actress Sarah Bernhardt, Jean D. has "a right to manifest himself...in any way whatsoever" (26),<sup>34</sup> whether it be in the form "of two pieces of veneered black wood streaked with white lead, glued together, like a fantastic silent guitar lying in a bed of dry grass in a shelter made of boards" (79); "a branch of holly that [Genet] found, no doubt broken by a young monk on a flat, mossy stone" (178); "an old beggarwoman bent over her stick" (75); or "a garbage can overflowing with refuse, egg shells, rotting flowers, ashes, bones, spotted newspapers; nothing prevented [him] from seeing in the old woman and the garbage can the momentary and marvelous figure of Jean" (75). Sometimes, Genet's grief traces a conventional mythological trope. Like a nymph escaping the embrace of a rapacious god, Genet's love metamorphosizes into a plane tree: "The tree contains Jean's soul, which took refuge there when the shots from a machine gun riddled his elegant body" (45). Should Genet cruise another fellow in its presence or "think of anyone other than Jean" (45), "the plane tree [would] shake its plume of leaves angrily" (45). Or, Genet might find himself playing Daphne to Jean's Apollo: "my hands would grow covered with leaves and I would have to live with them, lace my shoes with them, hold my cigarette, open the door, scratch myself with them" (83). But if inanimate objects can personify the dramatic gestures of the living—a tree shaking its leaves in jealousy—so too can persons assume the dead muteness of things—the once animated limb of a lover turned to rubbish and ruin.

---

<sup>34</sup> "I would even have allowed him to return to us in any form" (79); "Doubtless Jean can have existed momentarily in any form whatever" (75).

When I write, “depressives take things personally,” I am not making the paranoiacally-structured claim that depressives are oversensitive. Such a claim has always contained within it an ugly, authorizing, authoritative twist. Contextualizing the treatment depressed patients faced at the hands of Freud and his contemporaries, Meira Likierman explains that “most psychoanalysts [at the time] noticed an over-sensitivity in such patients. They concluded that the depressive condition was rooted in a narcissistic pathology and that the individual who normally succumbed to it was likely

to have a vulnerable self-image,  
take offense  
easily and be prone to grievance.” (102)

I am a little wary of any theory of depression that hinges on the distance it can construct between subject and object, on the alienating effect of calling somebody else “oversensitive”—an accusatory attribution usually flung at an aggrieved person or group in order to minimize, dismiss or de-legitimize a legitimate grievance.<sup>35</sup> The attribution of being oversensitive reminds me how insistently early psychoanalysts interpreted their female patient’s claim of being raped as mere fantasy, as symptom of some internal repression, and not as an accurate reporting of external reality. One only has to read the appalling media coverage around the Steubenville rape case to know that this particularly oppressive understanding of fantasy still holds very real sway

---

<sup>35</sup> It is a strange sleight of hand by which such accusations discredit one’s assessment of a situation, especially if one is oppressed. “You are only saying that because you are gay, or black, or Jewish, or a woman, or insert any other oppressed category”: accusations like these are meant to undermine the credibility and objectivity of the accused while simultaneously disavowing the personal stakes involved for the privileged speaker whose “impersonal” authority is thereby established. As if one could ever *not* take it personally. I can pretend the political is not personal, but of course it is. Taking things personally is something all oppressed peoples must do in order to survive.

in our collective consciousness. No, what I mean by taking things personally is something more akin to Barbara Johnson's notion of persons and things, or, more relevant to my discussion here, to Tomkins's repertoire of affect-laden scenes or Klein's conception of unconscious phantasy.

Klein's theory of unconscious phantasy was perhaps her most radical departure from classical psychoanalysis. For Freud, fantasy (sometimes spelt with an *f*, sometimes with *ph* depending on the translation) was a defense mechanism set in motion when the child could not gratify his or her instinctual urges. Deprived of satisfaction in reality, the child regressed to a state of "primary narcissism," an autoerotic space hermetically sealed from the outside world. "Within psychoanalytic theory," Judith Butler explains, "fantasy is usually understood in terms of wish-fulfillment, where the wish and its fulfillment belong to the closed circuit of a polymorphous autoeroticism" ("Force of Fantasy" 110).<sup>36</sup> Devoid of objects, Freudian fantasy is the opposite of reality. Or rather, Freud placed autoerotic fantasy in a developmental narrative whose happy normative arc ended in a clearly heterosexual object-oriented dyad. In such a schema, queer persons often found themselves pathologized as either melancholic masturbators or paranoid narcissists. Klein, on the other hand, understood the relation between objects, persons, and fantasy quite differently.

Unlike Freud and ego psychology in general, Klein believed object relations begin at birth. We are never enclosed within ourselves; we are always in some relation to the world around us. In this sense, phantasy—insistently spelt by Kleinians with a *ph* instead of an *f* to differentiate it from the more ordinary sense of daydreaming and Freudian wish-fulfillment—is

---

<sup>36</sup> The most famous example of fantasy was the tic. For Freud, the tic was a substitute for masturbation fantasies in which there is no object. For Klein, the tic was a substitute *for* the object around which the masturbation phantasy took place.



not reality's other, but rather an accompaniment to our everyday mental and physical activity.<sup>37</sup>

No stimuli, no event, whether psychic or physiological, happens without a concomitant phantasy within the infant's or adult's mind. In phantasy, the child "takes into himself everything he perceives in the outside world" (1:291). Klein insisted that the newborn is innately capable of interpreting his bodily sensations as a relationship between a good or bad object, depending on whether that object gave pleasure or pain.

Whereas Freud viewed objects in a rather depersonalized way—as R.D. Hinshelwood notes, "the [Freudian] object had very little about its character that was personal. It was something upon which impulses of energy were discharged, recognized only for the purposes of the subject's pleasure-seeking, satisfaction and relief" (362)—Klein depicted objects in a highly personified and anthropomorphic manner. In her cosmology, objects are not abstract representations or static things upon which we impersonally discharge our energy. Rather, Kleinian objects have intentions, motives, personalities all their own. Klein's neonate experiences hunger not as an abstract, instinctual urge, as Freud would have it, or as an insatiable lack *à la* Lacan, but as a malicious, gnawing presence within his own stomach intent on causing pain. When the infant nurses, a good, soothing object is *felt* to have taken up residence within, giving the infant warmth and succor. This soothing object is the breast itself that the infant feels he has ingested: "[i]n phantasy

---

<sup>37</sup> Part of the problem is the term itself, which as Hinshelwood notes, "appears almost to be a contradiction" (33). After all, in what sense can a phantasized relationship with an object be said to be *unconscious*? Another point of confusion and contention, at least from a Freudian perspective, arises from Klein's tendency to conflate primary and secondary processes in her eschewal of developmental narratives. Hinshelwood tellingly places his discussion of this particular critique leveled at Klein under the heading "Confusion of Terms" (42), perhaps making a fitting allusion to "The Confusion of Tongues between the Adults and the Child," a seminal paper presented by Klein's first therapist and mentor, Sándor Ferenczi.

the child sucks the breast into himself,  
 chews it up and swallows it; thus he feels  
 that he has actually got it there, that he  
 possesses the mother's breast within" (1:291).

The nursing infant introjects, or more precisely "incorporates" in the most literal sense, the breast, equating it with the good object "in his tummy." The same infant when hungry, however, projects his frustration and aggression into the "bad" breast equating it with the gnawing or painful presence inside him.<sup>38</sup> Klein imagined the infant mind as "an animistic world in which everything feels and has intentions" (Hinshelwood 75). In contrast to classical psychoanalysis, the boundaries between the Kleinian subject and object are porous as anthropomorphized bits of the exterior world become lodged within. As Sedgwick observes, "human mental life [in Klein] becomes populated, not with ideas, representations, knowledges, urges and repressions, but with *things*, things with physical properties, including people and hacked-off bits of people" ("Melanie Klein," 629). Thus, phantasies represent emotional relationships between a subject and his or her objects that, though based on external ones, are experienced as concrete, animated, and internal to the self.

Klein's understanding of unconscious phantasy proved hard to swallow for many of her contemporaries. It was the main point of contention during the Controversial Discussion of 1943-44 during which Klein's provocative ideas were debated, her reputation questioned, and her very career placed on the line. While Klein and her ideas weathered the storm—the British Psychoanalytic Society skirted the issue with a Gentlemen's Agreement (Hinshelwood 44)—

---

<sup>38</sup> The big question in Freud is fairly straightforward, if not a little coarse: *how do I discharge myself upon the world—through sublimation or repression?* Responding to Freud, Klein describes a far more complex dilemma: *do I swallow the world, or spit it out?*

unconscious phantasy received relatively little attention from Kleinian and non-Kleinians alike in the decades that followed, especially compared with the more widely circulated concept of projective identification (Hinshelwood 81-82; Spillius et al. 12-13). As a result, Klein's elaboration of unconscious phantasy has remained, as Hinshelwood mildly puts it, "mysterious" (69). To this day, the strangeness of Klein's concept can easily provoke laughter or derision in "anyone unwilling to sail through sentences about the cannibalistic defense of the good partial breast against the devouring invasion of the feces" (Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein" 628). At the same time, those sympathetic to Klein's project have tended to gloss over or take for granted the concept, as if Susan Isaacs' explication and defense of it in 1943 was all that need be said on the subject (Spillius et al. 13). Klein's unconscious phantasy has suffered a fate similar to Tomkins' "density of neural firing"—an important but quaint relic in the evolution of her thought, one best left in the past.

The relative lack of elaboration and criticism around unconscious phantasy is what has allowed Klein's ideas to be co-opted into the service of normalizing discourses in psychoanalysis. While Klein posited that unconscious phantasy was the precursor and accompaniment of conscious thought, she never elaborated a full account of mental development. Klein was more interested in the contents of unconscious phantasy than in its conceptual framework. Nor, according to Lieberman, did she elaborate what "propels mental growth, or what was, in her terms, the drive towards integration" (6). Like unconscious phantasy, cognition and integration in Klein has remained "a mysterious process" (6), leaving later psychoanalysts to fill in the gaps. Unfortunately, the few who did take up unconscious phantasy and its relation to cognition in substantive ways did so in the service of heteronormativity. For instance, Wilfred Bion—an analysand of Klein and one of her most

influential successors—re-imagined unconscious phantasy as the “mating” of “pre-conception” with “realization” leading to “conception.” The heterosexism of his theories becomes apparent when he reasons this “mating” between preconception and realization is “based on the innate expectation of the relationship between mouth and nipple, and between penis and vagina” (Hinshelwood 458). Oddly enough, his heterosexism is reified by a movement away from the body, his idiosyncratic notations tending toward mathematical abstraction. Klein, however, understood unconscious phantasy as rooted in bodily sensation. One of my motivations for placing Klein in conversation with Tomkins has been to re-animate her concept of internal objects and breathe queer life into unconscious phantasy. Like Klein, Tomkins remained close to the body, his affect theory being physiologically based. Paradoxically, it is Tomkins’s insistence on the specificities of the body that allow him to get away from gender difference. Bodies in Tomkins are not differentiated by gender, but rather by changing densities of incoming stimulus.

The Kleinian internal object is, in Hinshelwood’s words, “firstly an *emotional object*” (75, italics in original). But what constitutes an object in Tomkins? Interestingly, both Klein and Tomkins use the nursery language of *good* and *bad* in designating objects. These designations mark differences of feeling, not of morals, as in *this feels good, that feels bad*. In both cases, it is affect that makes us aware we are even dealing with an object at all. For the Tomkinsian infant, it is affect that “makes similar the sight of the object, the reaching for it, the touch of it and the taste and texture of it in the mouth” (3:626). The child experiences the mother’s body, or some part of it, *as* an object because affect provides “the psychic glue” and “continuous *contour through time*” that “binds the seeable, reachable, touchable, testable object” (3:626). Thus, positive affects fuse together changing, heterogeneous encounters with the mother’s body to create the Kleinian experience of a good breast, while the negative affects bind

equally varied encounters with the mother to form a bad one. As with Klein, so with Tomkins, the object is first and foremost an emotional one.

While object relations in Tomkins are not nearly as anthropomorphic or as cannibalistic as in Klein, his object world does admit to a similar intersubjective personalization. The experience of a particular affect, according to Tomkins, can “produce a subjective restructuring of the object... Thus, if I think that someone acts like a cad then I may become angry at him, but if I am irritable today I may think him a cad though I usually think better of him” (1:74). Just as Klein’s infant projects his unpleasant sensation onto the bad breast, so too does Tomkins project his hypothetical irritability onto another person. In fact, Tomkins argues that because affects are analogic and mimetic, they are also contagious. A particular affect not only has the potential to trigger more of the same affect in oneself, but also in others. Therefore, “the distress cry of the infant is innately capable of evoking the distress of the caretaking mother” (3:693). This innate affective resonance, or “duplication” as Tomkins sometimes calls it, supports Klein’s insistence that such complex defense mechanisms as introjection and projection are operative from birth. According to both theorists, we are hard-wired to project our affects as much as we are programmed to introject the affects of others.

Tomkins further hints at a world of internal objects when he writes of the depressive’s vulnerability to shame “whenever he loses the love and respect of the other who has been internalized and who lives under his skin” (3:822). He even conceives of such internalization in terms of a homunculus:

Just as I may hang my head in shame because you say you are ashamed of me,  
 so I may hang my head in shame because the internalized you  
 [a miniaturized Jean with bones the size of pebbles]

hangs his head in shame at the rest of my self.

In this event, the self is experienced as two-headed,  
both hung in shame.

When next the other in fact hangs his head in shame  
and there is also an internalized head,  
the individual then finds himself at the intersect of three heads,  
all ashamed. (2:403)

Granted, the hanging of an internalized head indexes a much more sanguine mental functioning than what Klein envisioned in her harrowing depiction of our earliest phantasies of internal objects. But as a theoretical concept, Klein's internal object—often defined by its “emotional attributes” (Hinshelwood 75) and characterized as a “dynamic...mental process which generates a characteristic emotional state” (Likierman 110)—rhymes with Tomkins's definition of a scene. Just as Klein believed phantasies are rooted in bodily sensations and exist in the child's mind from birth, Tomkins hypothesized that “human beings are to some extent innately endowed with the possibility of organized if primitive scenes or happenings somewhat under their control, beginning as early as the neo-natal period” (3:663). Like phantasies, scenes are how the infant experiences and makes sense of the world. These scenes are “the basic element in life as it is lived” with “the simplest, most primitive scene” being constituted by “at least one affect and at least one object of that affect” (3:633). For both Klein and Tomkins, the most primitive scene or phantasy is the infant at the mother's breast.

Klein describes this primitive scene in terms of reverse birth where the container now becomes the contained: “[t]he good breast is taken in and becomes part of the ego, and the infant who was first inside the mother now has the mother inside himself” (3:179). Bion would expand

on this evocative imagery of holding and containing the mother within to develop a compelling theory of thinking, one widely embraced within Kleinian thought. According to Bion, the infant must make links in phantasy in order to think, and these links have as their biological base the innate expectation of heterosexual coupling: “The coupling of penis and vagina, or mouth and nipple, is taken by Bion (1962) as a prototype of the way mental objects are put together, one inside the other. Thus, putting experience into thoughts, thoughts into words, entails a repeated chain of linking processes modeled on physical intercourse between two bodily parts” (Spillius et al. 396). The anxieties and defenses of both the paranoid and depressive positions threaten these cognitive copulations. Only by working through the depressive position—a working through that involves allowing the Oedipal couple to come together in phantasy—can the infant develop. For Bion, not only can queer persons not think, their existence cannot even be thought. The very ability to think in Bion rests on heterosexual union.<sup>39</sup>

What is refreshing about Tomkins is the complete lack of such a primal scene. Tomkins believed that the infant is born with some innate scripts with which to magnify and respond to a variety of primitive scenes: “[t]he earliest (neonatal) observed script is the birth distress cry and flailing arms and limbs, in response either to the excessive stimulation of change of scene or to the slap on the behind” (“Script Theory” 148). The infant is capable not only of responding to scenes of distress with flailing arms and legs, but also of imagining and scripting better scenes. Take, for instance, the nursing infant who

imagines, via coassembly, a possible improvement in what is already a rewarding scene, attempts to do what may be necessary to bring it about, and so produces and connects a set of scenes which continue to reward him with food and its excitement and enjoyment,

---

<sup>39</sup> In this regard, what Bion calls “nameless dread” (Hinshelwood 353-354) comes to sound very much like Sedgwick’s definition of homosexual panic in *Between Men*.

and also with the excitement and enjoyment of remaking the world closer to the heart's desire.

In Tomkins, there is no primal scene, only a series of early affective scenes involving a number of different objects. In response to these various scenes, we are hardwired to develop scripts to achieve those four General Images whose emergence in humans Tomkins viewed as, if not inevitable, then highly probable. Given these four images (i.e., the maximizing of positive affects, the minimizing of negative ones, the minimizing of affect inhibition, and the maximizing of the power to do all of the above), all that is necessary in Tomkins is a periodic table of affects and a feedback system to set the whole mental apparatus in motion.

While the Tomkinsian infant can link scenes that are “immediately sequential” (3:667), it has “a limited capacity” in relating two scenes together if too much time has elapsed; the infant is “not capable during the first six months of life of connecting what has happened before with what happens much later, as the [time] interval increases” (3:666). This limitation resonates with the Kleinian split between good breast and bad breast during the first three to six months of life: “[f]rom this relation to part-objects...springs at this stage the phantastic and unrealistic nature of the child's relation to all objects; to parts of its own body, people and things around it, which are at first but dimly perceived” (Klein 1:285). Both Klein and Tomkins observed a gradually increasing ability to link together disparate scenes over time as the infant reaches six months. And yet, I am sure I am not the only one for whom the body, other people, and things are not fully perceived, for whom perception is a constantly evolving and changing experience. As Tomkins points out, “the differentiation of affect from what activates it, what accompanies it, and what follows from it...is at best a slowly learned skill. It is vulnerable always, under the



pressure of intense and enduring affect, to confusion and dedifferentiation” (3:626).<sup>40</sup> Sedgwick gestures toward this slowly learned affective acuity in *Touching Feeling* by retelling the story of Transcendentalist educator Elizabeth Palmer Peabody who “one day walked right smack into a tree”:

she was naturally asked whether she had not seen in her path. “I saw it,” she became famous for replying, but “I didn’t realize it.” (167)

Think of those great losses and great pleasures in life whose full significance we only “dimly” perceive in the moment. A hubris fills our claims to perceptual mastery in adulthood.

Genet must write an entire novel before he can fully realize Jean’s death. Dimly, I knew that Sedgwick died. But for a long time, I didn’t realize it.

Like Klein, Tomkins interprets feeding at the breast as “the earliest mode of togetherness, which is not eating per se, but one inside of the other, in the womb, in the arms or in the mouth” (Tomkins 1:232). This symbiotic scene provides relief from distress and shame, those affects most involved in depressive states:

Quite apart from the womb, the child comes to experience joy both from relief from distress and from reduction of excitement [i.e., shame] in being held and supported by the mother, in being fed by her and having her breast in his mouth, in sucking and biting, in tasting the milk from her breast. (2:225)

Unlike Bion, where breast in mouth is *the* model of maternal reverie, Tomkins lists many different relations to the mother. The infant can experience joy

---

<sup>40</sup> Tomkins describes one study in which infants were deprived of and then offered the nipple of a bottle. While some infants readily accepted the bottle, some refused. These “infants apparently judged the scene a bad one with which they wanted no more experience at that time” (3:666). From a Kleinian perspective, these infants would be considered “confused,” unable to distinguish between good and bad scenes.

in being smiled at by her,  
 having body contact with her,  
 in smelling her,  
 in having its body hugged, rubbed, stimulated by her,  
 in clinging to her and hugging her,  
 in looking at her face, in being looked at by her and  
 in mutual staring into each others' eyes,  
 in first hearing her voice, before it is understood as speech,  
 in hearing her sing him to sleep with lullabies, and then hearing her talk,  
 in talking to her and engaging in mutual conversation. (2:225-226)

Here we have that *sui generis*, or “*félicité à deux*” (1:219), where depressives find rest and succor, having their fill of love and attention. Klein sets a similar scene where the child “can enjoy his mother’s presence in so many ways”:

He will often have a little play with her breast after feeding,  
 he will take pleasure  
 in her looking at him,  
 smiling at him,  
 playing with him  
 and talking to him long before he understands the meaning of words.  
 He will get to know and to like her voice,  
 and her singing to him  
 may remain a pleasurable and stimulating memory in his unconscious. (1:300)

All these scenes of enjoyment mitigate that depressive trio of distress, shame, and exhaustion. “Soothing [the infant] in this way,” Klein interjects, “how often [the mother] can avert tension and avoid an unhappy state of mind, and thus put him to sleep instead of letting him fall asleep exhausted with crying!” (1:300).

These various scenes of mother with child reflect that “understanding without words” Klein found so compelling and yet so elusive in her later writings. What is compelling in both theorists’ accounts of early life is how seamlessly language enters into that understanding. Given her focus on those earliest pre-verbal phantasies, Klein had “no complex awareness of the role of language in mental life” (Likierman 6). Such a gap led many thinkers that took up her theories to read language as a foreclosure of early phantasy life. Weaned from the mother’s breast, the child compensates by filling its mouth with words. *We lose things. And then we choose things*, the old Sondheim lyric goes. We lose the breast, and in its wake, we choose language. The infant moves from the “semiotic” world of the paranoid position to the “symbolic” order of the depressive. For Kristeva as with Lacan, the depressive position is the Oedipal complex par excellence. But Tomkins’s understanding of that primitive scene offers an alternative: language becomes not a disruption, but a continuation of preverbal psychic reality. What knits together the preverbal and the verbal for Tomkins is the child’s investment in social affect:

It is the love of the mother, the experiences of excitement and joy in her presence which powers the struggle of the infant to communicate by speech. The major motive to speech is, paradoxically, the intensely rewarding claustral and pre-verbal social affect. Speech is

in the first insistence a continuation of that kind of communion in which the distinction between subject and object is attenuated.<sup>41</sup> (1:235 )

Language here is not something that forever separates from the other—mere simulacrum and nothing else—but rather one medium of many by which we come to touch the real. Nor is language prioritized over other modes of communication—words exist alongside and have equal status as the rubbing, the hugging, and the smiling. Sedgwick once observed that unless you are a trained actor, dancer, or mime, non-linguistic processes of meaning are hard to know. It is much easier to distinguish between what is knowable and what is not, what is conscious and what is unconscious, when meaning is equated with language. Tomkins troubles that distinction, as does Klein herself, whose “unconscious phantasy” is, as Hinshelwood notes, “almost a contradiction in terms.” After all, in what sense can a phantasized relationship with an object be said to be *unconscious*? Interpreting Klein’s unconscious phantasy in terms of Tomkins’s scene allows us to conceptualize language and thinking without resorting to a heterosexist teleology.

Of course, such an interpretation risks oversimplifying what in Klein is presented as a mad mix of drives, affects, defense mechanisms, not to mention an even more maddening confusion of primary and secondary psychological processes. Tomkins’s internal world with its three heads hung in shame sounds like a scene from a Marx Brothers movie, whereas Klein paints a scenario somewhere between Henry Darger and Hieronymus Bosch. Describing in grim detail the paranoid-schizoid position of the first few months of life, Klein speaks of an endogenous anxiety that is the corollary to a primal sadism or destructiveness. Expanding

---

<sup>41</sup> Viewing speech and language acquisition as “imitation and communion rather than expressive communication” (1:236-237), Tomkins draws a link between speech/language and personality types: “one of the most striking differences we have found between normal subjects and psychotic depressives and paranoids concerns the expectations of outcomes of speaking to others” (1:240). The depressive craves speech, while the paranoid fears it.

Freud's concept of the death drive, Klein hypothesized that we all bring our own individual quotient of destructiveness into the world with us and that as infants we subjectively experience this death drive as an internal object intent on causing pain. This felt sense of an internal persecutor gives rise to an overwhelming anxiety in the infant who projects his destructiveness outward and onto, or more precisely, *into* the mother's breast. The infant attacks this "bad" breast, "scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying by it by every means which sadism can suggest" (1:262). In this Dargeresque world, the infant phantasizes that the mother's breast contains, among other things, the father's penis. Thus, the attack on "the phallic mother" represents an attack on a combined parent figure "who are in phantasy bitten, torn, cut or stamped to bits" (2:219). Peering into a shop window, Genet imagines Jean's transparent soul as skin containing "the repulsive landscape of his flesh, which had been pounded, chopped, and cut up in the form of sausages and liver pate" (48). Phantasies of cannibalism fill Genet's text as he tears his love to pieces: "To eat a youngster shot on the barricades, to devour a young hero, is no easy thing....My mouth is bloody. So are my fingers. I tore the flesh to shreds with my teeth" (18). Similarly, the ravenous infant in Klein "feels that he has taken in the nipple and the breast in bits" (3:5). These internalized bits of the breast, in turn, become internal persecutors who the infant fears "will devour it, scoop out the inside of its body, cut it to pieces, poison it" (1:262). To shield itself from such threats, the infant marshals the good internal object, the gratifying breast which it feels has been incorporated whole. Unfortunately, the pressures of frustration and anxieties can threaten this paranoid-schizoid split between good and bad breast, leading the infant to "feel that the good breast too is in pieces" (3:6). Thus, Klein paints a primitive scene in which anxiety and aggression mutually arise, good and bad internal objects wage war, and the

hapless infant's "tendency toward integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits" (3:4).

This primitive scene, however, changes once the infant reaches the depressive position at three to six months. Earlier, I mentioned the two types of anxieties in Klein: paranoid and depressive. While conceding that an absolute distinction between the two was impossible, Klein did differentiate the two according to the subject's relation to its objects. Whereas paranoid anxiety concerned the survival of the ego, depressive anxiety concerned the survival of the object. It is the difference between dread *of* objects versus dread *for* objects. When the infant reaches the depression position, it is able to understand that the good and bad breast, the good and bad mother, are one in the same. The infant comes to realize that the breast it has been sadistically attacking is the same breast that it has depended on for love and sustenance. This realization brings about feelings that "its loved objects are in a state of dissolution—in bits" (1:269). The infant now experiences a new set of anxieties:

there is anxiety how to put the bits together in the right way and at the right time; how to pick out the good bits and do away with the bad ones; how to bring the object to life when it has been put together; and there is the anxiety of being interfered with in this task by bad objects and by one's own hatred, etc. Anxiety-situations of this kind I have found to be at the bottom not only of depression, but of all inhibitions of work. (1:269-270)

These depressive anxieties are further compounded because the infant believes the dissolution of his good internal objects are "a result of his own uncontrollable greedy and destructive phantasies...against his mother's breast" (1:345). The act of "loving an object and devouring it are very closely connected" and the infant in phantasy believes "when its mother disappears, that it has eaten her up and destroyed her (whether from motives of love or of hate)" (1:266). If

earlier the infant held its mother in phantasy as she once held it, here the infant “miscarries” the mother and feels that it now contains a stillborn mother instead. This miscarriage heralds the arrival of the depressive position, what Klein suggestively calls a “melancholia *in statu nascendi*”—a depression being born. Although this melancholia *in statu nascendi* occurs in the first year of life, Klein argues that we return to this position again and again throughout our lives—“Take me once more, I’ll get it this time”—whenever we are faced by loss and mourning. In adulthood as in infancy, the depressive dreads harboring dead objects inside. The grieving Genet cries,

I am horrified with myself for containing—  
 having devoured him—the dearest  
 and only lover who ever loved me.

I am his tomb. The earth is nothing. Dead. (17-18)

The deadness of this moment, however, holds a queer fecundity:

he lives inside of me,  
 exhaling through my mouth,  
 my anus,  
 and nose  
 the odors  
 that the chemistry of his decaying accumulates within me” (18).

Faced with the horror of the containing the living dead within—“Corpses do not usually bleed. His did” (18)—Genet seeks to resuscitate Jean, even to “the point of asking a scientist: ‘Are you sure he can’t be brought back to life?’” (79). Writing his own version of *Frankenstein*, Genet fills his book with scenes of rape and rim jobs, militiamen and maids, his most “luminous

monster” (161) being Riton, the collaborator whose machine gun fire he repeatedly imagines, with both guilt and glee, ripping through Jean’s body. Genet’s fragmentary collection of stories, written in chunks, is his attempt to put those bits back together. At the same time, Genet suffers from what Sedgwick’s dying friend Michael Lynch once called the “Terrors of Resurrection.” In an essay by that title, Lynch ventriloquizes Sedgwick—“Michael Lynch chose to skip the MLA this year, having discovered that he is defatigable. But he wanted to be here today, if not in his own body then in mine, or at least in his own glasses, in mine” (79)—and recites his own parenthetical verse:

(catastrophe for the closest friends  
 must have been  
 that face  
 of what had been so grievingly safely bound  
 talking gently) (81)

Like Lynch, Genet and I share the same catastrophic fear, for

until now I have been speaking of one of the dead,  
 that is, of a god or an object,  
 but now that I’m about to repeat [her] words,  
 to describe [her] gestures,  
 and recapture the modulations of [her] voice,  
 I’m seized with terror,

not that I’m afraid of remembering incorrectly and betraying [Eve] but, on the contrary, because I’m sure I’ll recall [her] so accurately that [she] may come rushing in, in answer to my call” (59).



Theoretically speaking, Tomkins's primitive scenes contain nothing so gothic. Unlike Klein, Tomkins flatly rejected Freud's theory of the death drive and he criticized Freud's notion of anxiety for being too abstract. Had Freud "been able to continue his early posture—that mental disease is a disorder of the feelings—his system would not have been forced into that kind of reductionism issued in the doctrine of sublimation, in the doctrine that aggression is a drive and finally in the doctrine of the death instinct" (1:71). Tomkins thought Freud's error lay in collapsing all the negative (as well as some of the positive) affects into one of two categories—anxiety or aggression. In doing so, he made "anxiety equivalent to psychic suffering of all kinds... The usage of the word anxiety has come to include every variety of circumstance which is capable of evoking any variety of negative affect (be it distress, shame, guilt, disgust, dissmell, surprise, or contempt) excluding anger" (3:931). What Freud considered *anxiety*, and what Klein would later term *paranoid anxiety*, Tomkins proposed calling *terror*—one of the most toxic of the primary negative affects. Tomkins also revised Freud's concept of aggression, arguing that it did not represent a drive or instinct, but rather an affect: the affect of anger. Anger, like distress, is triggered by a constant punishing level of stimuli-density.<sup>42</sup> In Tomkins estimation, Freud's death drive is simply anger in its most intense form: rage. "In extreme rage," Tomkins argues, "the separateness of the self and other, of affect and action are dissolved into unholy mutually destructive fusion. Thus are produced many of Freud's 'primary process' phenomena" (3:692). If terror is the most toxic affect in Tomkins' periodic table of affects, then anger is the most combustible; "[o]f all the negative affects it is the least likely to remain under the skin of the one who feels it" (3:687). Due to affective contagion and resonance, anger can

---

<sup>42</sup> The total density for anger is much greater than that of distress. As with fear and interest, the similarity in density profile (both have "flat" profiles) explains Freud's failure to distinguish between the two in his theory of the death instinct.

quickly escalate, leading to vicious cycles of retribution. Anger can mean annihilation, both within and without. Anger-rage is the negative affect that most threatens violence to others, oneself, and society, “so it is just that affect all societies try hardest to contain within that envelope under the skin or to deflect toward deviants within society and toward barbarians without” (3:687). Anger, more than any other negative affect, seems ripe for violent projection and containment, in short, those same defense mechanisms Klein describes in the paranoid-schizoid position.

Contrary to Klein, the baby who comes howling into the world need not be bent on (self) destruction. Recasting Klein in Tomkinsian drag, one could easily imagine a scenario in which the hungry infant experiences an enduring distress that feeds upon itself until a critical density is reached and anger is activated. As Tomkins hypothesizes, “distress which is unrelieved and intense is a specific, releaser of anger” (1:164). By the principle of contagion, this anger might then escalate into rage, and that rage might in turn trigger fear.<sup>43</sup> As Sedgwick admits, “it frightens me to *feel* rage, to have it reach into my senses so deeply I can’t see around it anymore, can’t go on suspending it” (Sedgwick, *Dialogue* 51). What we find in Klein’s description of the paranoid position is an infant oscillating between rewarding scenes of excitement and enjoyment and punishing scenes of terror and rage. Upon entering the depression position, those bifurcated scenes come together as the infant realizes that the object proffering a sense of nurturing, gratifying wholeness is the same object causing terrifying, shattering aggression. At that point, paranoid scenes of dread give way to depressive scenes of distress, as the infant becomes more concerned about the fate and survival of the object. Klein herself linguistically marks this move,

---

<sup>43</sup> “As the ratio of the density of negative to positive increases, consciousness is more and more flooded, not only with negative affect in general but with terror over distress in particular “because of perceived helplessness and the inability to control the unwanted invasion of negative affect” (3:964).

tending to use the phrase *distress for the object* as opposed to *dread of the object* when discussing the new object relations within the depressive position. The depressive must tread lightly on surfaces, both textual and terrestrial. In Genet's "depopulated world" (28), anything can become the face of the beloved:

Amidst the debris of buildings being demolished, I sometimes step on ruins whose redness is toned down by the dust, and they are so delicate, discreet, and fragrant with humility that I have the impression I am placing the sole of my shoe on Jean's face. (17)

Even the innocuous phrase "get used to" has the power to "crumble" that delicate face.

So far I have made a case, hopefully a strong one, for using Tomkins to unmoor Klein from her Freudian bearings. But if Klein's theories are so problematic, so riddled with the Oedipal, why bother with her at all? Why not just go with Tomkins from the beginning instead? To answer that, I want to return to that not-necessarily-productive confusion between paranoia and depression within Tomkins's work. On the one hand, I revel in Tomkins's troubling of the firewall placed between paranoia and depression in psychology. If Freud attributed every instance of paranoia to unresolved homosexuality while at the same time championing melancholia as the pre-requisite for a fully mature heterosexual subject, a project interested in supporting queer persons would do well to destabilize that binary. On the other hand, I cannot help wanting to keep depression and paranoia apart. Otherwise, whither do I look for interpretative practices outside the usual protocols of paranoid reading? In the last chapter, I tried to resolve this tension by noting two major changes in Tomkins's thought: first, his separating out disgust from dissmell and thus depression from paranoia, and second, his move from talking about postures to theorizing about scripts. But my analysis overlooked one thing. Volume II presents us with case study after case study of different paranoid postures. Twenty-

five years later, Volume III offers us a panoply of depressive scripts. While the depressive is granted a number of scripts, no such scripts exist for the paranoid. It seems strange that Tomkins would speak so little about paranoia in that third volume, especially in his discussion of depressives and actors. He admits to only a faint trace of paranoia in Garland's confession that "there's a trick about handling crowds. If you try to push your way through in a panic, they'll mob you" (3:827). And yet, I do not know a single actor, teacher, or queer suffering from depression who does not have at least the occasional paranoid fantasy. Part of what makes up the drama in the drama queen are accusations of persecution, either real or imaginary. So where did the paranoid go in Tomkins's theory of scripts and what is its relation to depression?

The answer lies in Klein's concept of primary envy. Toward the end of her life, Klein developed a theory of primary envy, what she believed was an expression of the death drive. Earlier in her work, Klein had spoken about the "greedy love" (1:264) of the infant who feels impelled to devour and incorporate the mother's good content again and again. He does so because "he dreads that he has forfeited it by his cannibalism" (1:264).<sup>44</sup> With envy, Klein added another crucial element to her theory of the paranoid position. While she believed envy "to be inherent in oral greed" (3:79), she distinguished between the two:

greed aims primarily at completely scooping out, sucking dry, and devouring the breast:

that is to say, its aim is destructive introjection; whereas envy not only seeks to rob in this

---

<sup>44</sup> Klein elaborates this point thus: "I think that the child's compulsive, almost greedy, collection and accumulation of things (including knowledge as a substance) is based, among other factors which need not be mentioned here, upon its ever-renewed attempt (a) to get hold of 'good' substances and objects (ultimately, 'good' milk, 'good' faeces, a 'good' penis and 'good' children) and with their help to paralyse the action of the 'bad' objects and substances inside its body; and (b) to amass sufficient reserves inside itself to be able to resist attacks made upon it by its external objects, and if necessary to restore to its mother's body, or rather, to its objects, what it has stolen from them" (1:246).

way, but also to put badness, primarily bad excrements and bad parts of the self, into the mother, and first of all into her breast, in order to spoil and destroy her. (3:181)

Bound together in the aggressive introjections and projections of the paranoid position, greed and envy go hand in hand. Since envy seeks to spoil the goodness of the mother precisely *because* of its goodness, the envious infant “who cannot divide and keep apart successfully love and hate, and therefore the good and bad object, is liable to feel confused between what is good and bad in other connections” (3:184) and “[i]f, primarily, the good food is confused with bad, later the ability for clear thinking...is impaired” (3:221). This scenario is exactly what we find in Tomkins’s case study of the Sculptor.

The Sculptor is the most important case study in Tomkins’s oeuvre. In much the same way as marriage *is* performativity *tout court* in Austen, the Sculptor’s reparative nuclear script is exemplary in Tomkins: both a particular condensation of script theory as well as its more generalizable template. It is the embodiment of the nuclear depressive script *par excellence*, and it serves as the *tabula rasa* for Tomkins’s entire script theory. The case study tells the story of a man who experienced depression during the first year of life. The man in question is no doubt Tomkins, but the clinical history he gives could have been ripped from the pages of Klein’s *Narrative of a Child Analysis*:

This was an individual whose life was at some risk in his first year. He suffered protracted hunger because of an inability to digest milk, to which he responded with violent projectile vomiting. His mother gave him to a wet nurse for breastfeeding, who described the infant’s oral greed as “killing” her. This provided the earliest repeated mode of a good scene, the pleasure of feeding, turned suddenly and unaccountably bad, shaking the whole body in frightening, painful projectile vomiting. (3:809)

Things only become worse when a doctor recommends the Sculptor be given enemas for his intestinal issues. Tomkins explains how the Sculptor's internal and external worlds soon become bifurcated:

The distinction between good food and good mother, and bad food and bad mother, bad vomiting and bad enema was to become a permanent script in which he was to be forever vulnerable to the good turning bad as a nuclear scene. (3:809)

As in Klein, this bifurcation between good and bad mother leads to phantasies of both aggression and feared retaliation: “[the Sculptor] knew that to be ravenously hungry and taking into his body meant that he would have to give up and give back what he greedily sought and taken in and that, if he did not, it would be taken from him by force” (3:809). The Sculptor soon finds himself caught in a nuclear script in which he can neither fully love the mother nor fully renounce her: “If it was hell to be ripped apart at the mouth and anus, it was heaven to look at her, to be looked at, to be fed, to be bathed, and to be held in her arms” (3:809). It is the invidious contrast between these two scenes that create the Sculptor's nuclear script; “[t]here are no gradations in nuclear script space” (3:810).

Given this autobiographical case study, it should be no surprise that Tomkins dedicated that first volume on the negative affects of shame and distress to his mother. But it *is* interesting that his volume on anger and fear does not appear until twenty-seven years later. Anger, in particular, gave Tomkins a hard time. In his biographical sketch of Tomkins, friend and colleague Irving Alexander observes,

His mother was nurturant, loving, and protective (perhaps overly so), though somewhat confining in her rigid conventionality...the early mother was endowed with the power to induce enjoyment and excitement, on the positive side, contaminated in part by shame

and terror, on the negative side. Because of her overconventionality, overt anger was not an acceptable response to her ministrations. Indeed, the overt expression of anger was difficult for him most of his life, and anger as an affect eluded him intellectually. (“Silvan S. Tomkins” 262)

Just as Klein did not fully theorize the paranoid-schizoid position until late in her career, Tomkins did not expand on anger until the end of his. While the introduction of his script theory “enabled a more searching analysis of anger than had been possible [for him] 20 years [prior]” (Tomkins, *AIC* 3:xxxix), I wonder how much of Tomkins’s persistent difficulty with the affect of anger stemmed from his failure to incorporate a fuller account of paranoia into his discussion of script theory. The greed and cowardice he describes in relation to nuclear scripts, especially the nuclear reparative script, certainly seem a piece with Klein’s formulations regarding paranoia. Terror and rage have the capacity to magnify one another via feedback. Fear feeds rage; rage feeds terror. Such mutual magnification implies a nuclear script upon which the two scenes hinge, and greed and envy seem to be the linchpins. According to Tomkins, “excessive greed is a prime condition for the evocation of rage because the greedy one’s demands for more and more can produce sufficient overstimulation from a variety of sources to keep such a one perpetually unsatisfied and overstimulated” (3:961). Even rewarding scenes of excitement and enjoyment can lead to rage as “satiating first evokes distress and then anger” (3:706). According to Alexander, “continued enjoyment carried with it the threat of shame for greed, and thus, despite a large collection of classical music, he found it anxiety producing to listen to the recordings for extended periods to time” (“Silvan S. Tomkins” 262). Joy can be enraging.

Excessive greed is something Klein and Tomkins share. The potential in Tomkins for a scene of enjoyment to turn bad precisely *because* of its goodness sounds very much like Kleinian envy. As Klein points out,

[t]he fact that envy spoils the capacity for enjoyment explains to some extent why envy is so persistent. For it is enjoyment and the gratitude to which it gives rise that mitigate destructive impulses, envy and greed. To look at it from another angle: greed, envy, and persecutory anxiety, which are bound up with each other, inevitably increase each other. The feeling of the harm done by envy, the great anxiety that stems from this, and the resulting uncertainty about the goodness of the object, have the effect of increasing greed and destructive impulses. (3:186-187)

At the same time, according to Tomkins, “[i]n the nuclear script, terror is magnified by intransigent greed for recovery of the good scene turned bad, in which terror prevents such recovery and greed prevents giving up the hopeless quest” (Tomkins 3:970). But how exactly do anger and terror get conscripted into a nuclear script?

Tomkins cites many different kinds of greed: the greed for more action, more stimulation, more applause, more control, more information, citing, in particular, that paranoid cognitive style that greedily demands “too much information too quickly” (705). Regardless of type, excessive greed is a source of enraging self-stimulation. What knits all these forms of greed together is that first General Image of maximizing pleasure. This first image is counteracted by the second image of minimizing pain. Greed is stymied by cowardice. This mini-maximizing strategy creates a vicious cycle along the lines of Kleinian envy. Klein defines envy as that “angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable—the envious impulse being to take



it away or spoil it” (3:180). A mini-maximizing strategy, or “mini-maximizing greed” (3:706) as Tomkins sometimes calls it, seems just the thing to trigger such an angry feeling, because it aspires to reduce the distance between the ideal and the actual in every respect, whether it be in action, in perception, in production, in affect evocation, in control of others, in self-control, in understanding, in imagination, in decision, or in planning. Any barrier, imperfection, flaw, conflict, or ambiguity in the self or in the other can fuel unending rage in this type of greed. (3:706)

Envy in Tomkins is a result of that invidious comparison between the bad nuclear scene and its good but elusive counterpart. In his futile attempt to recover the good scene, the Sculptor rivals the good mother by becoming a creator himself (hence the Pygmalion pseudonym).<sup>45</sup> But his greed and envy get the better of him, since “the heroic vengeful creator will fear that just as he has attempted to steal the fire of the Earth Mother, so will envious others try to steal his creation, to derogate it rather than appreciate it, to try to surpass it, and to make the self envious of the robber” (3:972). Envy is not an affect in the strict Tomkinsian sense. Rather, it marks an invidious, self-defeating mini-maximizing strategy that is doomed to fail. That is why Genet describes all his doomed characters as “green” with terror and rage.<sup>46</sup>

Terror, rage, envy: the paranoid posture returns in the form of the nuclear script. And yet, Tomkins classifies the Sculptor’s nuclear script as depressive. In the previous chapter, I

---

<sup>45</sup> The Pygmalion reference also suggests a *Frankenstein*-like fascination with bringing inanimate objects to life, thus casting Gothic shadows over the case of the Sculptor.

<sup>46</sup> Describing the traitor Pierrot, Genet writes, “[h]is face, which already had the paleness that is called, I think, the greenness of fear, grew uglier with the sagging of the flesh” (186). The collaborator Riton is described as being “traversed by rivers of green anger” (247), and his German lover Erik also feel “the swift, shoreless rivers of green anger...flowing within [him]” (105).

argued that the nuclear depressive script was the very definition of depression. Whether or not depression and nuclear scripts in general are phenomenologically the same is debatable. To the extent they monopolize a person's cognitive and affective resources, nuclear scripts do rhyme with Tomkins's earlier description of depression as a great reduction of free energy available to the individual. But one could just as easily have a nuclear anger script or a nuclear disgust script or a nuclear fear script. One implication of such a formulation is that depressives might not be the only personality type in Tomkins to suffer from depression.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, a potential for different *kinds* of depressions exists across Tomkins's spectrum of affects. Tomkins theorized a major class of scripts keyed to each of the primary affects. Affluence scripts tend to scenes of excitement and enjoyment. Shame-damage scripts work to repair scenes of shame; limitation-remediation scripts rally to remedy scenes of distress. Contamination-decontamination scripts assiduously attempt to purify scenes of disgust, and anti-toxic scripts mobilize to rid the individual of dissmell, anger, and fear. These scripts represent a continuum, from the most rewarding to the most toxic. The placement of shame and distress as the least punishing of the negative affects would suggest that depressive scripts are the closest to scripts of affluence. As Tomkins states, "the toxicity to shame has been much exaggerated by shame theorists; shame is an affluent emotion" ("Revisions to Script Theory" 392). Shame-damage scripts lie just this side

---

<sup>47</sup> The fact that depressives have no monopoly on depression *per se* may be what prompted Donald Nathanson to call for the retiring of the term *depression* and "its replacement by language more attentive to the affective experience actually involved" ("A Case Against Depression"). Nathanson wryly opines that "the emergence of pharmacological agents capable of relieving the symptoms of some depression, but not others, or treating the depressive symptomology of some patients but not apparently others, should have suggested that more was wrong with our language than our medications." Vastly different emotional states, which previously would have all been lumped together under the single rubric of depression, would, in Nathanson's more qualitative diagnostic, fall under separate, affectively specific headings such as "Persistent Dysphoria; fear-terror with secondary distress-anguish" or "Persistent Dysphoria; inhibition of interest-excitement, cause unknown; possible biological shame syndrome."

of paradise. The anti-toxic scripts of that “most malignant trio of affects—dis smell, anger, and terror” (3:857), on the other hand, crouch threateningly on the opposite end of the pole.

Conceptualizing Klein’s positions along such a continuum, we might conceive of the paranoid position as a “constellation” (Hinshelwood 63) of predominantly anti-toxic scripts, from dis smell to terror, while the depressive position is a “central assembly” (Tomkins 3:660) whose primary scripts are damage-repair and limitation-remediation. Within these constellations or central assemblies, we find further gradations of these major scripts. For instance, under the heading limitation-remediation, Tomkins delineates commitment scripts, acceptance scripts, conformity scripts, opportunism scripts, hope scripts, resignation scripts, and struggle scripts—some containing more positive affect than others. Tomkins takes even greater care to parse out different scripts under the banner of damage-repair. We are presented with Chekhov’s ambivalent reparative script and Marx’s redemptive reparative script; we encounter the nuclear reparative script of the Sculptor as well as the accommodative reparative script of Judy Garland and the educator. Although it may not be clear upon first reading, all of these damage-repair scripts, as well as the limitation-remediation scripts with which they are often coupled, represent for Tomkins the depressive posture.

The variety of depressive scripts and their varying levels of remediation and repair—whether redemptive, ambivalent, nuclear, or accommodative—resonate with the various kinds of reparation we find in Klein. Klein distinguished between three forms of reparation: obsessional, manic, and reparation proper. While obsessional reparation attempts to repair the damaged object through controlling, “compulsive, often magical repetition of actions of the undoing kind without a real creative element” (Spillius et al. 471), manic reparation involves a contemptuous reversal of the child-parent relationship in which the demanding task of repairing the damaged

good object is “made light of as if it can be accomplished by magic” (Hinshelwood 346). In contrast to both the obsessional and manic versions, reparation proper is “a form of reparation grounded in love and respect for the object, which results in truly creative achievements” (Hinshelwood 413). This love and respect *for* the object, however, is intimately bound up with the love and respect *of* the object. The depressive’s dilemma, according to Tomkins, is that he “must be loved, that he must be respected, that he must be full of energy at all times” (3:822). This trio of demands causes a number of idealized scenes. In one, the depressive is loved just for himself alone. But love without respect can ring false, as when a (not so) well-meaning relative tells a queer person, “I love you, but I just don’t believe in your lifestyle.” Love without respect can lead to idealized scenes in which one is given unconditional respect:

when this assumes psychotic proportions, it is the manic state, in which the self can do no wrong and cannot fail....[One] recovers [one’s] self-esteem by feeling and acting big....This particular type of affirmation of the importance of the self is forced alike upon those with depressive psychosis and those with the depressive script because the excessive demands of a socialization which has tied love to excellence, or achievement, or morality. Because of the inherent difficulty of always meeting both demands [of being love and respected] at once, there necessarily emerges a fantasy in which the individual becomes so godlike in stature that love is guaranteed as a by-product. (3:822)

As defenses against depressive anxiety, reparation of the manic and obsessional kind can and often do “provide partial solutions” (Spillius et al. 471), but “these are imperfect and at best transient solutions for the depressive” (Tomkins, *AIC* 3:822). They can also be “a recipe for failure, since huge efforts are called out to restore extremely damaged objects” (Hinshelwood 415). Either forms of reparation can lead to nuclear scripts as “the object may be felt to have

suffered further damage, giving rise to further depressive anxiety about harming and about the destructive impulses, and hindering the development of the child” (Hinshelwood 415). In their tendency toward nuclear formations, manic and obsessional reparation might account for the different ways reparations in the political sense get derailed as well as for the paranoid texture and “persistent and not necessarily productive confusion” (Love, “Truth and Consequences” 236) of much reparative criticism. At the same time, the subtle differences between the various damage-repair and limitation-remediation scripts in Tomkins can also help us imagine the capaciousness within Klein’s depressive position, thus opening that Sedgwickian “window to give air and light onto scenes of depressive pedagogy.”

Hypothesizing such a continuum would make sense of Klein’s refrain that paranoid and depressive positions were intimately linked to one another and that movement between them was marked by gradations.<sup>48</sup> Those auxiliary affects of humiliation—shame, disgust, and dissmell—modulate those gradations. The more shame, the more depressive; the more dissmell, the more paranoid. At the same time, the difference between nuclear and non-nuclear can disrupt such a smooth continuum. The profound depression of the Sculptor’s nuclear script may represent the nadir of the depressive position,<sup>49</sup> but its nuclearity also ties it to the more paranoid scripts of anti-toxicity and decontamination. Most of the scripts presented by Tomkins under those headings are nuclear ones. We learn of the nuclear decontamination scripts of Tolstoy,

---

<sup>48</sup> As Klein worked through her theories, she would place the emergence of the depressive anxieties earlier and earlier in the infant’s development. She eventually talks of gradations of depressive and paranoid elements, suggesting that both exist in the child’s psyche almost from birth.

<sup>49</sup> Likierman describes the onset of the Kleinian depressive position in terms that are clearly nuclear: “the depressive individual is trapped, able neither to confront and then accept and forgive his object, nor to reject or relinquish it” (103).

Wittgenstein, Hemingway, Eugene O'Neill, and Freud. We also find the nuclear terror scripts of the Oedipal complex and Oliver North's Cold War ideology. And yet, Tomkins ends the final chapter of the third volume—"Fear Magnification and Fear-Based Scripts"—by returning to the Sculptor. "No one told me that grief felt so like fear," the grieving C.S. Lewis once observed (qtd. in Whybrow 3). The nuclear depressive script's affinity with feared-based scripts helps explain the potential confusion between depression and paranoia. The specific mix of depressive and paranoid features within any given script—i.e., any given person's way of being in the world—depends both on where one is on the spectrum between shame and fear at any given moment as well as whether one's script is more or less nuclear. Or, to return to the older meteorological sense of depression, the more the cyclone of depression moves over the open waters of dissmell, anger, and fear, the more intense and paranoid it becomes. But if that "vicious circle" (Klein, 1:292) tracks back toward land, rubbing up against the shores of distress and shame, the more reliable ground of those two affects might downgrade it to a tropical storm. Those smaller squalls or doldrums might then potentially give way to anti-cyclones—or "anti-analogues" in Tomkins's world or "benevolent circles" (1:292) in Klein's—of excitement and joy, whose higher barometric pressure promise fairer emotional weather.<sup>50</sup>

Nonnuclear depressive scripts promise just such a respite from the Sculptor's stormy weather. Unlike the Sculptor for whom there is only a heaven or hell, the depressive whose scripts are nonnuclear "is one who has found both heaven and hell" (3:821), or rather, "he is

---

<sup>50</sup> Sedgwick provides a compelling discussion of barometric pressure and its relation to internal objects in the title essay of the posthumously published *The Weather in Proust*. Sedgwick demonstrates how the homunculus that the narrator imagines living inside himself responds to changing atmospheric pressure, and how this relation is inextricably tied to his vocation of writing.

driven into that corner in the Garden of Eden which is hell in heaven” (3:822). The depressive’s world is not so bifurcated as the Sculptor’s:

the drama is not essentially an oral one in which one is fed and the other feeds, or in which the depressive oscillates between oral dependence or greediness and oral guilt. If we were to use oral imagery, it would be the case that the child feeds himself by feeding the parent, who feeds the child in gratitude and who instructs the child on what is good and what is bad food; when the child has given the parent bad food, the child also both loses his own appetite and has to somehow provide better food for the parent before he too can enjoy eating and the act of being fed by the parent. (3:821)

If the cyclone of nuclear scripts swirls in an increasingly vicious circle, the feedback here swirls in a different direction. Such benevolent feedback marks the nonnuclear, accommodative depressive scripts of Judy Garland and the educator as well as Chekhov’s “optimizing affluence, shame-anger damage-repair, healer remediation, critic decontamination, and antitoxic script” (3:790). These are the scripts closest to affluence in Tomkins. Unlike nuclear scripts in general, and nuclear reparative scripts in particular, affluent scripts “address neither the damages, the limitations, the contaminations, nor the toxicities of the the human condition, but rather those scenes which promise and deliver intense and/or enduring positive affects of excitement or enjoyment” (3:683). In Tomkins, affluent scripts are queer. They favor heterogeneity, difference, accretion, and discontinuities:

They may specify that one respond positively to particular scenes by savoring them whenever they occur, as on the occasion of a conversation, a dinner, or a flirtation in separate scenes or in one scene. They may specify the one seek particular scenes for excitement or enjoyment, as in travel, the theater, or in reading. They may specify that

one attempt to produce rewarding scenes, as in hobbies, pleasing a friend, wife, or child, or decorating one's house. Such scenes may be narrow or broad in range, specifying one or more psychological functions (e.g. thinking, perceiving, remembering, acting, drivesatisfying), one or more people, places, times, or settings. Within any class of such rewarding scenes, satisfactions may be scripted as focal or diffuse, as in one or many friends, one or many hobbies, one or many arts.

Tomkins's permissive *may* reminds me of Sedgwick's expanding list in *Epistemology of the Closet* of possible ways that some people may or may not define their sexuality. Such a series of hypotheses lend a different texture to repetition. For instance, past scenes may be repeated because of their rewarding nature, and, unlike nuclear scripts, these repeated scenes deliver what they promise and are easily given up if they prove no longer rewarding. As opposed to the more "satisficing" strategies of remediation and the invidious and doomed "mini-maximizing strategies" of nuclear scripts, affluence scripts are marked by optimizing strategies: "[a] good scene may vary in intensity or duration and yet be rewarding for what it is and not for what it might have been or might yet be" (3:684).

Under the banner of affluence, repetition scripts come in many forms. An individual may seek to re-experience past scenes that were once rewarding or have become rewarding: "[s]uch scenes as an attempt to revisit the past (which may indeed have been and as still remembered as having been painful) may become deeply rewarding as a possible reexperience from the vantage point of adulthood" (3:739). An individual may embrace *repetition with exploration scripts* in which a budding interest seeks "exploration of more of the same" (3:739). At the same time, she may enjoy the pleasures of repetition-with-improvement affluent scripts, in which the major aim is to increase one's skill, not to a plateau but to continually redefined peaks, common among



professional athletes and performing artists” (3:739). In Tomkins’s conception of affluence, repetition does not signal lockstep reproduction but a responsiveness to contingency.

“Responsiveness scripts,” for instance, aim “not to seek rewarding experiences, but rather to be open *to* them should they occur or recur” (3:739). In responsiveness quest scripts, an individual may set out to find places where such experience is more likely to occur, especially places “where believes he is more likely to be the target of others who will evoke deep positive responses in himself which he incapable of either seeking directly or of initiating” (3:739).

Tomkins is expansive in his embrace of such responsiveness quests:

Some will even seek the possibility of an attack for the enjoyment and excitement from the release of suppressed rage, distress, terror, or shame. These may be considered affluence scripts if the excitement and enjoyment is the primary aim and the released negative affects are the instrumental vehicle for such rewards. Just as puritanical scripts seek to punish for pleasure, sadomasochistic scripts may seek pleasure and excitement or enjoyment from punishment. (3:739)

In a work so surprisingly quiet on issues of sexuality, Tomkins’s responsiveness here to sadomasochism as a possible affluence script highlights just how queer and ecumenical his notion of affluence can be.

“There is no person without a world” (Carson 82). Tomkins hangs his entire script theory on his childhood traumas. His marked and unmarked references to the Sculptor abound in the text, weaving together his many different observations about the relation between affects, persons, and societies. Likewise, Klein’s theory of the depressive position arises from the death of her son and the “desertion of her daughter from her group of supporters” (Mitchell 146), her life following a nuclear script “characterized by a high regard for intellectual development, and

at the same time, by difficulties and inhibitions that beset intellectual endeavor” (Likierman 28).<sup>51</sup> Tomkins’s and Klein’s theories boil down to that same ontological problem that Sedgwick faces in *A Dialogue on Love*, namely, “What’s the Matter with [Me]” (15). Spinning a general theory from one’s personal loom is nothing new in the world of psychoanalysis. Freud himself spun his theories from his own conflicted relationship with his mother and an anti-Semitic society. “Psychoanalytic theory,” Tomkins argues, “in its central concepts of the Oedipus complex, castration anxiety and penis envy is an expression of Freud’s paranoid posture” (2:569). But for Tomkins, Freud’s insertion of autobiography into his theories is not a scandal or a way of discrediting Freud’s suggestive and compelling insights. Quite the contrary. Tomkins stakes his personality theory on the feminist axiom that *the personal is political* and the queer-affirming assumption that *people are different from each other*.<sup>52</sup> In Tomkins, we are even different from ourselves: “given the same stimulus, the same perception, the same feeling, the individual may or may not respond with the same ideas and the same actions on two or more occasions. Further, similarity on two occasions does not guarantee similarity on three occasions and least of all on *n* occasions” (2:490). The Sculptor was one embodiment of Tomkins taking things personally, and yet Tomkins was also keenly interested on how things could be different, not only for others, but also for himself. His script theory allows for a diversity of origins and outcomes.

---

<sup>51</sup> This nuclear script was one passed down to her from her father and her brother, as again and again “Klein witnessed a loved figure who had exciting intellectual promise but failed to bring it to fruition” (Likierman 29). Klein seemed cut from the same cloth: “a pattern of unfulfilled intellectual and professional promise was the inescapable family background which Klein had inherited” (29).

<sup>52</sup> For a groundbreaking discussion of this queer-affirming assumption, see the section “Axiom 1: People are different from each other” in Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 22-27.

“[W]e have evolved to be born as human beings who will, with a very high probability, attempt and succeed in becoming persons” (3:666). The persons we become depend on the scripts we create, and we begin writing those scripts “in the first day of life—the expansion of one scene in the direction of a connected but somewhat different scene” (3:666). Freud assumed that those scripts were related to each other in fairly straightforward ways; one major script dominated our personality as we simply became more and more of what we already were, like a snowball rolling down a hill. To the extent this cumulative, consolidated self became fractured or ripped apart, repressed desires were seen at work. Tomkins suggestively called these two developmental models *monopolistic-snow ball* and *intrusion-iceberg*, as if the Freudian self were modeled on the Titanic whose integrity and hubris were forever vulnerable to the icy shards that lay beneath the water’s surface.<sup>53</sup> Tomkins, however, disputed the assumption that intrusive scenes into one’s dominant scripts were symptoms of submerged instinctual forces:

Everyman, contrary to Freud, has not assumed that these intrusive affects are under continual tension ready to burst forth at the slightest relaxation of defensive vigilance. Rather, he has assumed there is something about certain kinds of situations which inflame and activate certain otherwise dormant affects. It is our belief that both Freud and everyman are correct. Intrusive affects may indeed be continually activated but also continually warded off, to overwhelm the individual when defenses are less vigilant; there are also intrusive affects which do not come alive except under conditions which are both rare and specific. These latter are consequences of truly weak theories which play only a secondary role in the personality. (2:451).

---

<sup>53</sup> While the coining of terms “snowball” and “iceberg” to describe personality development comes from Tomkins, I owe the drawing out of those terms through the useful analogy of the Titanic to Sedgwick.

Of course, intrusive weak theories could themselves grow stronger and become monopolistic, thus radically changing the structure of one's personality. The monopolistic-snowball and intrusion-iceberg models, thus, lend themselves to nuclear formations.

Tomkins was interested in alternatives to these two dominant models in psychoanalysis and psychology. One alternative he proposed was the competition-co-existence model, an essentially Kleinian mode of development in which the self oscillates between competing scripts. For instance, with shame theory, there might exist

a relatively unstable equilibrium between the adult personality and the earlier personality with continuing competition between early and later types of belief and reaction to shame and contempt. Such a personality constantly surprises by its lability and swings from adult to childish responses to shame. (2:450)

The other alternative Tomkins offers is the integration-late bloomer model:

In the integration model no single affect theory [or script] is permitted to dominate the personality monopolistically, to be suppressed or relegated to the mode of intrusion or permitted to oscillate in competition with alien affect theories [or scripts]. Instead, a *modus vivendi* is achieved in which there is mutual accommodation between affects in the interests of a harmonious personality integration. In its analog across time, the late bloomer model, the elements of the past personality may have continued to compete with each other unhappily, in an early competition model with continued into a co-existence model. At some late point in development there is a confrontation of the warring affect theories out of which a harmonious integration is achieved by the late bloomer. (2:450)

What usually goes by the name *integration* in psychology would be considered monopolistic in Tomkins's world: the nuclear Oedipal family. Tomkins thought that "[t]he Psychoanalytic

model has so stressed the snowball and iceberg models that the co-existence and late bloomer models have been somewhat discounted as alternatives” (2:481). Kleinian thought after Bion would represent a co-existence model, one in which we constantly oscillate between paranoid and depressive positions. While such a model proved incredibly powerful as a much-needed challenge to the developmental assumptions within classical psychoanalytic thought, it also held the danger of foreclosing change. Klein, however, believed that the depressive position was to be overcome, that integration was possible, even if vulnerable to intrusions by paranoid and depressive anxieties under certain conditions. In Tomkins, as in Klein, integration is about a queer dispersal of the self.

The image I have in mind for this model of queer integration is the *antiprosopoeia* in Genet’s text. Like the King James version of “The Song of Songs,” in which no sooner do we find the lover and his beloved personified by leaping roes and cooing doves than the actual persons of the lovers disperse into flocks of sheep, pillars of marble, towers of ivory and a fountains of gardens, the dead Jean D. crops up in any form he chooses:

Jean! Young tree with thighs of water! Blazoned bark! Endless and amazing revels took place in the hollow of your elbow. The shoulder of the Parthenon. A black clover. I am a wad of tow pierced with gold pins. The taste of your mouth: deep within a silent vale a mule made its way in a yellow cassock. Your body was a fanfare into which water wept. Our love! Remember. We lit up the barn with a chandelier. We woke the shepherds dressed for their Mass. Listen to their songs merged in a light blue breath! I fished in your eye! The sky opened its gates. (177-178)

Integration and affluence are neither about the consolidation of a unified self, nor are they about a subversive self-shattering. Rather, they register a dispersal, a relaxation: “Staves and

orchards issue from my mouth. His. Perfume my chest, which is wide, wide open. A greengage plum swells his silence” (18).

In its dream-like reverie, strange non-sequiturs and startling juxtapositions, Genet’s memoir conveys the inchoate, pre-verbal quality of unconscious phantasy. I don’t know if such oral phantasies are as universal as Klein claims. The *fact* of phantasy or scenes might be, but the content that goes into them might be modulated according to the historical discourses of the time. Klein’s depiction of the depressive position may not be a universal, but rather one specific to her time and place, phantasies of oral greed, aggression, and love being in circulation at the time of her writing, as Genet’s own poetics so beautifully testifies. And yet, Tomkins speaks of “[t]he almost universal recourse in infancy and in adulthood to some form of oral pacification to relieve distress” (1:232). The way we experience and articulate the queer phantasies and scenes of today may be of a different sort. But they nonetheless are structured as intersubjective, affect-laden relations with objects.

Genet “had so often dreamed fruitlessly of intimate loves that the most desirable of these loves were signified, written, by things that are inanimate when alone and they sing—and sing only of love—as soon as they encounter the beloved” (50). I cross the room and pick up Sedgwick’s book lying dumb upon the shelf. I open to its inscription.

The book sings of love.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Depressives Brood

“Richard remained silent, obviously thinking over the interpretation, and then smiled. When asked why he smiled, he answered that it was because he liked thinking.”

Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*

“I guess I like brooding—maybe I wanted even more people, feelings, dreams, landscapes, and predicaments in my life to brood about.”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Sedgwick on Sex, Death and Children”

Sedgwick had a long personal history of brooding. In *A Dialogue on Love*, she tells of her “brooding-jawed father” (21) and her sister Nina who in high school “bitterly accused [Sedgwick] of embarrassing her by walking around alone looking as if [she] was *thinking*” (219).<sup>54</sup> Her psychoanalytic sessions provide an opportunity to indulge this brooding nature and “accounts for a big part of the sheer pleasure [she gets] from therapy” (164). As she tells her therapist Shannon Van Wey, “a lot of the just-plain-sweetness of the thing is that I always feel there’s a fresh supply of narrative coming my way to brood over” (164). Sedgwick’s brooding bears itself out in her criticism as well. Demonstrating that “obsession is the most enduring form of intellectual capital” (*Touching Feeling* 2), she begins her essay on paranoid and reparative

---

<sup>54</sup> A similar accusation could be leveled at Tomkins whose “son recalls that often he’d stand silently at the water’s edge for hours on end ‘just thinking’” (Nathanson, “Prologue” xi).

practices by “brood[ing] a lot over” (123) a response that sociologist Cindy Patton made to her almost a decade before, and in describing her “difficult relation over time to the work of Melanie Klein,” she admits, “I can’t remember when, in this decades-long process, I did start actually reading Klein rather than just brooding over her” (“Melanie Klein” 626). From her memoir to her criticism, all this brooding seems to be a source of great pleasure and productivity.

Of course, brooding hasn’t always been valued so. The term often connotes a morbid solipsism. From Hegel’s “unhappy unconscious” to Nietzsche’s “bad conscience,” from Freud’s “melancholia” to Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis,” the brooding subject, turned in upon itself, is a thing to be lamented.<sup>55</sup> To quote Hegel, “we have here a personality confined to its own self and its petty actions, a personality brooding over itself, as wretched as it is impoverished” (qtd in Butler, *Psychic Life* 50). Brooding has no future. Whereas the paranoid evacuates the present in order to create infinite narratives of past and future, the depressive broods in the present. This temporal arrest could be interpreted as a liability, an inability to register a changed reality, a revolt against the historical circumstances that ushered in the painful loss. *Things have changed. You must accept. Move on.* These exhortations the depressive cannot heed. As Judith Butler observes in her discussion of Benjamin’s *On the Origins of German Tragic Drama*, “History itself, on such a view, becomes a kind of catastrophe, a fall from which there is no redemption, the dissolution of sequential temporality itself” (“Afterword” 469).

But the stigma of stasis, solipsism and stagnation that usually attends brooding finds itself redeemed in Sedgwick. Under her tutelage, navel gazing becomes *Novel Gazing*, her brood more akin to masturbation than morbidity. Describing her adolescent depression, she confides in Shannon that she “was somebody who, given the opportunity, would spend hours and hours a

---

<sup>55</sup> See Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*.



day in [her] bedroom masturbating” (*Dialogue* 45). A way of managing her “raging depression,” Sedgwick’s masturbatory brood works by taking things *out* of context. “You know how fantasy works,” she says to Shannon, “It’s like a closed room with all the air sucked out of it—hence, no gravity—and just a few, diverse objects tumbling around together” (171). These “objects tumbling” in the vacuum of Sedgwick’s fantasy are the salves to the lacerating bellstroke of belatedness that Sedgwick hears “tumbling and tumbling over [her] dread dreams” (95). “And what makes them add up to ‘fantasy’ is that there isn’t a stable context for them, or a stable place to identify, or anything” (171-172).

In this final chapter, I explore the depressive’s masturbatory brood as a way of thinking about scenes of queer writing. By scenes, I mean a set of phantasized relations between a writing subject and his or her internal objects. By writing, I mean the ideo-affective postures, or scripts, ordering those scenes. Writing in this context does not signal sublimation or repression. In the Freudian primal scene, non-normative desire is either repressed and paranoid or sublimated and melancholic. In contrast, scenes of queer writing are non-Oedipal, foregrounding a brooding *I* that like Genet’s admits to a promiscuous sense of the first person, his “bronze eye.” After first meeting Erik, the secret German lover of Jean’s mother, Genet “attempt[s] to retrace the contour of [Erik’s] life”:

for greater efficiency,

I got into his uniform, boots, and skin. (36)

Having “wormed” (36) his way into Erik, Genet fantasies a sexual tryst between a younger Erik and a German executioner. When the executioner asks Erik if he is afraid, Genet writes

I shook my head and lightly tapping the cigarette twice with my forefinger, dropped a bit of ash on his foot. The casualness of these two gestures gave the boy such an air of

detachment, of indifference, that the executioner felt humiliated, as if I had not deigned even to see him. (39)

It is hard to know where you stand with Genet. Throughout this scene and many others like it, Genet shifts from first to third person, and back again, often within the same sentence. His shifting allegiances (in addition to Erik and the executioner, he gets “under the skin” of Jean’s would-be executioner, the collaborator Riton, as well as Hitler and Jean’s meaner, older brother, Paulo, to revel in disgusting, disarming, and delicious scenes of buggery) is no doubt one of the reasons Genet’s novel got under the skin of a reading public still reeling from the ravishes of World War II.

For me, though, Genet’s shifting and shifty identifications resonate with Sedgwick’s masturbatory brood and her distress that those she leaves behind will need her “labor of regenerating a first person to keep them going” (“This Piercing Bouquet” 250). The Kleinian notion of phantasy, populated as it is with multiple persons and things (this is what Whitman meant when he exclaimed, “I contain multitudes”), is paradoxically what motivates both Sedgwick’s and Genet’s liberal use of autobiography. While Sedgwick concedes, “it’s easy to fear that autobiography merely exposes a bumptious narcissism, reeking with its primordial first person singular” (“Teaching/Depression” 3), she sees in Klein’s depressive position and Tomkins’ depressive posture the possibility of a more expansive, complex, and intersubjective sense of the first person pronoun. Sedgwick, like Genet, assumes that there is more to the first person than a desire to please, to secure one’s seat at the center of the universe, and to “appear as attractive and exemplary as possible” (Sedgwick, “This Piercing Bouquet” 251). That one might need to de-materialize, “to aerate, expose, and ideally to disable or ‘burn out’ the potency of certain violent defenses” (Sedgwick, “Teaching/Depression” 3), by simultaneously identifying

and disidentifying with the persons and things around one, is as axiomatic in Sedgwick as it is in Genet.

De-contextualization is the depressive's labor. In order to create a new object to be identified with and desired, the masturbating depressive weaves phantasy out of any and all available material, wresting words, phrases, acts and organs from "the dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality" (*Touching Feeling* 147). The bent of such an undertaking is decidedly ahistorical. To steal from Winnicott:

I shall not first give an historical survey and show the development of my ideas from the theories of others, because my mind does not work that way. What happens is that I gather this and that, here and there, settle down to clinical experience, form my own theories, and then, last of all, interest myself to see where I stole what. (qtd. in Phillips 16).

Of course, the person being robbed here is the mother. She is the one tasked with "the labor of regenerating a first person" for sole purpose of keeping the infant going, or at least maintaining the infant's illusion of omnipotence:

From the infant's point of view he is simply loving the mother; from the mother's point of view it can feel like a ruthless assault in which the infant cannot, and must not be made to, empathize or identify with the mother....She is, as it were, continuously giving birth to her infant. (Phillips 90)

In Winnicott's holding environment, there is no room for a depressed mother, let alone a mother whose first person is coming undone. In "Reparation in Respect of Mother's Organized Defense against Depression," Winnicott ruthlessly criticizes the depressed mother for sabotaging her infant's personal development by being, well, an actual person. While this rather unforgiving

script has its roots in Winnicott's childhood--"Winnicott was recalling an early experience of his mother's depression, and her consequent inability to hold him" (Phillips 29)—he cannot help but lodge the same complaint against his one-time teacher Klein:

[h]aving described in detail the effect of the depressed mother on the child, he concludes his paper with a plea, "each individual member of our Society must achieve his *own* growth at his *own* pace." The implication is that Klein's followers had been suffering from her depression at the cost of their own individual potential. (Phillips 90)

Perched in his makeshift fortress, Winnicott looks over the battlefield of psychoanalysis, boasting along with Riton, "I'd like to be the one who makes mothers cry!" (Genet 91). Like the hoodlums in Genet's memoir or Tomkins's Sculptor who "steal[s] the fire of the Earth Mother" (3:972), the child in Winnicott "steals in symbolic form only what once belonged to him by right [and] Winnicott's method of writing papers, so recognizably close to ordinary experience, enacts this process" (Phillips 17). Winnicott never fully recovered from his dispossession by Klein:

"This was difficult for me" he wrote, "because overnight I had changed from being a pioneer into being a student with a pioneer teacher" (Phillips 45).

His later obsession with the distinction between a True Self that possesses its own language and a False Self that merely mimics the language of other's reflects his own abiding fear of ventriloquism (Phillips 145).

While the scenes of queer writing I put forward in this chapter have much in common with Winnicott's approach, they differ radically in their relation to the mother's depressive pedagogy. My relation to the mother-teacher Sedgwick is a case in point. If, as Sedgwick contends, "'I' is a heuristic" (*Tendencies* xiv), then it is

her depressed *I*

I mime

she enters my bronze eye.

To make legible such scenes of queer writing, I want to return with Sedgwick's depressed *I* to "a particularly devastating bedroom scene" (*Tendencies* 113) from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. In this tale of two sisters, Elinor Dashwood is awoken one morning by the "agitation and sobs" of her younger sister Marianne who is weepingly writing a letter to her would-be suitor Willoughby:

the frequent bursts of grief which still obliged her, at intervals, to withhold her pen, were proofs enough of her feeling how more than probable it was that she was writing for the last time to Willoughby. (Austen 172)

Brooding over what to make "of Marianne's terrible isolation in the scene; of her unstanachable emission, convulsive and intransitive; and of the writing activity with which it wrenchingly alternates" (*Tendencies* 114), Sedgwick reads Marianne's epistolary emissions through the lens (or, we might say, through the prosthetic device) of anti-masturbatory tracts from the late nineteenth century. She argues that, in its compulsive repetition, gaping stupidity, and historical rupture, Marianne's "brooding over her sorrows in silence" (Austen 204) is masturbatory in nature. Sedgwick's infamous essay on the subject, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," is a *tour de force* in queer writing. Mimicking Marianne's "abstracted" attention and epistolary emissions, the essay does not proceed by way of linear argument; rather, it revels in parataxis, quoting passages from *Sense and Sensibility* alongside large chunks of Demetrius Zambaco's 1881 case history of "Onanism and Nervous Disorders in Two Little Girls." Shuttling back and forth between Austen's novel and the Zambaco's case history, Sedgwick's segues amount to nothing more elaborate than quick dispatches: "To quote again from the document dated 1881"

(120), “More from the manuscript dated 1881” (120), or simply “Back to 1881” (123). In juxtaposing the novel and the case history, Sedgwick is *not* giving lessons in how to contextualize historically:

the last time [she] taught *Sense and Sensibility*, [she] handed out to [her] graduate class copies of some pages from the 1981 “Polysexuality” issue of *Semiotext(e)*, pages that reproduce without historical annotation what appears to be a late-nineteenth century medical case history in French. (127)

For Sedgwick, the allure of the *Semiotext(e)* piece is the complete absence of any “legitimizing scholarly apparatus that would give any reader the assurance of ‘knowing’ whether the original of this document was to be looked for in an actual nineteenth-century psychiatric archive or, alternatively and every bit as credibly, in a manuscript of pornographic fiction from any time—any time including the present—in the intervening century” (*Tendencies* 127). The brooding present of “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” is the same present of Sedgwick’s “The Warm Decembers” in which “the present tense of the poem is 1880, except where it is circa 1980” (*Fat Art, Thin Art* 88).

This historical nimbleness certainly raised the hackles of New Historicists and homophobes alike.<sup>56</sup> Even critics sympathetic to Sedgwick’s anti-homophobic project found her queer relation to history and historicism troubling. Vincent Quinn, for instance, differentiates the institutionally sanctioned practice of “‘close reading’ with its connotations of praiseworthy attentiveness” (311) from what he terms Sedgwick’s “loose reading” (319) with its “less attentive form of textual analysis” (305). Quinn’s designation of Sedgwick as “loose,” with its gendered connotations of promiscuity and perversion, is not meant as a disparagement: as he

---

<sup>56</sup> See Kimball; Van Leer; Siegel.

explains, his use of the term “is akin to the valorizations of parody and surplus found in current theorizations of mimicry and performativity” as well as “feminist disruptions of canonicity” (319). But for all Quinn’s praise for this “unapologetically ‘loose woman’” (319), he ends up playing the anally retentive Elinor to Sedgwick’s more permissive Marianne. He spends much of his essay fretting about Sedgwick’s “abandonment of attentiveness” (322).<sup>57</sup> “Disappointed by Sedgwick’s failure to explore her rejections to historicism” (323), he cautions her to be less “intemperate” (316) and warns of “the dangers in rejecting attentive reading strategies” (320). In doing so, he replicates the same “compulsive attention paid by antionanist discourse to disorders of attention” (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 119). But that was Sedgwick’s point in the first place: “[t]oward the site of the absent, distracted, and embarrassed attention of the masturbatory subject, the directing of a less accountable flood of attention has continued” (127).

Sedgwick’s reading, however, is far from inattentive. When Sedgwick hands out the 1881 document to her students, she does so “for reasons no more transparent than [...] the true but inadequate notation that even eight years after reading it, my memory of the piece wouldn’t let up its pressure on the gaze I was capable of leveling at the Austen novel” (127). Having a text “lodged in [one’s] mind” (118) for eight years hardly evidences an attention deficient. Sedgwick simply directs her attention elsewhere, her close reading attending to a different scale:

MY WAY OF PAYING ATTENTION TO PEOPLE IS ADDITIVB, NON-NARRATIVE. THUS I DON’T HAVE A SENSE OF CHANGE IN PEOPLE, I.E., IF I NOTICE SOMEIHTING NEW I DON’T THINK “THEY’VE CHANGED.” INSTEAD, I THINK, “THIS IS AN ADDITIONAL WAY X IS”—

---

<sup>57</sup> One can also read this continuity between the surveillance leveled at Marianne’s “‘abstracted’ attention (*Touching Feeling* 121) and the criticism flung at Sedgwick’s “abstract” prose.

(*Dialogue 109*)<sup>58</sup>

Sedgwick's distinction between addition and narration in processing new information is analogous to "the two different ways in which we think" (3:676) according to Tomkins:

One is by the principle of variants; the other is by the principle of analogs. A variant is a way of detecting change in something which in its core remains the same. Thus, if one's wife is wearing a new dress, one does not say to her, "You look very similar to my wife" but rather, "I like the new dress you're wearing." Scenes which are predominantly positive in affect tone thus become connected and grow through the classic principle of unity in variety. (3:676)

In contrast, analogs are primarily associated with scenes of negative affect and characterized by a narrative construction in which things go from good to bad, and bad to worse. Analog constructions often produce nuclear scripts and reinforce long-standing depressions. If analogues produce those vicious cyclones of anger, terror, and envy, then variance is the mode of thinking most conducive to those benevolent anticyclones of enjoyment and excitement.

Sedgwick's variant mode of thinking "GROWS OUT OF SOME KIND OF STRESS ON OBJECT PERMANANCE, HOW TO KEEP THE SAME PERSON, A KIND OF CUBIST THREE-DIMENSIONALITY" (*Dialogue 109*). This cubist three-dimensionality is a piece with Sedgwick's love of chunkiness, her hard-to-explicate density, her eschewal of developmental narratives. In contrast to "the gorgeous narrative work done by the Foucauldian paranoid, transforming the simultaneous chaos

---

<sup>58</sup> I have reproduced Sedgwick's text as it appears in *A Dialogue on Love*. Sedgwick's rhetorical choice to write in small caps, reminiscent of the small caps found James Merrill's *The Book of Ephraim*, was her way of creating in her own writing that chunkiness she so values. The effect of such a choice is to place language on the same ontological status as things, i.e., objects to be brood on and enjoyed.



of institutions into a consecutive, drop-dead-elegant diagram of spiraling escapes and recaptures” (*Coherence* xi), the depressive resists being framed by easy argument or narrative.

Depressives have little interest in plotting; reverie is their forte. Sedgwick explains,

there are senses in which autoeroticism seems almost uniquely—or at least, distinctively—to challenge the historicizing impulse...Because it escapes both the narrative of reproduction and (when practiced solo) even the creation of any interpersonal trace, it seems to have affinity with amnesia, repetition or the repetition of compulsion, and ahistorical or history-rupturing rhetoric of sublimity. (*Tendencies* 111)

Sedgwick’s masturbatory brood<sup>59</sup> challenges Jameson’s famous injunction to “always historicize.” She is more interested in “the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading” (*Touching Feeling* 145)<sup>60</sup>, whose formalism, anachronistically unfolding the text in the present, is generally taken as “evacuation of interest from the passionate, the imagistic, and the ethical” (*Tendencies* 4). But Sedgwick’s “visceral near-identification with the writing [she] cared for, at the level of sentence structure, metrical pattern, rhyme, was one way of trying to appropriate what seemed the numinous and resistant power of the chosen objects” (*Tendencies* 3). For instance, Sedgwick appropriates the syntactical density of Henry

---

<sup>59</sup> Compulsive repetition, gaping stupidity, historical rupture: these adjectives apply to the depressive and masturbator alike. Both revel in the present. Both have no future. Both exhibit a close intimacy with objects.

<sup>60</sup> Positing close reading as an alternative to paranoid forms of knowing, Sedgwick brings in Tompkins’s notion of strong versus weak theory. What makes a theory strong is how much of the world it attempts to generalize. Weak theory, on the other hand, attends to the local, the contingent. As Sedgwick points out, “what could better represent ‘weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain,’ than the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading?” (*Touching Feeling* 145). Championing close reading, Sedgwick argues that “there are important phenomenological and theoretical tasks that can be accomplished only through local theories and nonce taxonomies” (145). Whether it be the term “broodable-on” or “male homosociality,” Sedgwick’s neologisms take advantage of the generative power of “nonce taxonomies.”

James and Marcel Proust both of whom forgo plot—“nothing happens” one might say—for the pleasures of brooding. Unlike the clinical eye of the New Historicist whose X-ray vision scans the text for symptoms of a hidden malignancy, Sedgwick’s reading relations resemble more two patients swapping diagnoses in the waiting room: the exchange is one of identification, avowal, and survival.<sup>61</sup> Sedgwick attachment to formal structures is what allows her to find reparative practices within even the most paranoid of frames;<sup>62</sup> it is also what allows her to “succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain [her]” (*Touching Feeling* 150-151).

What moves Sedgwick in “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” to bring historically disparate texts closer together is the rhyme of their address: the disturbing continuity in how they isolate the masturbating subject in order to shore up their own subjectivities. Quinn’s distinction between close and loose readings, the critical and the creative, the social and the psychological, in essence, sense and sensibility, hinge on “the pseudo-distantiating relish” (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 127) of such a move. But such divisions, according to Sedgwick, like “the would-be-damning epithet mental masturbation,” only highlight the “foundational open secret about how hard it is to circumscribe the vibrations of the highly relational, but in practical terms, solitary pleasure and adventure of writing itself” (110). Quinn denies such relational possibilities by assigning asocial tendencies to Sedgwick’s reading strategies:

---

<sup>61</sup> Or, to use another metaphor, the New Historicist plays the jealous lover who sets out to catch his beloved in a lie. Sedgwick, on the other hand, loves the text for its contradictions, detailing the idiosyncracies and complexities of the beloved.

<sup>62</sup> For instance, she finds in D.A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* (a new historicist work that Sedgwick offers, along with Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, as a paranoid practice *par excellence*) “a glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment” (*Touching Feeling* 150) in his “keenly pleasure-oriented, smaller-scale writerly and intellectual solicitations” (144).

Sedgwick's reading practice claims the right to ignore, distend, interpolate and mutilate the text. The final result is a final transferral of power from the author/text to the reader. Instead of collaborating with the text to produce meaning, Sedgwick suggests that the reader not attend too closely to the small print of her or his readerly contract. Indeed if s/he wants, s/he can rip it up. (311)

But it is precisely “the numinous and resistant power” of these texts—their “chunky affordances”—that allows Sedgwick to make such sadistic use of them. Her manipulations do not constitute a breach of contract. On the contrary, they convey a trust that the text will prove resilient enough to withstand her masturbatory “distraction, forgetfulness, casual brutality, [...] desire to please, or absence of mind” (Sedgwick, *Dialogue* 96). Nor is Sedgwick's essay, as Quinn claims, “a parody of close reading” (319), especially given the high value Sedgwick places on the “New Critical skill of imaginative close reading” (*Touching Feeling* 145). When Quinn defends Sedgwick against Lee Siegel's attack (Siegel had called Sedgwick's reading a “fantasy”) with the assertion that “the strength of Sedgwick's essay is that it is, very precisely, a fantasy” (307), he *is* right. Hers is an “*imaginative* close reading” (my emphasis). But his critique ultimately relies on a hygienic developmental narrative in which “fantasies of reading” and “fantasies of masturbation” serve as healthy way stations toward a more socially engaged subjectivity. What becomes invisible in such a narrative is how relational Sedgwick's fantasy, or should I say, *phantasy* actually is. Sedgwick's masturbatory brood is not divorced from the world; rather, her phantasy (and here I mean *phantasy* in the Kleinian sense) marks a deep engagement with it.

It is important to note that what makes brooding a pleasurable thing in *A Dialogue on Love* is that it is shared. The space of the therapy allows the burden of brooding to be borne by

both parties. After meeting Sedgwick's mother, "Shannon's been brooding over the web of knowing, allusive, sexualized language [Sedgwick's] mother throws over her accounts of things" (79), while Sedgwick's "own obsessive site of brooding is what must have been her predicament in those years in the fifties" (79). Later, Sedgwick tells Shannon,

You know, when I start telling you something by saying, 'I was thinking about what you said about...', it always gives me pleasure to say that, to let you know that I was brooding on your words. And I think the pleasure is...well, I know how much I love it when *you* say 'I was thinking about what you said about...' It's somehow as though the part of you that's in me will be able to nourish the part of me that's in you, or—something—I don't know how to put it. But that there's some circuit of reciprocity between these holding relations: your ability to hold me inside you, and mine to hold you inside me. (164-165)

Brooding here involves a "circuit of reciprocity" as both Sedgwick's and Shannon's phantasies incorporate parts of each other. Levi-Strauss wasn't just talking metaphorically when he famously wrote in *The Savage Mind*, "Animals are not only good to eat but good to think" (204-208). Levi-Strauss' aphorism is often translated into English as "good to think *with*." I always took the preposition *with* metaphorically, as in "So-and-so's theories, concepts, and texts are good to think with when creating one's own theories, concepts and texts." We need the other's nourishing presence, a sort of Winnicottian holding environment, in which to think. It took an embarrassingly long time for me to realize that the *with* was literal. We need the other actually there, whether in the form a person, a book, or box of safety matches, to share in the exhilarating and exhausting labor of thinking.

But what happens when one loses the other in such a mutual exchange, what becomes of brooding then? Describing “the guillotine of awfulness that was the sheer end” of an “intimate and passionate” friendship, Sedgwick gives a wretched account of what happens when one is abandoned with the burden of brooding alone:

Every bit of me that was lodged in him was lost to me, I guess forever. And it was very graphic: every bit of Benj that lodged in me stayed in me. It had nowhere else to go. But now it hated me, it seemed to hate me with every molecule of its being, of his.

*(Dialogue 65)*

What Sedgwick is experiencing are the punishing, hard-to-contain effects of projective identification. As Sedgwick explains, projective identification resembles Freud’s projection but is “more uncannily intrusive: for Freud, when I’ve projected my hostility onto you, I believe *you* dislike *me*; for Klein, additionally, when I’ve projected my hostility *into* you, you *will* dislike me” (emphasis in original, “Melanie Klein” 636). I imagine something of the sort happening with Marianne who is left alone to brood over the demise of her relationship with Willoughby. Marianne, in fact, is on the receiving end of a long line of powerful projective identifications—not only from Willoughby but also from Elinor, Austen, the reader and literary critics—rendering her dumb and depressed, perhaps because her masturbatory brood is at the service of onlookers whose subjectivities are constituted in their very distance from such brooding. When Elinor exhorts Marianne to exert herself, Marianne replies, “Oh! how easy for those who have no sorrow of their own to talk of exertion!” (177). Of course, Elinor has sorrows of her own, but a sorrow that is disavowed and projected *into* Marianne whose burden it is to do the emotional work of two. The epistolary drive of the depressive—Marianne’s compulsive letter writing—

stems from the need to make legible and legitimate this disavowed labor, a depressive re-working of the projected material.

Sedgwick intervenes on this chain of projective identifications by interposing her textual body.<sup>63</sup> She seeks not to write *about* Marianne, but to write *from* that space of grief and reverie. To understand what it might mean to write from such a space, I want to slip into another scene of queer writing, one that has mothered and nursed many a gay reading: namely, Oscar Wilde brooding in Reading Gaol.<sup>64</sup> Wilde's *De Profundis* embodies what happens when a holding environment becomes a holding cell.<sup>65</sup> Writing in isolation to his own Willoughby, Sir Alfred Douglas aka Bosie, Wilde alternates between scenes of shame and unstanchable anguish and scenes of contempt and obliterating rage:

I have lain in prison nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; anguish that wept aloud; misery that could find no voice; sorrow that was dumb. (152)

In his letter of lament—and certainly there is a history to be written on epistolary depressions—Wilde bitterly accuses Bosie for his imprisonment and subsequent bankruptcy, at the same time, blaming himself for his own ruin. In the world of *De Profundis*, “I blame myself” (101) almost always means *I blame you*. Wilde's paranoid posturing saturates the letter:

---

<sup>63</sup> When historian Lytton Strachey made his case as a conscientious objector during World War I, he was asked what he would do if invading Germans tried to rape his sister. His gay response: “I would try to interpose my own body” (qtd. in Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 212).

<sup>64</sup> For more on Wilde's relation to later LGBTQ readers, see Koestenbaum's “Wilde's Hard Labor and the Birth of Gay Reading.” Koestenbaum's thrilling, provocative essay is itself a beautiful letter, both addressed to scenes of queer writing as well as an embodiment of them.

<sup>65</sup> Thanks to Tina Meyerhoff for giving me this felicitous turn of phrase to think with.

I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of his age...The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring; I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art; I altered the minds of men and the colours of things; there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. (151)

Wilde's place among the gods, however, is short-lived as he finds himself caught in a power struggle between Bosie and his father, the Marquise of Queensberry. In an earlier letter to his friend Robert Ross, Wilde laments, "I was placed between two people greedy for unsavoury notoriety, reckless of everything but their own horrible hatred of each other" (*Complete Letters* 670). Queensberry would famously leave a card for Wilde with the inscription: "For Oscar Wilde posing as a sodomite [sic]" (qtd. in *Complete Letters* 634). Wilde's subsequent lawsuit against Queensberry, a lawsuit encouraged by Bosie himself, ultimately led to Wilde's conviction and incarceration. Sitting in prison, he cannot help but brood on the invidious comparison between his fate and that of Bosie and Queensberry:

your father will always live among the kind pure-minded parents of Sunday school literature; your place is with the infant Samuel; and in the lowest mire of Malebolge I sit between Gilles Ruiz and the Marquis de Sade. (*De Profundis* 106)

Rehashing his unfortunate fall from self-aggrandizement to self-abjection, Wilde voices phantasies of omnipotence and impotence in one and the same breath: "Of all the people who have ever crossed my life, you were the one, the only one I was unable in any way to influence in any direction" (194). At the same time, he is bent on proving that anything the world can do to him, and he can do first to himself: "Terrible as was what the world did to me, what I did to myself was far more terrible still" (151). "I ruined myself" (150), he says. A paranoid's boast.

Judging by the letter, Wilde certainly knew how to make scenes. He dragoons everyone—family, friends, servants, prostitutes—into his little dramas. If he could return to the world in any form of his choosing, Wilde could reprise the role of Blanche DuBois without anyone being the wiser. He could recite the line, “Crumble and fade and—regrets—recriminations... ‘If you’d done this, it wouldn’t’ve cost me that!’” (119), and believe it plucked from his own letter. With the pecuniary precision of an accountant—why is it so humiliating to speak openly of one’s monetary investments in a relationship?—Wilde recounts how Bosie

“made a scene so dreadful,

so distressing  
that I told you that we must part” (107)

only to swiftly follow with scenes of tearful reconciliation: “your tears breaking out again and again all through the evening...your contrition, so simple and sincere...made me consent to renew our friendship” (112). But these scenes of repair quickly turn to “a series of scenes culminating in one more than usually revolting” (109). Listening to him rehash these “incessant scenes” (103), it would be easy to dismiss Wilde as a drama queen, “a poseur to the last” (qtd. in Gagnier 335). Indeed, according to Regenia Gagnier, traditional autobiographical approaches to *De Profundis* have resulted in the contemptuous verdict that Wilde was ““constitutionally theatrical” (335). Working against such judgment and hoping to shed light on Wilde’s mental state during his two years of “solitary cellular confinement” (335), Gagnier reads Wilde’s letter within the tradition of prison writing, quoting the British conscientious objector James Abbott who was sentenced to solitary in 1941 for his pacifism:

You think until your head aches and then you fall into a daze. After a while you start thinking again....Then you get tired of thinking and lapse into a daze again. But before



long you find yourself thinking some more—you can't help it. You relive incidents and episodes; what you said, what the other person said, what you answered. Then you go over the entire scene again, but this time you think of what you should have said and what the other person would have answered. (qtd. in Gangnier 350)

Like Abbott, Wilde replays the same scenes, both in his head and on the page, *ad nauseam*. Wilde's repetitive thinking follows the Tomkinsian principle of analogues "whereby a negative affect scene is endlessly encountered and endlessly defeats the individual" (Tomkins 3:677). As Josephine Guy and Ian Small point out, "Wilde dwells obsessively on a surprisingly small number of what he saw as the key events in his life with Douglas. Wilde's recounting of these events is repetitive; and because they are not dated, and are often described in different ways, many readers will not realize that the same memories are being rehearsed again and again" (137).<sup>66</sup> Wilde rehearses these scenes in hopes of changing his script, in contemplating how things might have turned out differently, but the strategy does not work. The more Wilde tries to repair these scenes in phantasy, the more he fails. And the more he fails, the more he tries again. Wilde's script is nuclear, and he is toxic.

Wilde's nuclear script reasserts itself with an Oedipal regularity--"[a]s far as I can make out I ended my friendship every three months regularly" (106). Whether it is three months, three years, three days, or his cell C.3.3., Wilde's humiliation always comes in threes. *De Profundis* traps him in a series of Oedipal triangulations—not only with Bosie and Bosie's father, Queensberry, but also with Queensberry and Bosie's mother. He is the purloined letter passed among the three:

---

<sup>66</sup> Guy and Small identify these small number of scenes as including "Douglas's attempt to publish some of his own poetry and his correspondence with Wilde in the *Mercure de France*; the role Wilde played in 'rescuing' Douglas from the clutches of blackmailers; Douglas's trip to Egypt; and Douglas's alleged neglect of Wilde when Wilde was ill in Brighton in 1894" (137).

You thought again that in attacking your own father with dreadful letters, abusive telegrams, and insulting postcards, you were really fighting your mother's battles, coming forward as her champion, and avenging the no doubt terrible wrongs and sufferings of her married life. (124)

Wilde is the collateral damage of this Theban house, his letters the radioactive waste that must be contained to keep the nuclear family going. The letters Wilde writes Bosie pre-incarceration serve not only as state's evidence against him. They are the textual body upon which everyone involved in the trial can discharge a hermeneutics of suspicion rivaling that of even the best New Historicist:

To achieve this interpretation of the letter [as evidence of gross indecency], the court reconstructed its entire history. It went through the perverse process of amassing a mountain of evidence in order to reduce all details of that evidence to evidence of a single crime, allowing them to contain no suggestions or digressions, no spaces in which a life could be tasted or elaborated, but only on awful truth... At that point all rights of interpretation and expression were taken from [Wilde]. The letter became part of the evidence; all his letters, stories, his novels, plays and poems now 'meant' just one thing; they collapsed into a single, horrible text. (Bartlett 156-157)

Like Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, Wilde becomes the target of a long line of projective identifications meant to confer authority and vicarious pleasure onto whomever is "reading" him. The queer letter that is Oscar Wilde gets passed around, from hand to lubricated hand, granting anyone who wants to take a stab at him—"a Saint Sebastian marked by arrows" (Koestenbaum, "Wilde's Hard Labor" 180)—the privilege of fishing out his contents, making authorial claims about him, shoring up one's identities at his expense, until his letter has reached its intended

audience with not some much as a word untouched by others. Wilde performs the hard labor of carrying the disavowed affects of those who would close read him, and all the people close reading him—from Bosie to Queensberry to the police to the prosecutor to the reading public—are the very ones who are killing him.

Letters, of course, are never fully intended for the persons to whom they are addressed. Careening out into the world, they are also addressed to the intervening bodies that bear them along—the promiscuous postman, the snooping neighbor, the pandering friend, the disloyal prostitute, the spying state, the future reader, and, of course, the fretting mother. I bring up the figure of the mother, because it is from that space that we might attend to Wilde's nuclear scene without replicating the paranoid frames both within the letter itself and the close readings surrounding it. Mothers appear in a surprising number of Wilde's letters. When he is not writing about his own mother, he is hailing someone else's, his favorite valediction being some form of "Pray remember me to your mother" (*Complete Letters* 325). What is striking about *De Profundis*, though, is the prominence of Bosie's mother, Lady Queensberry. Wilde's letter is addressed to her as much as it is addressed to Bosie. From the letter's opening, Wilde entertains the possibility that Lady Queensbury will be its ultimate reader:

If you go complaining to your mother, as you did with reference to the scorn of you I displayed in my letter to Robbie, so that she may flatter and soothe you back into self-complacency or conceit, you will be completely lost. (97-96)

Towards the end of the letter, he again addresses himself to Bosie's mother:

I have spoken of your mother to you with some bitterness, and I strongly advise you to let her see this letter, for your own sake chiefly. (190)

Between these two evocations of Lady Queensberry, Wilde repeatedly recounts the drama set in motion by Lady Queensberry's letter entreating Wilde to intervene in Bosie's life on her behalf. This queer triangulation mirrors that between Wilde, Bosie, and Bosie's father, and is, according to Wilde, no less tragic: "You see the position in which I was placed between you and your mother. It was one as false, as absurd, and as tragic as the one in which I was placed between you and your father" (190). But while the triangulation with Queensberry presents a fairly straightforward Oedipal drama, with Wilde stepping into the role of mother as Lady Queensberry's understudy, Wilde's triangulation with Bosie's mother feels less like *Oedipus Rex* more like *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* Wilde heaps as much blame upon his sister-in-crime as he does upon Bosie and himself: "You will ask me in what way your mother contributed to my destruction. I will tell you. Just as you strove to shift on me all your immoral responsibilities, so your mother strove to shift on me all her moral responsibilities with regard to you" (190). Here, Wilde's constant refrain of *I blame myself, I blame you* turns into *I blame your mother*. Much of his invective and contempt is directed at her:

your mother must at times regret that she tried to shift her grave responsibilities on to someone else who already had enough of a burden to carry. She occupied the position of both parents to you. Did she really fulfill the duties of either? (193)

He phantasizes Bosie's mother attacking him in kind: "I know she puts the blame on me...I hear of it often. She talks of the influence of an elder over a younger man" (194). At the same time, Wilde cannot help but empathize with Bosie's mother's plight, often presenting himself as her "warmest seconder" (192): "At the end of the week a letter from your mother was handed in. It expressed to the full every feeling I myself had about you" (110). He lectures Bosie that he should have "avenged [his] mother's wrongs on [his] father...by being a better son to [his]

mother than [he] had been...by not making her afraid to speak to you on serious issues...by being gentler to her, and not bringing sorrow into her days” (124). At the letter’s close, he even seeks to repair any damage done between mother and son: “You would be much happier if you let your mother know a little at any rate of your life from yourself” (197). At times, with regards to Lady Queensberry, Wilde comes close to saying with Bette Davis, “You mean all this time we could have been friends?” (*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*).

Wilde’s identification with mothers, however, extends beyond the less than ideal figure of Lady Queensberry. One of the most poignant, and the most depressive, moments in the letter is when he expresses his grief over the death of his own mother, Speranza. It must have seemed a bitter irony that Bosie would abandon him the very moment he was abandoned by his mother. How dumb he must have felt. Not only because he had been duped by a boorish Queensberry, and not only because he has been abandoned by an equally doltish Bosie, but also because “so irreparable, so irredeemable a loss” (142) as that of his own mother leaves him dumbstruck:

I,  
 once a lord of language,  
 have no words  
 in which to express my anguish and my shame.” (141)

*My anguish and my shame*: Wilde is wracked by that shame-distress bind peculiar to the depressive script, with its attendant dread of irreparable loss. The only other times Wilde uses the word “irreparable” are in reference to “the entire loss of [his] library, a loss irreparable to a man of letters” (132) and to society’s abandoning of those it punishes like people who shun “one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irredeemable wrong” (157). The loss of his library and the shunning of the oppressed are metonyms for the loss of the family name:

She and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured, not merely in literature, art, archaeology, and science, but in the public history of my own country, in its evolution as a nation. I had disgraced that name eternally. (141)

The name to which Wilde refers is not the Name of the Father. Rather, the lineage he has in mind is maternal.<sup>67</sup> Hailed as “Speranza’s gifted son” during his lecture tour in the United States, Wilde made a name for himself as a man of letters through his mother. It was her name, and not her deceased ex-husband’s, that was recognized in his home country and abroad as a literary accomplishment and political activism. When Speranza dies penniless and lies buried in an unmarked grave, the irreparable personal and political losses she embodies bequeaths Wilde with “a sorrow that [is] dumb” (*De Profundis* 152) as well as special kinship with “those who are dumb under oppression” (171). And for Wilde, “what is dumb is dead” (171).

Wilde only mentions his mother three times in *De Profundis*, once with regards to her passing, again later in passing reference to some lines from Goethe she was fond of quoting, and, finally, in stark contrast to Lady Queensberry. Urging Bosie to show his mother the recriminations lodged against her son, Wilde states,

If it is painful for her to read such an indictment against one of her sons, let her remember that my mother, who intellectually ranks with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and historically with Madame Roland, died broken-hearted because the son of whose genius and art she had been proud, and whom she had regarded as worthy continuer of a distinguished name, had been condemned to the treadmill for two years. (190)

---

<sup>67</sup> According to his son Vyvyan Holland, when Wilde refers to his parents bequeathing him a name revered and honored, he is primarily thinking of his mother, whose nationalist writings, under the pseudonym Speranza, championed the rights of women and the politically oppressed in Ireland (Horan 114).

In Wilde's phantasy, Lady Queensberry, whose only claim to literary fame was as illustrator of the rather anodyne *A Very Simple Story: Being a Chronicle of the Thoughts and Feelings of a Child*, plays the part of the bad mother. Speranza, on the other hand, embodies the good. And yet, Wilde is strangely silent about his mother throughout letter. Presumably, his "incommunicable woe" (141) over her death makes writing about her impossible. But if Wilde cannot write *about* his mother, it is because he writes *as* her instead. I recall Sedgwick taking part in a public conversation on Oscar Wilde at The Morgan Library in New York. Projecting on a photographs of Wilde and Speranza onto a screen, Sedgwick described how utterly Wilde became his mother. His face became her face; her bearing, his bearing, her posture, his. (Sedgwick, "Wilde in the Streets"). He is his mother's shade.<sup>68</sup>

He plays the good mother Speranza opposite Lady Queensberry's turn as bad mother. Taking on his mother's depressive script, Wilde finds himself faced with the infant Bosie who can neither be satisfied nor let go: "one had either to give up to you or to give you up....I gave up to you always" (104). Bosie is *l'enfant terrible* whose greedy demands suck Wilde dry: "[h]aving made your most of my genius, my will power and my fortune, you required, in the blindness of an inexhaustible greed, my entire existence" (104). With his "entire lack of any control over [his] emotions...his resentful moods of sullen silence...[and] fits of epileptic rage" (103), Bosie is the envious child who robs the mother Wilde of his creativity: "during the whole time we were together I never wrote one single line....my life, as long as you were by my side, was entirely sterile and uncreative" (99). Bosie willfully destroys the motherly hand that feeds him:

---

<sup>68</sup> Wilde's disastrous libel case against Queensberry uncannily mirrors his mother's unsuccessful libel suit against Mary Tavers, the young woman who accused Sir William Wilde of seduction.

If one gives to a child a toy too wonderful for its little mind, or too beautiful for its but half awakened eyes, it breaks the toy if it wilful...So it was with you. Having got hold of my life, you did not know what to do with it...It was too wonderful a thing to be in your grasp....you were willful and so you broke it” (202).

But if Wilde identifies with his (dumb, depressed, dead) Speranza, he also identifies with the life-sucking Bosie. After all, it is Wilde who “made [the] most of [Speranza’s] genius” (104) when he was an aspiring writer, and it was *his* willful hand that disgraces a name “too wonderful for [his] little mind...too beautiful for [his] but half awakened eyes” (202), thus leaving his mother “broken-hearted” (190). When he admonishes Bosie to share a little of his life with his mother, more than little self-reproach seems coiled up in his words. And when he writes to Ross about the Home Secretary’s refusal to commute his sentence:

I had fed on hope, and now Anguish, grown hungry, feeds her fill on *me* as though she had been starved of her proper appetite. (*Complete Letters* 669)

one gets the impression that having had his fill of the good mother (*Speranza* being the Italian word for *hope*), Wilde must now suffer her return in the form of the bad mother, Anguish, having her fill of him.

Thus, if Wilde writes *as* his mother, he also writes *to* her. His cries of abandonment—“Why did you not write me?” (146)—are addressed to her as much as to Bosie, his queer letter meant to cross that crack between the living and the dead. He rages against Bosie: “I could if I had chosen have torn you to pieces with bitter reproaches. I could have rent you with maledictions” (133). He rails against Lady Queensberry’s “weakness and lack of courage” (191), what he sees as her complete inability to confront her son and withstand his anger:



Your mother, if she was afraid of talking seriously to you, should have chosen someone among her own relatives to whom you might have listened. But she should not have been afraid. She should have had it out with you and faced it. At any rate, look at the result.

Is she satisfied and pleased? (194)

Yet he never once expresses even the slightest anger or bitterness toward his own mother, despite the fact that she was the one who, along with Bosie, all but commanded him to stay and fight Queensberry in the first place. Instead, all we get from Wilde with regards to his mother is a “sullen silence” (103). Surely, some of the hatred he directs toward the bad mother figure of Lady Queensberry is displaced anger towards Speranza. My sense is that Wilde’s conspicuous silence surrounding his mother stems from his desperate need to keep her intact as a good internal object, his fear that her memory could not withstand his rage. What could be read as self-serving attacks on Bosie and Lady Queensberry are, in fact, acts of survival as Wilde uses the less exemplary first person pronoun of his letter “to aerate, expose, and ideally to disable or ‘burn out’ the potency of certain violent defenses” (Sedgwick, “Teaching/Depression” 3).

Reading back over these harrowing scenes of recrimination in *De Profundis*, I find I have lodged in my mind a bedroom scene from another document, a narrative structured not as a case history of “Onanism and Nervous Disorders in Two Little Girls” dated 1881, but rather as “an autobiographical homosexual story” (qtd. in Jones 23) dated 1972: Fred Halsted’s film *L.A. Plays Itself*. Halsted enjoyed the kind of incandescent fame only possible during the heyday of his own short-lived Decadent movement known as “porno chic,” that exciting time in the United States, just after the overturning of the pornography, when pornography seemed poised to break into the mainstream. I first came across this pornographic flick while browsing the shelves of Chelsea Video. I still recall the alluring dust jacket of VHS advertising the film’s rare distinction

of being “Part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.” The film was presented at MoMA in 1974 as part of their Cineprobe Series. No small feat, when one considers that *L.A. Plays Itself* ends with what MoMA curator Adrienne Mancina, in her introduction to the night’s screening, delicately described as “a scene of...it’s, well, you can call it anal manipulation, better known as...fist fucking” (qtd. in Jones 95).<sup>69</sup> The first of the film’s two storylines, however, treats the viewer to the relatively lush hills of Malibu where two actors engage in some rather vanilla play, while the second unfolds in the grit of the city where an older man (played by Halsted) schools a young newcomer (played by Joey Yale) in the rigors of said anal manipulation.

Admittedly, Fred Halsted’s S/M flick would seem an unlikely candidate to read alongside Oscar Wilde’s *ars poetica*; their histories, tonalities, personalities, choice of medium couldn’t be more different. I *could* mount historical arguments for bringing Halsted to bear on Wilde. The 1964 publication of the uncensored version of *De Profundis* (past versions had omitted all references to Bosie) would have certainly made Wilde’s letter newly available to a queer aesthetic imaginary already in full bloom after Jean Genet’s *Un Chant d’Amour*, Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising*, Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*, and Andy Warhol’s *Blowjob*. But Halsted’s film contains not one reference, explicit or otherwise, either to Wilde or to his infamous letter. I could draw interesting parallels between the textual histories of the two texts. *De Profundis* was notoriously edited in his first commercially available editions. So too was Halsted’s film. The fisting scene was heavily edited when it was reprised in the theatrical release of *Erotikus: A History of the Gay Movie* (a survey of gay porn featuring the works of Bob Mizer, Pat Rocco, Lancer Brooks, and Halsted who, oddly enough, serves as the film’s narrator), and

---

<sup>69</sup> Whether or not Adrienne Mancina said these exact words is unclear. The story was related to Halsted’s biographer by one of his Halsted’s ex-partners. See Jones 95.

later distributors who could not stomach the film's final scene simply excised it all together from video release. Like a *De Profundis* sequestered in The British Museum for fifty years, the only extant copy of the original film now lies cloistered in the MoMA's archive. Beside that uncanny and tenuous parallel, however, nothing in the textual histories of either the film or the letter recommends the two being read in tandem. Along with Sedgwick, I must confess, I bring Halsted's film into my current discussion of Wilde for reasons no more transparent than the true but inadequate notation that even eight years after viewing it, my memory of the piece won't let up its pressure on the gaze I am capable of leveling at Wilde's letter.

What draws Halsted's film into the orbit of my reading phantasies of Wilde's letter is the rhyme of its address. Before the movie was complete, Halsted's co-star and then-boyfriend, Joey Yale, abandoned the project, leaving Halsted alone to pull the pieces together, to create a filmic whole as best he could. As Yale explains,

Halfway through the film, I had such indecision about what I was doing that I backed out of the project. Fred had filmed all the major footage of me, and then I decided, I can't handle this because I was really young and didn't understand what I was doing. And so I didn't return his phone calls. I didn't see him, and I wouldn't finish the film the way he had originally intended it. So it forced him to be very creative as an editor, to take the existing footage that he had and make it work. (Halsted and Yale, "Who's On Top?")

*LA Plays Itself* is Halsted's *Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis*, his aesthetic complaint to a lover gone. Joey—the created surname “Yale” an approving nod to his patrician good looks—certainly played Bosie to Halsted's Wilde. Although only eight years separated the two, Halsted himself played up the pedagogic/pederastic nature of the relationship: “He was 19 at the time—he looked about 12.” Their daddy/boy relationship finds its echo in the film's voice-over, in

which a more seasoned man warns a newcomer about some less than savory guys on the street, explaining, “You don’t want to mess with guys like that.” The older man then offers to show the newcomer the ropes, but the ropes he means are not metaphorical; in the next shots, Halsted ropes Yale to a bedpost. Like Wilde, Halsted wants to teach his “super-twink”<sup>70</sup> a lesson.

In one scene, Yale strips naked at the bottom of dimly lit and dirty staircase. He, then, crawls up the steps, Halsted atop the stairs, victorious. The scene culminates with Yale licking Halsted’s boot—a penitent Boise crawling back on hands and kneel to lick Wilde’s feet. Halsted makes graphic Wilde’s line that, “Love is a sacrament that should be taken kneeling” (175). *L.A. Plays Itself*, like *De Profundis*, is a document of public shaming, a letter of recrimination addressed to the real Yale, and the internal Yale that Halsted harbors inside himself. The complicated operations of revenge, reparation, and regret enacted on this internal object are not unlike what Wilde performs on his internalized Bosie. Like the nuclear scenes of Tomkins’s script theory, the internal objects of Yale and Bosie—both out there in the free world, both imprisoned in the psyches of Halsted and Wilde—pose irreconcilable problems. In Tomkins’s terminology, “they matter more than anything else, and they never stop seizing the individual” (3:676). A nineteenth-century dandy, a nineteen-seventies daddy: Wilde and Halsted are imprisoned within their respective nuclear scenes, those scenes which

[i]f they reward us with deep positive affect, we are forever greedy for more...If they punish us with deep negative affect, we can never entirely avoid, escape, nor renounce the attempt to master or revenge ourselves upon them despite much punishment.

(Tomkins 3:676)

---

<sup>70</sup> As Jones explains, “[a] term that Halsted and Yale claimed to have invented, ‘twink’ derives from Hostess Twinkies, snack pastries that are white, sickeningly sweet, full of cream, and no nutritional value whatsoever” (70).

The anxiety inherent in both their nuclear scripts is this: *Can my internal object withstand my attacks if the external person is no longer present?* With the loved object absent, neither artist has reassurances that their paranoid attacks will not in fact kill their loves, and to kill the Yale/Bosie within would mean carrying dead objects inside—the very definition of depression.

But how could it have been different? By what mechanism could either artist “keep love alive in [his] heart” (134). Wilde states: “I have got to make everything that has happened to me good for me” (155). Searching for a way to change his nuclear depressive script to one of affluence, Wilde writes, “I got to learn how to be happy” (158). But in order to create better scenes, he must learn how to absorb the bad ones:

The important thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do, if the brief remainder of my days is not to be maimed, marred, and incomplete, is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. (155)

When Tomkins theorizes affluence scripts, he also speaks about the capacity to absorb:

The maintenance of affluence demands the capacity to understand and absorb negative affect when it *is* encountered. One cannot afford excessive specialization even of rewarding affluence without some capacity for the compensation of and absorption of the confrontation with the inevitable suffering by the self and by other. (3:738)

Or, as Klein puts it, “a greater capacity to bear suffering results in a greater insight into his psychic reality and enables him to work through the depressive position” (3:279). For Tomkins, affluence and integration stem from a capacity to absorb scenes of negative affect. For Klein, enjoyment of a good internal object is only possible “if the capacity for love is sufficiently developed” (3:187). And for Wilde, “it is love and the capacity for it that distinguishes one

human being from another” (*De Profundis* 178). But there are limits to one’s capacity to take things in. Klein asserts that “envy spoils the capacity for enjoyment” (3:186); Tomkins warns of the excessive drain that the toxicity of fear and terror can place on “the channel capacity” of consciousness (1:294); and Wilde observes, “Emotional forces....are as limited in extent and duration as the forces of physical energy. The little cup that is made to hold so much can hold so much and no more” (199).

The key word here is *capacity*. The term is not only ubiquitous in Klein and Tomkins, it is littered throughout the annals of psychoanalysis. Noting that “the ubiquity of the word and its unremarkable ordinariness may have obscured its real significance in the language of psychoanalysis” (1217), organizational psychologist Robert French argues that the term *capacity* offers us better ways for conceptualizing personal development:

The notion of capacity may offer an alternative to what appears to be an inevitable drift into hierarchical thinking about development. Whatever terms are used, even those specifically intended to counter linear thinking about learning, such as *position*, or *loop*—or, almost inevitably, *capacity* itself—tend to be interpreted in hierarchical terms, as stages, phases or levels, each ‘superior’ to the previous one....The metaphor of expansion and containment in the notion of capacities may offer an important alternative to these dominant images. (1221-1222)

French pulls from the work of Winnicott and Bion to craft a working definition of capacity: “the ability to hold enough to be able to hold something for another as well as for oneself” (1223). In the remaining pages of my dissertation, I want to stretch out this “metaphor of expansion and containment” by returning to Halsted’s fisting scene and brooding on the queer capacities made

available not only within Halsted's and Wilde's work in particular but also within scenes of queer writing in general.

But first a disclaimer: by summoning up fisting as a one possible representation of queer writing, I do not mean to posit this particular act as *the primal scene* of queerness. Nor do I want to suggest, as many clinicians and theorists have done, that anal manipulation and all the affects that may or may not go with it—such as enjoyment, fear, excitement, anger, distress, surprise, to name a few—are the exclusive domain of gay and straight men. Quite the contrary. What attracts me to the rectum is the simple and true fact that, well, everyone has one. In her penetrating discussion of the anal erotics in Henry James's writing practices, Sedgwick explains that she likes “the fisting image as a sexual phantasmatic” because it offers “a switchpoint not only between homo- and heteroeroticism, but between allo- and autoeroticism (after all, James in the *Notebooks* passage is imagining fisting himself) and between the polarities that a phallic economy defines as active and passive” (*Tendencies* 101). Jeanne Barney, “one of Fred's best friends and surely the only woman who attended every leather event in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s” (Jones 41), offers one window into a few of those switchpoints:

I was with the guys and I was a sort of a Mother Superior. I would be lying if I said my interests weren't piqued. Just by chance I met a detective from Hollywood Division. I used to get him in my living room and get him all lubed up with K-Y. And there is nothing in this whole world as satisfying as having your fist up the ass of the LAPD. (qtd. in Moore 66)

A maternal figure capable of rendering great anal pleasure and punishment, Barney hovers around the entire film. During the famous final scene in which Halsted fists Yale's stand-in, the

camera keeps cutting away to the portrait of a woman on the wall. No doubt, Mother Barney looks on.

The mother who fists hovers around the edges of Wilde's text. The pornographic affect in Wilde is shame, and the tutelary spirit of Speranza demands that it be absorbed. In his essay on Fred Halsted's film, Patrick Moore locates the pornographic in *L.A. Plays Itself*, not in the acts themselves, but in the affects surrounding them:

Here is a porno movie in which the sexual act is entirely beside the point, where the violent emotional climax is far more important than ejaculation... What is being explored ... is a kind of sex that depends not upon erections or ejaculations, but rather on an emotional stretching. (Moore 62)

The scene of writing in *De Profundis* is a scene of fisting, an emotional stretching. Wilde attempts to stretch his emotional capacities through the sadomasochistic repetitions of all the suffering he has experienced:

For just as the body absorb things of all kinds, things common and unclean no less than those that the priest or a vision has cleansed, and converts them into swiftness or strength, into the play of beautiful muscles and the moulding of fair flesh, into the curves and colours of the hair, the lids, the eye; so the soul in its turn has its nutritive functions also, and can transform into noble moods of thought and passion of high import what in itself is base, cruel, and degrading; nay, more, may find in these its most august modes of assertion, and can often reveal itself most perfectly through what was intended to desecrate or destroy. (156)

There are a lot of "things" being absorbed here. First is the dawning realization that abjection can confer a certain dignity, that, following Genet, the most sacred writing is often the most



profane. He also takes in the idea that “things common and unclean” have their “nutritive function.” Finally, he comes to the understanding that he must absorb everyone and everything that had a hand in his downfall, including himself:

The important thing, the thing that lies before me, the thing that I have to do... is to absorb into my nature all that has been done to me, to make it part of me, to accept it without complaint, fear, or reluctance. (155)

Taking all these things personally stretches Wilde’s text to the limit, as he includes not only the internal objects of Bosie, Queensberry, Lady Queensberry, and Speranza, but also all the other texts he pulls into his orbit. His imaginative close readings of Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, and the Gospels are not meant as evidence in an overarching argument, or at least that it not their most important function. Nor is his recycling of his own texts symptom of a solipsistic, pathological brooding. Rather, his readings and his repetitions are ways to get outside the cell of his nuclear depressive script by populating his internal world with more people, things, and landscapes to brood about.

Wilde is capacious in his absorption of other textual bodies. With the compression of time that marks the depressive comes an expanse of space in which to wander. Sedgwick describes such depressive wandering as “the art of *loosing*” (*Touching Feeling* 3). In the last book to be published during her lifetime, Sedgwick admitted “one of the cumulative stories told by *Touching Feeling* may be of a writer’s decreasing sense of having a strong center of gravity in a particular intellectual field” (2). Her work does canvass a wide terrain of generic forms: from “editorial experiments in collaboration” (3) to the “double-voiced *haibun* of *A Dialogue on Love*” (3), from cancer journalism to textile art. Sedgwick’s peripatetic pedagogy, her “art of *loosing*,” is capacious in its embrace of different voices, different tones:

Ideally life, loves, and ideas might then sit freely, for a while, on the palm of the open hand. (3)

As far back as *Between Men*, one can see Sedgwick's permissive, what Quinn would call her "loose" (319) and "high-handed" (309), use of quotation. She doesn't heed the grammar school admonishment to laboriously introduce and elaborate quotes. Quotes, even incredibly long ones, are dropped into the middle of her text as if their presence is self-evident. For Sedgwick, quoting someone can mean something different than providing evidence. Take, for instance, this assignment from her "Experimental Critical Writing" class:

Read the first two-thirds or so of Neil Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mister Oscar Wilde*...Pay special attention...to the different ways he uses quotations. He doesn't seem to see them as "evidence" for a thesis put forth in his own prose—at points, his books almost reminds me of the German critic Walter Benjamin's fantasy that the perfect book would consist *exclusively* of quotations. ("Teaching 'Experimental Critical Writing'" 109)

I must admit one phantasy animating this dissertation has been the prospect of endlessly quoting Sedgwick. In many ways, my dissertation is a recitation of Sedgwick's final book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, the only difference being the substitution of *Depressive* for *Affect*. Sedgwick herself was given to inserting long quotations into her work, sometimes with little in the way of introductions, especially in her writing on Tomkins. In some respects, this penchant for longer and longer quotes stems from the chunkiness of Tomkins's ideas. Like Marcel Proust or cultural critic Theodor Adorno, Tomkins resists easy extraction, the threads of his thinking too long to accommodate short sound bites. And no doubt, Sedgwick wants us to love Tomkins as much as she does, revealing her crush with the lover's locution:

*Tomkins says.* But the performative around quoting Tomkins, or anyone for that matter, might not be so much to exercise some form of authority or to demonstrate our love of a text, but rather “to show how perfectly [the text] understands us” (*Touching Feeling* 117). Sedgwick wants Tomkins to love us, as much as she loves him.

“Here’s a Buddhist meditation I’ve read about,” Sedgwick tells us. “It happens in a public place; the substance of it is to recognize that every other person there, one by one, male and female and young and old, has been, in some earlier life, your mother” (*Dialogue* 216). Despite her preternatural shyness, Sedgwick is “pretty good at this meditation,” finding even in “a girl who’s anxious, anorexic, half crazed with all her narcissistic burden” some “curve of tenderness”—“the sense of her possible, beautiful care of me” (217). Wilde’s reworking of texts, both his and that of others, is his way of understanding their possible, beautiful care of him, as if to say

Isn’t she beautiful?

There she is, there she is

There she is, there she is

Mama is everywhere

He must have loved her so much” (Sondheim, *Sunday in the Park*). A depressive reading means finding love letters addressed to us.

In those early writing scenes from prison, Wilde laments the “terrible thoughts that gnaw [him]

Thought, to those

that sit alone

and silent and in bonds,

being ‘no winged living thing’,

as Plato feigned it,

but a thing dead,

breeding what is horrible,

like a slime that shows monsters to the moon” (*Complete Letters* 669).

Here is one scene of depressive pedagogy. Wilde’s thinking is nuclear and analogic, his brood breeding nothing but death and despair. But what about that open window with its promise of air and light? In an early version of *L.A. Plays Itself* (the version probably closest to Halsted’s heart),<sup>71</sup> the order of the two major sex scenes was reversed. The scene of fisting opened out onto the Edenic scene of Malibu Canyon, as if Halsted were filming Genet who

saw the eye of Gabès become adorned with flowers,

with foliage,

become a cool bower

which I crawled to and entered with my entire body,

to sleep on the moss there, in the shade. (253)

A horticulturalist by trade, Halsted wanted to make a film about nature, wildlife, and bugs. The camera lingers on nature shots as much as it does on the sexual encounter between a hiker and

---

<sup>71</sup> Interviewing Halsted’s reputed first lover, a man who requests that he only be identified by the pseudonym Frank, William E. Jones asks “which version of *L.A. Plays Itself* he had seen at MoMA. [Jones] mention[s] that in the original version of the film, described in many early reviews, the reels were in reverse order; first the alienated sexuality of the city scenes, culminating with fist fucking, then the long, idyllic (and anticlimactic) nature scene. Frank knew exactly what [Jones] was talking about; indeed, he took credit for convincing Fred to arrange the film in its present order” (95). As Frank tells it, Halsted “was more interested in putting together a hopeful film that went from bad to good, from anonymous pickups to a one-on-one relationship. I was more interested in making it bad, ending with the dark, awful scene” (qtd. in Jones 96).

what the film's press release identifies as "Elf in Stream" (Jones 24). Likewise, Wilde ends *De Profundis* on a pastoral note:

I have a strange longing for the great simple primeval things, such as the sea, to me no less of a mother than the Earth. It seems to me that we all look at Nature too much, and live with her too little....Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole. (208)

In this passage reminiscent of "Song of Songs" in the *King James Bible*, Wilde is the Elf in the Stream, finding once again Speranza, his mother who "knew life as a whole."

After being released from Reading Gaol, Wilde found refuge in a small seaside village. His thinking became variant, his scripts affluent. From Napoule, he writes,

I wish there was some chance  
of your coming out here:  
the weather is lovely—  
blue and gold weather—  
and the warm sun broods on the sea. (*Complete Letters* 1114)

Almost a century later, Tomkins would retire in similar fashion: "in a house by the sea in Strathmere, thinking and writing in a study overlooking the breaking surf, he re-created the major elements of an intense, highly valued positive-affect scene" (Alexander, "Silvan S. Tomkins" 260). There, he would finish his magnum opus, dedicating last two volumes,

To my mentor

who died recently,

I offer this belated gift ((3:xxxv)

Just this side of paradise, scenes of queer writing are about opening up the dark storm cell of nuclear depression and exploring the wider terrain of depressive scenes. In these more aerated scenes, we feel our way towards scripts of affluence, scripts characterized by queer relations with persons, places, and things. In that sense, depressives are capacious. In her essay “Capacity,” Judith Butler describes how she “has been moved to think otherwise by virtue of reading and teaching Sedgwick...and in every instance it has demanded that

I think

in a way

that I did not know

thought could do—” (109)

Sedgwick’s depressive pedagogy means making, through manual labors, enough space in which to think otherwise. It is about stretching one’s capacity to think something again and to think it differently.

Sedgwick understands the implicit message behind Virginia Woolf’s assertion that “a women must have money and a room of her own if she is to write” (4). Isn’t the commodity procured by money and a room the luxury of having untold time to masturbate and to brood? Sedgwick’s therapist reads the child Sedgwick’s being left to her own self-pleasuring devices as parental neglect. But the adult Sedgwick is protective of “that child’s privacy to masturbate” and “can’t bear the thought that [Shannon wants] this kid constantly haled out of her room, back into the space of the family, in the name of togetherness and mental hygiene” (*Dialogue* 81). Sedgwick’s self-pleasuring is set against the hygienic space of the nuclear family whose

sequential temporality collapses in favor of a queer simultaneity. *At the same time* is among her most favored expressions.<sup>72</sup> Speaking of her queer friendships, Sedgwick notes,

no one is, so to speak, passing on the family name; there's a sense in which they slide up more intimately alongside one another than can any lives that are moving forward according to the regular schedule of generations. 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 best to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company. (*Touching Feeling* 149)

Sedgwick does not heed the cynical warning *misery loves company*. She embraces it. The collapse of generational narrative ushers in a queer house, where Sedgwick, in her haiku to me, can occupy the position of both mother and grandmother, José Muñoz becoming both brother and maternal uncle, as lateral and transversal relations come into focus. I might play mother to both. Sedgwick's persistent present honors the ways in which the present is never a simple thing to know. Neither solipsistic nor nihilistic, her masturbatory brood offers warmth, protection, and shelter (in other words, hope that "thing with feathers") to all those whose lives, loves, and work run counter to a normative clock. We are her brood.

---

<sup>72</sup> The phrase appears twenty-four times in *Touching Feeling*; eighteen times in *A Dialogue on Love*; sixty times in *Tendencies*; sixty-five times in *Epistemology of the Closet*; and fifty-four times in *Between Men*.

## Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.
- Ahuja, Anjana. "Sadness: A Natural Antidote." *The Times* 3 Dec. 2007: n.pag. Web. 31 Aug. 2014.
- Alexander, Irving. "Silvan S. Tomkins: Biographical Sketch." Sedgwick and Frank 251-264. ---. "Foreword." Demos, *Exploring Affect* vii-xi.
- Almodóvar, Pedro, dir. *All About My Mother* [*Todo sobre mi madre*]. Sony Pictures, 1999. DVD.
- Arendt, Hannah. "Walter Benjamin 1892-1940." Introduction. *Illuminations*. By Walter Benjamin. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 1-55. Print.
- Auden, W.H. "Funeral Blues." *Another Time: Poems*. New York: Random House, 1940. 78. Print.
- Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. New York: Vintage Classics, 2007. Print.
- Bak, John S. "Abbott and Costello Meet...John Hawkes: The Goose on the Grave, Affect, and Tomkin's Script Theory." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 29.1-2 (2006): 3-17. Print.
- Barber, Stephen M., and David L. Clark. "Queer Moments." Introduction. *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*. Eds. Barber and Clark 1-53.
- Barber, Stephen M., and David L. Clark, eds. *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Two Girls, Fat and Thin." Barber and Clark 71-108.
- Berlant, Lauren, and Lee Charles Edelman "What Survives?" Modern Language Association



- Annual Convention. Los Angeles. 6 January 2011. Conference Presentation.
- Barthes Roland. *Mourning Diary*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009. Print.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. Print.
- Bartlett, Neil. *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1988. Print.
- Baxter, Liliane Kshensky. "To Heal and Recreate Ourselves: Shame, the Holocaust, and Nonviolence." Diss. Emory U., 2002. Print.
- "Be Stupid Campaign." *Diesel*. 2010. Web. 23 November 23, 2012.
- Bellows, Sierra. "The Evolution of Depression: How Depression Might—or Might Not—Be A Biological Adaptation." *University of Virginia Magazine* Summer 2012: 34-35. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002. Print.
- . *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*. Trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994. Print.
- . *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: Verso, 1990. Print.
- Bersani, Leo. "'The Culture of Redemption': Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein." *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 (1986): 399-421.
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *The Way We Read Now*. Ed. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. Spec. issue of *Representations* 108 (2009): 1-21. Print.
- Britzman, Deborah. "Theory Kindergarten." Barber and Clark 121-142.
- Bush, Kate. "Running Up That Hill." *Hounds of Love*. EMI Records, 1985. Cassette.

Butler, Judith. "Afterword: After Loss, What Then?" *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Eds.

David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Print.

---. "Capacity." Barber and Clark 109-119.

---. "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 2.2 (1990): 105-125. Print.

---. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Print.

Carlson, Rae. "Silvan Tomkins's Legacy: A Grand Theory of Personality." Demos,

*Exploring Affect* 295-300.

Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998. Print.

Chambers-Letson, Joshua, and Robert Diaz, eds. *Repairing Feminism. Performing Reparation: Practice, Methodology, Process*. Spec. Issue of *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 16:2 (2006): 169-339. Print.

Crean, Jeremy Paul. "Freedom and Constraint: The Structuring Roles of Affect in the Writing of Four Twentieth-Century Poets." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 2001. Print.

Crozier, Susan. "Making It After All: A Reparative Reading of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11:1 (2008): 51-67. Print.

---. "Making It After All: A Reparative Reading of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 11:1 (2008): 51-67. Print.

Demos, E. Virginia. "An Affect Revolution: Silvan Tomkins's Affect Theory." Demos,

*Exploring Affect* 17-23.

Demos, E. Virginia, ed. *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition*. Arlington, VA:

- American Psychiatric Association, 2000. Print.
- Diaz, Robert G. "Reparative Acts: Redress and the Politics of Queer Undoing in Contemporary Asian/America." Diss. City U of New York, 2008. Print.
- Duggan, Lisa. "Making It Perfectly Queer." *Socialist Review* 22.1 (1992): 11-31. Print.
- Eiland, Howard and Michael W. Jennings. *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014. Print.
- Faunce, Robert Joseph. "A Semester in Purgatory: At the Intersections of Pedagogy, Interpellation, Queerness, and Mourning." Diss. City U of New York, 2009. Print.
- Flatley, Jonathan. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008. Print.
- . "Unlike Eve." *Honoring Eve: A Symposium Celebrating the Work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*. Boston University. 31 October 2009. Conference Presentation.
- . "Unlike Eve Sedgwick." Erin Murphy and J. Keith Vincent 225-234. Print.
- Fosse, Bob. *Chicago: A Musical Vaudeville (1975 Original Broadway Cast)*. Perf. Chita Rivera, Gwen Verdon, and Jerry Orbach. Arista, 1996. CD.
- Foucault, Michel. *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. Trans. R. James Goldstein. Cambridge :Semiotext(e), 1991. Print.
- Frank, Adam. "Some Affective Bases for Guilt: Tomkins, Freud, Object Relations." *ESC: English Studies in Canada*. 32.1 (2006): 11-25. Print.
- . "Medium Poe." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 48.2 (2006): 149-174. Print.
- . "Symptom and Sensation in Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Gertrude Stein." Diss. Duke U., 1997. Print.

- French, Robert. "The Importance of *Capacities* in Psychoanalysis and the Language of Human Development." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 80.6 (1999): 1215-1226. Print.
- Gagnier, Regenia. "De Profundis as *Epistola: in Carcere et Vinculis*: A Materialist Reading of Oscar Wilde's Autobiography." *Criticism* 26.4 (1984): 335-354. Print.
- Garland, Judy. *Live at Carnegie Hall*. Rec. 23 April 1961. Capitol, 1961. LP.
- Genet, Jean. *Funeral Rites*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Grove Press, 1969. Print.
- Gladwell, Malcom. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005. Print.
- Goldberg, Jonathan. "Eve's Future Figures." Modern Language Association Annual Convention. Los Angeles. 6 January 2011. Conference Presentation.
- Gordon, Rebecca M. "Between Thought and Feeling: Affect, Audience, and Critical Film History." Diss. Indiana U, 2007. Print.
- Guy, Josephine M. and Ian Small. "Reading *De Profundis*." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 49.2 (2006): 123-149. Print.
- Halsted, Fred, dir. and perf. *L.A. Plays Itself*. Eight of Clubs Production, 1972. Film.
- Halsted, Fred and Joey Yale. "Who's On Top? Fred Halsted and Joey Yale" *Skin Magazine* 1981. *BJ Pornology Pages*. Web. 31 Aug. 2014.
- Hatch, James C. "Refiguring the Fall: Intertextuality in Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats." Diss. City U of New York, 2005. Print.
- Hinshelwood, R.D. *The Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. London: Free Association Books, 1989. Print.
- Horan, Patrick M. *The Importance of Being Paradoxical: Maternal Presence in the Works of Oscar Wilde*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997. Print.

- Hullot-Kentor, Robert. "Translator's Introduction." Introduction. *Aesthetic Theory*. By Theodor W. Adorno. xi-xxi. Print.
- Isaacs, Susan. "The Nature and Function of Phantasy." *Unconscious Phantasy*. Ed. Ricardo Steiner. London: Karnac Books, 2003. 145-198. Print.
- Jones, William E. *Halsted Plays Himself*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011. Print.
- Kiki and Herb Will Die For You: Live at Carnegie Hall*. Perf. Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman. Evolver, 2005. CD.
- Kimball, Roger. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. Print.
- Kincaid, James. "When Whippoorwills Call." Barber and Clark 229-241.
- King, Emily "Reconsidering Reparation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Critical Reading Practices." *Pacific Coast Philology* 43 (2008): 55-71. Print.
- Klein, Melanie. *The Writings of Melanie Klein*. 4 vols. New York: The Free Press, 1975. Print.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne. *Andy Warhol Tribute*. Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, New York. 25 October 2003. Panel Discussion.
- . "Wilde's Hard Labor and the Birth of Gay Reading." *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*. Eds. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Melanie Klein*. Trans. Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. Print.
- Kuriyama, Shigehisa. *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*. New York: Zone Books, 2002. Print.
- Lassen, Christian. *Camp Comforts: Reparative Gay Literature in Times of AIDS*. Bielefeld:

- Transcript Verlag, 2011. Print.
- Lehrer, Jonah. "Depression's Upside." *New York Times Magazine* 25 Feb. 2010:38. Print.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. Print.
- Leys, Ruth. *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. Print.
- Likierman, Meira. *Melanie Klein: Her Work in Context*. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Limitless*. Dir. Neil Burger. Perf. Bradley Cooper, Abbie Cornish, and Robert De Niro. Relativity Media, 2011. Film.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. Print.
- . "Some Day My Mom Will Come." *Postmodern Culture (PMC)* 15.2 (2005): n.pag. Web. 24 June 2013.
- . "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading." Erin Murphy and J. Keith Vincent 235-241. Print.
- Lucas, Duncan Alexander. "Dreams We Learn: Affect Theory, Genre, and the Example of Tragedy." Diss. McMaster U, 2008. Print.
- Lynch, Michael. "Terrors of Resurrection 'by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick'." *Confronting AIDS through Literature: The Responsibilities of Representation*. Ed. Judith Laurence Pastore. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 79-83. Print.
- Meyer, Neil. "Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9.1 (2011): 142-166. Print.
- Manderfield, Richard J. "The Affective Dilemma in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry." Diss.

- Michigan U, 2004. Print.
- Mitchell, Julia. Introduction. *The Selected Melanie Klein*. By Melanie Klein. New York: The Free Press, 1986. Print.
- Moon, Michael. "On the Eve of the Future." Modern Language Association Annual Convention. Los Angeles. 6 January 2011. Conference Presentation.
- Moore, Patrick. "The Life and Films of Fred Halsted." *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004. Print.
- Murphy, Erin, and J. Keith Vincent, eds. *Honoring Eve: A Special Issue on the Work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick*. Spec. issue of *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 52.2 (2010): 159-307. Print.
- Nathanson, Donald L., M.D. "The Case Against Depression." *Bulletin of the Tomkins Institute* 1 (1994): 9-11. *The Tomkins Institute*. Web. 17 March 2014. <<http://www.tomkins.org/tomkins-topics/depression/the-case-against-depression/>>
- . Prologue. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*. By Silvan S. Tomkins. xi-xxvi.
- . *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of the Self*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992. Print.
- Phillips, Adam. *Winnicott*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. Print.
- Probyn, Elspeth. *Blush: Faces of Shame*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005. Print.
- Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time*. 6 vols. Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terrence Kilmartin. Rev. by D.J. Enright. New York: Modern Library, 1998. Print.
- Queen. *The Show Must Go On*. Parlophone, 1991. CD Single.
- Quinn, Vincent. "Loose Reading? Sedgwick, Austen and Critical Practice." *Textual Practice*

- 14.2 (2000): 305-326. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Planetarium." *The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970*. New York, W.W. Norton, 1971. 13-14. Print.
- . "Tear Gas." *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New, 1950-1984*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. 198-200. Print.
- Sánchez-Pardo, Esther. *Cultures of the Death Drive: Melanie Klein and Modernist Melancholia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Saphire, Rick. "Judy Garland Rehearsal." *YouTube*. Web. 23 November 2012.
- Schweitzer, Ivy. "Reparative Retelling by Male Narrators: Grace Paley Writing Social Change." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 3:2 (2009): 173-180. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Print.
- . *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. New York: Arno, 1980. Print.
- . *A Dialogue on Love*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999. Print.
- . *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Print.
- . *Fat Art, Thin Art*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994. Print.
- . "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.3 (2007): 625-642. Print.
- . "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading; or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You." *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. 1-37. Print.
- . "Pedagogy." *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 162-187. Print.



- . "A Poem Is Being Written." *Representations* 17 (1987): 110-143. Print.
- . "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 1-16. Print.
- . "Queer Sex Habits (Oh, no! I mean) Six Queer Habits: Some Talking Points." *Queer-e* 1.1 (1995): n.pag. Queer Resources Directory. Web. 31 August 2014. <<http://www.qrd.org/qrd/media/journals/queer-e-v1.n1/article.3>>
- . "Sedgwick on Sex, Death and Children." *The News and Observer* 11 Sept. 1994: 8G. Print.
- . "Silvan Tomkins." *ENGL 80400. Non-Oedipal Psychologies*. The Graduate Center—City University of New York, New York, NY. 26 October 2004. Discussion.
- . "Teaching/Depression." *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 4.2 (2006): 1-6. Web. 23 November 2012.
- . "Teaching 'Experimental Critical Writing'." *The Ends of Performance*. Ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 104-115. Print.
- . *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. Print.
- . "Socratic Raptures, Socratic Ruptures: Notes Toward Queer Performativity." *English Inside and Out: Essays from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the English Institute*. Ed. Susan Gubar and Jonathan Kamholtz. New York: Routledge, 1993. 122-136. Print.
- . "This Piercing Bouquet: An Interview with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick." Barber and Clark 243-262.
- . *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- . *The Weather in Proust*. Ed. Jonathan Goldberg. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- . "Wilde in the Streets: A Conversation with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Wayne Koestenbaum,

and Robert Reid-Pharr." *Oscar Wilde: A Life in Six Acts*. Morgan Library. 16 Nov. 2001.

Panel Discussion.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins." Introduction. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. By Silvan S. Tomkins. 1-28. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Andrew Sullivan. "Introduction: Performativity and Performance." *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print. 1-18. Print.

Shahani, Nishant. "Queer Pedagogy: A Reparative Retelling of American Studies." Diss. U of Florida, 2006. Print.

Shmurak, "Demystifying Emotion: Introducing the Affect Theory of Silvan Tomkins to Objectivists." *Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 8.1 (2006): 1-18, 163. Print.

Siegal, Lee. "The Gay Science: Queer Theory, Literature, and the Sexualization of Everything." *The New Republic* 9 Nov. 1998: 30-42. Print.

Smith, M. Brewster. "Introduction." Demos, *Exploring Affect* 1-12.

Sondheim, Stephen. *Sunday in the Park with George*. Perf. Mandy Patinkin and Bernadette Peters. 1984. Image Entertainment, 1999. DVD.

Sontag, Susan. "Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes." *Where the Stress Falls*. New York: Picador, 2001. 63-88. Print.

Spillius, Elizabeth Bott, Jane Milton, Penelope Garvey, Cyril Couve, and Deborah Steiner, eds. *The New Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Steiner, George. Introduction. *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*. By Walter Benjamin. 7-24. Print.

- Stevens, Wallace. "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1997. 643-665. Print.
- Tissari, Heli. "Oops Blush! Beyond Metaphors of Emotion." *Cognitive Linguistics: Convergence and Expansion*. Ed. Mario Brdar, Stefan Th Gries, and Milena Zic Fuchs. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Benjamins, 2011. 291-304. Print.
- Thomas, Kate. "On Being Too Slow, Too Stupid, Too Soon." *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*. 4 vols. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2008. Print.
- . "Inverse Archaeology." Demos, *Exploring Affect* 284-290.
- . "The Quest for Primary Motives: Biography and Autobiography of an Idea." Demos, *Exploring Affect* 27-63.
- . "Revisions to Script Theory—1990." Demos, *Exploring Affect* 389-410.
- . *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*. Ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. Print.
- . "Script Theory." Demos, *Exploring Affect* 312-388.
- Tucker, Irene. "Macaulay's Paranoid Parliament: Queer Theory, Victorian Medicine, and The History of England." *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 33.2 (2006): 82-123. Print.
- Van Leer, David. *The Queening of America: Gay Culture and Straight Society*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- . "Trust and Trade." *Critical Inquiry* 15.4 (1989): 758-763. Print.
- Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*. Dir. Robert Aldrich. Perf. Bette Davis and Joan Crawford.

Warner Bros.,1962. Film.

Whitman, Walt. "Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand." *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. Ed. Michael Moon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 100. Print.

Whybrow, Peter C., M.D. *A Mood Apart: The Thinker's Guide to Emotion and Its Disorders*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997. Print.

Wilde, Oscar. *De Profundis and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

---. *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000. Print.

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Signet Book, 1974. Print.

Winnicott, D.W. *Holding and Interpretation: Fragments of an Analysis*. London: Karnac Books, 1989. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harvest Book, 1989. Print.