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## Some Avenues for Feeling

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A D A M F R A N K

## Some Avenues for Feeling

*The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects*, by Charles Altieri. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. Pp. x + 299. \$52.50 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

*Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant. New York: Routledge, 2004. Pp. 272. \$90.00 hardback, \$24.95 paperback.

*Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, by Winfried Menninghaus. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003. Trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb. Pp. viii + 471. \$57.50 hardcover, \$19.95 paperback.

*Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. xii + 195. \$54.95 cloth, \$18.95 paperback.

What can an attention to affect offer those of us who continue to be engaged by criticism, who do it for a living or find it indispensable for some other reasons? For one thing, thinking about affect can change what counts as material and what material might do. I am using the word *material* in the psychoanalytic sense to mean “the patient’s words and behaviour as a whole, in so far as they offer a sort of raw material for interpretations and constructions.”<sup>1</sup> Affect is part of what an analyst or critic considers in order to build a convincing interpretation (of a lived scene, of a literary or cultural text): one sign that I am performing a good reading or interpreting well is if this reading helps me to understand why I feel a certain way, or why a text makes me feel this way. This is especially the case if a feeling is counterintuitive or perverse in the sense that it undermines or is simply outside of what I recognize to be my “own” desires or wishes. Affects or feelings fit the psychoanalytic bill perfectly when they are felt to be, as Laplanche and Pontalis put it, somewhat “alien . . . as far as the conscious subject is concerned” (246); when they are considered “incommensurate with [a subject’s] conscious motives” (246), they become material for analysis, symptomatic of unconscious wishes, for example, or structures.

Affects may serve as exemplary material in this specific psychoanalytic sense, but they need not only be symptoms or objects of analysis. Affect, and it will help to specify a range of affects to make this point, may also play other roles in elaborating interpretations or in theory construction, and may play an especially crucial role in the formation of objects and practices. For example, I may take my excessive distress at being interrupted in the classroom as a symptom; but my excitement at coming up with some explanation may not itself be symptomatic of anything besides a general addiction to posing and trying to answer questions. Or consider my nervous curiosity in developing tactics to do something about this distress, my frustration when these tactics fail, or my relief when they actually work: I do not take these various feelings to be symptoms, but rather as accompanying and motivating activities other than explanation, including (and primarily, in this case) a revised relation to my teaching practice.

In contrasting these ways of thinking about affect (as object of symptomatic analysis, or as motivating practice) I do not mean to oppose them as, for example, the unconscious may be opposed to consciousness, but rather to insist on more intricate and unpredictable relations between consciousness and unconsciousness and a set of associated oppositions (theory/practice, subject/object, self/other). Laplanche and Pontalis point out that the notion of raw material as absolutely distinct from its interpretation or construction can be supported neither temporally, in terms of successive stages of the analysis (first you produce material, then you interpret it) nor in terms of the functions of subject and analyst (to produce material, to interpret it). Psychoanalytic theory, especially in Freud's writing, has offered so many tools for criticism in part by making possible a precise openness with respect to such reciprocal relations between material and construction; this openness has permitted psychoanalytic methods their incalculable effects on twentieth-century criticism more generally (especially deconstructive practices), effects on what it means, and feels like, to do critical work. This openness has also been why psychoanalysis has often been dismissed out of hand as insufficiently scientific, that is, as not sufficiently empiricist or objective in its methods. And to the degree to which psychoanalysis and its uptakes in literary and cultural criticism have been primarily concerned with sexuality and sexual experience, it has alternately been received as providing the most truthful and potentially universal knowledges, or the most narrow and least applicable across a range of cultural experience, or both.

Some of the most interesting things about recent writing about affect: it returns to such psychoanalytic ground without either excluding or foregrounding symptomatic explanation and sexuality, to revisit a notion of "the body" with more differentiated vocabulary, sets of reading and thinking skills, and theoretical goals. Specifically, as Eve Sedgwick suggests in her introduction to *Touching Feeling*, having access to a differentiated vocabulary of affects may make it possible to think outside of the ruses of what Foucault identified as the repressive

hypothesis. Sedgwick offers an extraordinary analysis of how Foucault's critique of repressive hypotheses (narratives and assumptions that oppose repression or prohibition to liberating or liberated sexuality) has been tremendously promising and stultifying, both in Foucault's writing and in its major uptakes; these critiques have foregrounded the identification and analysis of the workings of prohibition as the most important thing for critical work to do, which has had the effect of "propagating the repressive hypothesis ever more broadly by means of displacement, multiplication, and hypostatization" (11). For Sedgwick the danger this poses is cognitive: in limiting the varieties of interpretation that become possible to a hyper-moralized and simplified version of critique (the identification of a text as hegemonic or subversive), other performative possibilities and goals for criticism get lost.

It is difficult to imagine beginning from somewhere other than the identification of prohibition, especially for those of us who turned to literary or cultural criticism precisely because it gave us resources to think in ways that included sophisticated attention to the workings of power. In my case this involved a decision fifteen years ago to move from undergraduate work in linguistics (and analytic philosophy) to graduate work in an English department, a move from the particular idealizations of the empirical science of linguistics to materialist approaches to discourse in Foucault's sense (his reading of Nietzsche's notion of genealogy was especially galvanizing). This attention to discourse and power was at the same time an attention to bodies, an attention stemming largely from Nietzsche's "corporeal turn."<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche's critique of the reification of the first-person grammatical subject, a critique that takes up the implications of nineteenth-century physiologizing of subjectivity, permits the simultaneous turn toward both bodies and language, and the relations between and among these and the institutions, practices, and theories that create value. As Winfried Menninghaus writes in his rich analysis of disgust, "Nietzsche's physiological aesthetics and his physiology of cognition are aimed, in their entirety, at a reconnection of even the most abstract thought processes to affects and corporeally grounded needs" (160). Nietzsche's writing (along with Freud's and Marx's) teaches readers materialist criticism, in part by offering alternatives to mind-body dualisms and the normative hierarchies that such dualisms install. I take the recent attention to affect to be a continuation and transformation of materialist concerns with "the body," one that newly differentiates the space of bodily experience and perception and implicitly asks what it might mean to offer materialist criticism with this distinct inflection.

To begin answering this question, consider how affective experience contributes to the perception of such basic matter as objects. In a chapter on "The Dynamics of Enjoyment-Joy" affect theorist Silvan Tomkins discusses the role this affect plays in the infant's constitution of objects in perception; the brief section's full title is "Enjoyment-joy as a reward from the reduction of excitement

which helps create familiar objects and long-term commitments.”<sup>3</sup> Tomkins tries to answer the question “how is any perceived object endowed with sufficient familiarity in its different parts to be recognized as one object?” (487). He considers this to be a problem of distractibility as it accompanies an infant’s constantly shifting interest: before the infant has a concept of permanent objects in an independent space, Tomkins suggests that “there must be achieved an even more primitive construction which unites the kaleidoscope of changing fragments which move through space into a unitary familiar object which can be recognized as the same object which was seen a moment ago” (487). Tomkins proposes that enjoyment can “provid[e] some containment of the enforced distractibility of the infant” (488), for enjoyment (because of its particular neural trigger, in his theory) lets the perception remain in awareness longer and adds an additional motive to return to what is becoming, for the infant, an object: “This object, now in addition to once having excited interest and lost interest, is an object which has been enjoyed as the same object which was once exciting. In miniature, each such contact yields the enjoyment of the rediscovery of an old friend, the return home, the revisiting of a country first seen on a holiday” (489). Basic recognition or object-formation requires, in addition to cognitive mechanisms, the capacity to be interested and to enjoy.

It is important for Tomkins that affective and cognitive capacities are distinct. Charles Altieri agrees with this, arguing strongly against the prevailing view in Anglo-American philosophy that understands affects as particular kinds of cognitions, interpretations, or qualities emerging from beliefs and judgments: “Many affects have power in our lives because they emerge as immediate aspects of the kind of attention we pay to the world and to ourselves. And how we feel is often shaped less by belief per se than by how we experience the fit of various elements” (10). For Tomkins (as for Altieri) affects help make stuff up, both at relatively lower levels of biological organization (in the example above, infant perception) and at relatively higher ones: Tomkins’s “brief examination of Freud as an example of the role of excitement and courage in a sustained radical intellectual enterprise” (367) is only one of his many discussions of the relations between the affective dispositions of innovative thinkers and writers and the work they are able to do. The autonomous, independent systems of affect and cognition are also interdependent, intimately linked, especially in affect theories: ways of selectively scanning for, amplifying, and organizing the experience of specific affects (enjoyment, say, or fear or shame) that are both based in and seek out experiences that make such affects or affect combinations salient. Such affect theories comprise basic composition or perception.

I should make one caveat before diving further into a discussion of recent publications on affect: my name appears as coauthor of an essay on Silvan Tomkins in Eve Sedgwick’s book. My thinking about affect has been shaped by reading the four volumes of Tomkins’s *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, coediting a

collection of his writing, and using his work for the last few years. The revised notion of “material” I have begun to pursue here has to do with a technical relation between Freud and Tomkins and the implications of this relation for criticism more generally. For Freud, sexuality is a drive or instinct, although one that is different from the other drives (of self-preservation, such as hunger); but Tomkins suggests that Freud’s version of the drive of sexuality smuggles many of the most interesting features of the affect system into its description. Tomkins proposes that the affects are a separate system whose primary evolutionary function is to amplify the drives, including sexuality (I will return to how the affect system’s qualitative differences from the drive system permits it a set of specific freedoms). Attending to the workings of what Tomkins calls affect theories can reflect those psychoanalytic methods of twentieth-century criticism that, even if out of use or forgotten, still provide a guiding sense for what counts as material and its analysis.

Thinking about affect invites an attention to perception, especially varieties of perception across sensory modalities. Smell and taste turn out to be central to Winfried Menninghaus’s wide-ranging, historically organized study of the role of disgust in European (German and French) aesthetics: Menninghaus begins from the formation of the ideal of the beautiful body in the second half of the eighteenth century, and then moves to the nineteenth-century “poetry of putrefaction,” Nietzsche’s physiological aesthetics, Freud’s theorization of libido, a remarkable, extensive treatment of Kafka’s poetics, and disgust and the abject in Bataille, Sartre, and Kristeva. That Menninghaus explicitly aims to avoid repressive hypotheses is clear from his first chapters, which detail the role of disgust as it marks the limit of aesthetic experience in debates of the 1760s (Herder, Lessing, Winckelmann). Disgust, in this writing, short-circuits aesthetic experience: aligned with the lower senses, which deny the distance necessary for aesthetic illusion, the sensation of disgust becomes a sign of nature or reality, outside the bounds of and delimiting the aesthetic. “Symbolically excluded, imaginarily plagued by the fury of vanishment, yet omnipresent, disgust marks the position of a tabooed reality: one that never stops returning to the field of the aesthetic in order once again to be ejected. It is the beautiful’s matter, matrix” (49). These first chapters set the stage for Menninghaus’s understanding of the role of disgust for modernist aesthetics as indicator of the real or the truth, recasting the politics and poetics of transgression through a specification of the role of disgust.

A chapter on the construction of the ideally beautiful body offers a detailed survey of what he calls “the rules for disgust-avoidance” in discussions of classical sculpture, and in the section “Repression or Differentiation?” Menninghaus takes up some of the questions I have begun to raise above. Bringing these rules into the present-day concern with smooth skin and eternal youth, Menninghaus considers the view that such rules are “ideological reflexes pointing to a comprehensive suppression of the body in its basic being and functioning. Such a

view would be in line with Nietzsche's and Freud's interpretation of disgust as something rooted in sexual repression; it would likewise conform to Norbert Elias's description of 'civilization' imposed on all the bodily functions in modern times, as well as to Bakhtin's critique of the idealism of the bodily facade" (92). At this point in his argument Menninghaus seeks to avoid casting these rules as a result of repression and turns instead to the notion of differentiation: "To institute aesthetics as an independent, irreducible form of perception means creating and reflecting upon a realm that is *different* from all other realms. . . . Rather than simply confirming, once again, the suppression of the body and its functions, disgust can thus also be read as the operative source of a distinction generating a new, irreducible phenomenal realm" (92–93). Niklas Luhmann's powerful systems-theoretical approach is behind this use of the notion of differentiation, as well as Menninghaus's description of how disgust marks a distinction between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic, supplying the code for the aesthetic and permitting it to emerge as one among several "autopoietic functional systems" (65).

This attempt to read disgust as itself operative, as participating in perception-formation or theory immediately opens out onto specifications of medium. Menninghaus points out that the aesthetic ideal is, in the first instance, a body made of stone: the aesthetic theorists maintained strict borders between sculptural bodies and flesh and blood ones. Menninghaus reads Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* to show how the aesthetic realm creates a hierarchy in terms of purity/impurity that can be imported into fields other than sculpture: even though the autopoietic system of aesthetics and its pleasures "necessarily mark a border with the other pleasures: a border that cannot be instrumentalized unconditionally as evidence of sexual repression" (95), aesthetic perception can itself generate a sexual pleasure in fetishistic viewing (what he calls statue-erotics, again bringing up contemporary supermodels). While he argues against reading the mark of differentiation between aesthetic and sexual pleasure as evidence of repression, he nevertheless wants to argue that "The rules of the 'beautiful' are the traces of disgust" (96). Such exclusive concentration on one affect or sensation can make disgust seem like the single element that has generated the last 250 years of European aesthetics. Tomkins would call this a strong theory, one that selectively organizes vast amounts of information by way of a small handful of cognitive moves; strong theories tend to ring true, but they are costly. The Luhmannian emphasis on creating systems from making distinctions reduces the phenomenological range of terms and descriptions that aesthetics can offer and gives Menninghaus's intellectual history a remarkable coherence and closure.<sup>4</sup>

I am not sure whether Menninghaus's use of the notion of differentiation gets away from repressive hypotheses, and especially his return to the medium of the body in his chapter on Freud signals the continuing importance of this explanatory concept. Menninghaus offers an impressive specification of the role that dis-

gust plays in Freud's evolutionary theory of repression. For Freud, "[w]alking upright represents a break with the interrelation of smell, excretion, and sexuality that is characteristic of animals" (185–86); disgust accompanies the abandonment or repression of the sexual zones of mouth and anus, an incomplete abandonment central to Freud's understanding of civilization as "the permanent production of abject antiworlds, counterworlds, and underworlds" (188). Menninghaus suggests that "Freud's narrative of the suppression of instinct is the basis of all sexual-political rehabilitation of abandoned practices in the field of culture itself" (190): aesthetics and antiaesthetics emerge from the role that disgust and its overcoming play in the repression and de-sublimation of older forms of libidinal energy. But one useful conclusion to be drawn here is that there may not be just one repressive hypothesis (an attention to a range of affects might permit one to observe that Elias, Freud, Nietzsche, and Bakhtin are not all doing the same thing with "repression" and the body).<sup>5</sup> For Freud, repression names what disgust does to control sexuality part of the time, as one of a host of other controls (or motivators) including shame and fear; together, this set of controls are conveniently grouped together under the name *repression*, but if what we want to do is to examine them singly or link them to factors other than Darwinian evolution (especially other than the reduced version captured by the slogan "anatomy is destiny"), then this catchall notion may not be so useful. Instead of saying disgust is rooted in sexual repression, disgust may be cast as one affective motivator for sexuality among others; exploring and enjoying "tabooed zones of sexual intimacy," or non-tabooed zones for that matter, involves thinking about sets of feelings other than only disgust.

Where Menninghaus pursues one affect to describe its founding role for aesthetics, Charles Altieri pursues a variety of affective experience to offer what he terms "an aesthetics of the affects." Altieri elaborates what an aesthetics (especially of reading poetry and looking at painting) might be like if it were to begin with a close attention to carefully distinguished affective states. Where Menninghaus writes in relation to a European philosophical tradition, Altieri is very much in conversation with an Anglo-American tradition that has largely theorized affect along cognitive lines. Specifically, Altieri seeks to develop "a fundamentally expressivist view of affective agency" (18), one that is less interested in the epistemic worry about how we know feelings (our own and others') and presses toward a performative conception that values first-person construction and stylization over third-person explanation. By contrast with Menninghaus's propulsive, at times exhilarating third-person writing style, Altieri's concerns with subjectivity permits his writing access to an engaging, process-oriented first person that I associate with the discipline of analytic philosophy: a first person that has a way of bringing a reader down a thorny argumentative path, gracefully acknowledging the moments that require ducking under a fallen tree or skipping over a root, although Altieri tends to avoid such figures.

Altieri forwards “the arts as a challenge to dominant philosophical theories of the affects” (as the title of the first chapter puts it) and formulates a theory of emotion that does not rest in psychoanalytic notions of fantasy and projection that, he suggests, ultimately invite the methods of symptomatic explanation. The second chapter discusses paintings (by Caravaggio and Titian, Pissarro and Munch) to build a vocabulary and a number of proposals for the relations between sensation, feeling, affect, emotion, and mood. Altieri defines feelings as “elemental affective states characterized by an imaginative engagement in the immediate processes of sensation” (48); feelings contrast with emotions, which “involve the construction of attitudes that typically establish a particular cause and so situate the agent within a narrative” (48). Altieri suggests that modernist artists sought to separate feelings from emotions: emotions were “beyond repair . . . too contaminated by centuries of association with rhetoric” (50) and wrapped up in narratives of privilege, while “an art devoted to feelings seemed capable of a leanness, an honesty, and a concreteness” (50–51) that might make possible a renovated imagination much closer to sensation than earlier forms of self-theatricalizing subjectivity. This part of Altieri’s project recasts the historical narrative about modernist rejection of the sentimental: instead of the binary opposition sentimental/antisentimental, Altieri’s scheme offers a range of affective states (sensations, feelings, emotions, moods) and a modernist insistence that locates subjective experience in strange, unpredictable encounters with an “object’s materiality” (52), and especially art objects.

Early on Altieri states part of the motivation for his project: he wants to “bring vitality to the Romantic tradition’s efforts to dramatize the limitations of epistemic orientations and to provide some countermeasures of what might count as significant ways to assess values. I come to that tradition through modernism’s intricate efforts to make the nondiscursive and nonepistemic dimensions of art wield the same level of cultural force as did scientific and utilitarian argument” (33). Theories of affect or emotion accompany an interest in (re)assessing values, and Altieri’s elaboration of an aesthetic approach to the affects accompanies an attempt to derive an ethical stance—not so much an ethical theory as a *modus operandi* for generating value from the acts of reading poetry, viewing painting, and thinking and talking about art. Altieri is exquisitely conscious of the difficulties of discussing value while avoiding moralizing, and I think it is fair to characterize what he is after as an ethics of an active imagination. The distinction between active and passive turns out to be important for this elaboration, and he seeks to think about the distinction without normativizing it: “we have to ask what conceptual scheme will allow us to separate those emotions and attitudes which seem for the most part imposed on the agent and those where some kind of active control is present. And we have to worry whether we can speak of control or even mastery of emotions without defining that control in rationalist terms as an understanding of necessity, or for that matter as any kind

of comprehensive understanding” (131). Altieri’s solution is to speak of second-order endorsements, “distinguishing between emotions we find we can endorse as significant for our senses of ourselves and those we find embarrassing or threatening to those senses” (132), a solution that makes sense of the intricate linking between cognitive and affective capacities. But the problem of distinguishing between active and passive affective or emotional experience may only be a problem for an attempt to derive an ethical stance, even at the minimal level of generality Altieri asserts for it. I would suggest that this undecideability of affective experience (as active or passive) comprises how affects are relational and how they define our sense of relationality: that affects are reciprocal by nature may be less a problem than the ground of possibility for the kinds of contingent and particular ethical behaviors that Altieri seeks to promote.

I’ll take Altieri’s ethics of an active imagination over Martha Nussbaum’s normative liberal ethics any day (Altieri devotes chapter 5 to a careful summary and critique of Nussbaum’s attempts to bring emotion into the cognitive fold—he is especially critical of her readings of Joyce). But I worry about any ethics that requires an awareness or appreciation of high modernist art either as its condition or, as it is for Altieri, its proving ground. Altieri’s existential approach to the aesthetic encourages finely tuned awareness, especially in his (non-transcendentalizing) phenomenological attention to specificities. This attention, however, is restricted to art objects and literature: as he puts it, “I had always hated criticism that preferred context to text and insisted on situating works in relation to historical forces and sociopolitical interests” (1). This attempt to conceive relations between value and affect becomes so disconnected from social, institutional, or material (in its traditional sense) factors that it can feel like the baby of Nietzschean critical attention has been thrown away with the bathwater of too-quickly moralizing critique.

Thinking about affect can offer ways to specify how “aesthetics” and “politics” need not be opposed but can be, in systems-theoretical terms, at once independent from and interdependent upon one another, although the subtitle of Altieri’s book and that of the volume on *Compassion* edited by Lauren Berlant do invite such an opposition. Berlant stages the collection, which began in papers given at the September 2000 meeting of the English Institute, as intervening in the specific political context of the Republican platform of “compassionate conservatism” as it emerged in U.S. political discourse in the 1990s. Her introduction offers a concise overview of the move from Great Society liberalism to the more recent scheme, which places primary value on working individuals and their families. Where social interdependence is no longer seen as structural, what had previously been understood as state obligation becomes the more individualized responsibility of local institutions and faith-based volunteers. In this context compassion is no simple “humanizing emotion” (5), but rather “opens a hornet’s nest of problems about what responses should be desired and

when private responses are not only insufficient but a part of the practice of injustice. Compassion turns out not to be so effective or a good in itself. It turns out merely to describe a particular kind of social relation" (7).

If one wants to be aware of structural inequalities that accompany capitalist economies (as Berlant does, and as I do), then to the degree that compassion coopts a relation to suffering in the service of such inequalities it becomes difficult to stomach. But this may not be the only context in which to think about such a complicated emotion, and only the first group of essays in this collection considers compassion explicitly in the broad context of liberalism (Marjorie Garber's genealogy of the term and its relations to sympathy and empathy, Candace Vogler's essay on Poe and Emerson, and Kathleen Woodward's on distinct contemporary treatments of the liberal narrative of compassion). The second group of essays centers on George Eliot (the author panel that year at the English Institute) to unpack the complex of feelings and attitudes that make up the emotion of compassion (Neil Hertz's analysis of George Eliot's locution "poor X" and X's subsequent ruination, Carolyn Williams's essay on the relation between the theatrical form of melodramatic tableau and George Eliot's realism, and Mary Ann O'Farrell's on Eliot's solicitation of identifications as good girl and bad). The final essays in the text center on what one might call scandals of compassion withheld (Lee Edelman's essay on Lacan and Hitchcock; Neville Hoad's on Freud, Darwin, and H. G. Wells; and Deborah Nelson's on Hannah Arendt). The essays range widely in their approaches, and I find Nelson's to be exemplary of how an attention to a writer's style can open out onto her theory of affect. Nelson reads the scandal that followed the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to offer a careful analysis of Arendt's choice of an ironic tone to describe the trial. Nelson unfolds what is at stake in what was so often described as Arendt's "heartlessness" and makes Arendt's style beautifully telling of her theory of thinking and suffering, facing reality and love of the world.

Because Nelson focuses on style and its relations to feeling, she is able to avoid the double binds of sentimentalism in her own analysis. Attention to the play between what gets said and how, and between the linguistic and nonlinguistic, is one of the most valuable things that Eve Sedgwick's book models and makes available. Sedgwick's attention to affect can be characterized as trying to find somewhere to begin thinking (and feeling) about feeling that will not be trapped within the sexist and homophobically structured set of binary oppositions she elucidated fifteen years ago.<sup>6</sup> She casts the primary project of *Touching Feeling* (which revises and collects writing of the last ten years) as an exploration of "promising tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy" (1), and it is relevant to note that this book's subtitle has three main words in apposition (affect, pedagogy, performativity) rather than two conjoined (culture and politics, theory and history). Sedgwick describes these tools and techniques in her introduction, beginning with the centrality of J. L. Austin's writing on per-

formativity for her thinking. She notes how her recent interest in and use of Austin's concept differs from a "deconstructive/queer lineage" that takes up the concept "in the service of an epistemological project that can be roughly identified as antiessentialism" (5). Sedgwick's interest is less in any overarching antiessentialist project than in "attending to the textures and effects of particular bits of language . . . [which] requires a step to the side of antiessentialism, a relative lightening of the epistemological demand on essential truth" (6).

To put this another way, in this volume Sedgwick moves away from only strong theory (in Tomkins's sense) and toward theoretical spaces that do not make monopolizing claims on (or about) experience. Sedgwick's writing stays close to the ground of perception, aiming to open up possibilities for thinking and feeling that are not so much resistant to totalizing theory and practice but rather, by virtue of the writing's attention, precision, specificity, and presence, offer a reading experience whose effect is to de-totalize. Sedgwick is the contemporary thinker who has steered closest to Nietzsche's corporeal/linguistic turn, who has most inventively translated his first-person style. This writing's openness follows, in part, from Sedgwick's sustained interest in thinking about "aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside those that do" (6), and her willingness not to predict in advance their relation: "I assume that the line between words and things or between linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation" (6). This freedom from programmatic statements permits a sharply honed attention to such relations in their different specificities. Consider, by negative contrast, how a more general insistence that words and things occupy separate domains, one beyond or beneath the other, entails an ontological privileging of one over the other (language over reality or vice versa) and a renewed dualism.

The rich notion of performativity permits explorations of the relations among words and things, among words and acts, along several distinct axes. The earlier chapters link performativity to an analytics of shame, for shame is the affect that most accommodates and gives body to performativity in both its theatricalizing and deconstructive senses: "the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and—performativity" (38). For Sedgwick, being attuned to the workings of specific affects in their performative dimensions does not exclude paying attention to historical or institutional factors (theater, or marriage, or slavery); neither does aesthetic perception exclude an activist sense of the possibilities of or in the present. Quite the opposite, as her discussion of texture (elaborated from an essay by Renu Bora) offers a set of valuable questions for any mode of critical thinking: "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What

could I do with it?" (13). Read as method, these questions move fluidly from phenomenological description to historical exploration to a perception of first-person possibilities.

Shame is central for a project that wants to think outside of the ruses of the repressive hypothesis, because it does not emerge primarily from experiences of prohibition or taboo, as Silvan Tomkins understands it, but from experiences of positive affect (interest or enjoyment) that are incompletely reduced. Sedgwick finds several aspects of Tomkins's thinking useful: as distinct from drives, affects are constrained neither by aim nor object, and their time constraints are less stringent as well. "In contrast to the instrumentality of drives and their direct orientation toward an aim different from themselves, the affects can be autotelic" (19), which in combination with their other features permits the affect system to become a motivational system of much greater complexity than the drives. The affects are where Sedgwick would locate "middle ranges of agency" (13), and a chapter on paranoid and reparative reading practices attempts to make space for such middle ranges, especially for queer critical practices that have been exemplarily motivated by what she calls (after Melanie Klein) the paranoid position. Sedgwick's analysis of the nature of such paranoid styles of affective and cognitive critical behavior offers Klein's reparative position as an alternative gestalt, a reparative impulse continuous with an interest in shame.<sup>7</sup>

One aim of Sedgwick's writing is to extend this reparative impulse to everyday practices, both to earlier forms of literary critical practice ("the history of literary criticism can also be viewed as a repertoire of alternative models for allowing weak and strong theory to interdigitate" [145]) and to teaching. The chapter on pedagogy and Buddhism stretches to think about the pedagogical relations between East and West (especially in nineteenth-century U.S. transcendentalist reception of Buddhist teachings), the pedagogical nature of Tibetan Buddhism, and the nature of pedagogy itself. Here Sedgwick depicts the hermeneutic circle of Western interpretation as less a problem or paradox than, for Buddhist thought, a practice, and part of the possibility of elaborating a rich phenomenology of learning. The extraordinary compassion of this essay, written from the perspective of someone "moving through the subjectivity [of conscious dying]" (173), models for a reader how thinking and feeling by way of acts of identification can somehow be more attuned to the possibilities of fine differences (between persons, within persons, among persons and nonpersons, over time and space) than what we ordinarily think of as "identification" could or should allow.<sup>8</sup>

This insistence on relationality is one of several promising things about the recent interest in affect: the vocabulary of affect offers a much more fine-grained recasting of what has gone under the rubric "identification," a way to return to the ground that psychoanalytic models treat without oscillating back and forth between the categories of identification and desire, subject and object. If symp-

tomatic explanations and repressive hypotheses produce objects and subjects negatively by way of prohibition, then attention to affect theories, by beginning from middle or medium spaces, permit emergences of more contingent, even practical subjects and objects. Such an attention may also create continuities between the kinds of thinking and theorizing that we do in our everyday lives and the more specialized, literary or cultural critical thinking that we do in the classroom or our writing. (Critical interest in emotion or feeling can be located, in part, as a response to specialization and an often felt lack of relation, a felt lack that a moralized version of “the political” has been the major supplier for.) Affect theories offer tools for specifying relations between the aesthetic and the political, and between the psychic and the social, that are not only linguistic. Finally, an attention to affect lets me consider the higher-order goals that guide my critical work and gives me more ways to assess what these goals may be, a better sense of the material.

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### Notes

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1. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Material,” *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 246.
2. John Tambornino, *The Corporeal Turn: Passion, Necessity, Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). Tambornino suggests that much of the recent discussion of the body in cultural studies has tended “to emphasize language, belief, and symbolic systems while overlooking affect, disposition, and disciplinary practices,” emphasizing “representations or constructions of the self without exploring *tactics of the self*” (2). Or, I would add, tactics of non-selves.
3. Silvan Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness, Volume One: The Positive Affects* (New York: Springer, 1962), 487.
4. Luhmann’s writing often makes reference to the writing of George Spencer-Brown, who devises a calculus almost entirely from the single act of drawing a distinction. See, for example, Niklas Luhmann, “Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing” in *Theories of Distinction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). George Spencer-Brown, *Laws of Form* (1969; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979).
5. For a more directed use of both Niklas Luhmann’s and Norbert Elias’s work, see Daniel Gil, who writes: “Elias’s model occasionally seems an instance of what Foucault calls a repressive hypothesis, but given Elias’s larger sociological argument it is clear that he is describing not a quantitative reduction of instinctual life but a qualitative change in the nature of human ties.” Daniel Gil, “Before Intimacy: Modernity and Emotion in the Early Modern Discourse of Sexuality,” *ELH* 69 (2002): 865.
6. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California

- Press, 1990). See especially “Some Binarisms (II): Wilde, Nietzsche, and the Sentimental Relations of the Male Body.”
7. Tomkins links shame and a reparative impulse in a discussion of damage-reparative scripts that, he suggests, “map extraordinarily well to the dynamic structure of shame.” Silvan Tomkins, “Revisions in Script Theory—1990,” in E. Virginia Demos, ed., *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 393.
  8. See James Kincaid, “When Whippoorwills Call.” *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer and Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002). See also Sedgwick’s distinction between “identification with” and “identification as” in *Epistemology of the Closet*, 59–63.