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Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank

Here are a few things theory knows today.

Or, to phrase it more fairly, here are a few broad assumptions that shape the heuristic habits and positing procedures of theory today (theory not in the primary theoretical texts, but in the routinizing critical projects of “applied theory”; theory as a broad project that now spans the humanities and extends into history and anthropology; theory after Foucault and Greenblatt, after Freud and Lacan, after Lévi-Strauss, after Derrida, after feminism) when it offers any account of human beings or cultures.

1) The distance of any such account from a biological basis is assumed to correlate almost precisely with its potential for doing justice to difference (individual, historical, and cross-cultural), to contingency, to performative force, and to the possibility of change.

2) Human language is assumed to offer the most productive if not the only possible models for understanding representation.

3) The bipolar, transitive relations of subject to object, self to other, and active to passive, and the physical sense (sight) understood to correspond most closely to these relations are dominant organizing tropes to the extent that the act of dismantling them is framed as both an urgent

We are grateful to Irving Alexander for discussing Tomkins with us and for showing us the full text of his obituary essay on Tomkins. In the multidisciplinary boundary crossing entailed by this project, Timothy Gould, Donna Haraway, Andrew Parker, H. A. Sedgwick, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith have all been characteristically generous.

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and an interminable task. This preoccupation extends to such processes as subjectivation, self-fashioning, objectification, and Othering; to the gaze; to the core of selfhood whether considered as a developmental telos or as a dangerous illusion requiring vigilant deconstruction.

4) Correspondingly, the structuralist reliance on symbolization through binary pairings of elements, defined in a diacritical relation to one another and no more than arbitrarily associated with the things symbolized, has not only survived the structuralist moment but, if anything, been propagated ever more broadly through varied and unrelenting critique. Such a critique reproduces and popularizes the structure even as it may complicate an understanding of the workings of the binaries mentioned above, along with such others as presence/absence, lack/plenitude, nature/culture, repression/liberation, and subversive/hegemonic.

In this essay we want to discuss a figure not presently well known, the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1911–1991), who seems implicitly to challenge these habits and procedures—to challenge them not from the vantage of the present, but from (what we take to be) a moment shortly before their installation as theory. He is also, then, a figure whom such habits and procedures would tend sharply to rebuke. In fact, reading Tomkins's work on affect has consistently involved us in a peculiar double movement; to be responsive to the great interest of his writing seems also, continually, to make graphic the mechanism of what would seem an irresistibly easy discreditation. 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.

Yet we can't convince ourselves that, for instance, the formidably rich phenomenology of emotions in Tomkins is in any accidental or separable relation to his highly suspect scientism. If anything, his scientism seems to interpret as an alternative and far coarser scientism the very theory that would find his so easy to dismiss. The scientism of "theory," indeed, can become visible in this light as a different product of almost the same, very particular technological moment as Tomkins's. The fact that one today sounds cockamamie and the other virtual common sense—or that one sounds ineluctably dated and the other nearly as fresh as print—may reveal less about the transhistorical rightness of "theory" than about the dynamics of consensus formation and cross-disciplinary transmission.

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One “conjoint” of affect-effects we experienced on the way to becoming addicted to reading Tomkins was that his writing excited and calmed, inspired and contented. Once, one of us fell asleep reading and afterwards explained, “I often get tired when I’m learning a lot.” There are many examples of the writing’s brash generosity, and in a section on affect differences in different species we find an example of the writer’s:

The writer successfully domesticated a somewhat wild kitten, Bambi, which had been terrorized by a couple of dozen older cats, all of whom lived together on a farm. Bambi was a wild little anxiety neurotic with an overwhelming fear of all animals, including man. It proved possible, however, to attenuate both his wildness and his fear by holding him tightly as long as was necessary to burn out the fear response. I continued to hold him tightly after his fear passed, to habituate him to non-fearful human contact. This was repeated daily for some time and eventually the fear subsided.¹

This scene could as well describe Tomkins’s writing: a potentially terrifying and terrified idea or image is taken up and held for as many paragraphs as are necessary to “burn out the fear response,” then for as many more until that idea or image can recur in the text without initially evoking terror. Phrases, sentences, sometimes whole paragraphs repeat; pages are taken up with sentences syntactically resembling one another (epistemically modal, non-factitive utterances of the form “It is possible that . . .,” “If . . . may . . .,” “Whether because . . .”), sentences that don’t exemplify a general principle but rather offer a sampling or listing of the possible. This rich claustral writing nurtures, pacifies, replenishes, then sets the idea in motion again. Bambi isn’t the only terrified wild thing in this picture.

During Tomkins’s postdoctoral years at Harvard he underwent a seven-year psychoanalysis for which the immediate stimulus was a severe reading block. “Severe reading block” was a symptom we’d never heard named before, but one has only to hear it named in order to feel one knows it intimately. *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* isn’t least affecting for the traces it bears of an intensively problematized verbal process. Tomkins’s friend of many decades, Irving E. Alexander, described to us in an interview how Tomkins wrote—six or seven rapid handwritten lines to a page, “like automatic writing”—and how sometimes to his great surprise, after writing a long section, he would discover in a drawer a sheaf of papers that he had written months before that reached the same set of conclusions from a different starting point. If the astonishingly heterogeneous

1. Silvan Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 4 vols. (New York, 1962–92): 1:161; hereafter abbreviated *AIC*. A much shorter selection of key passages from *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, edited by the present authors, will soon be available as *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (forthcoming).

writing of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* often embraces multiple overlapping voices to attenuate terror, it does this less to reduce the number of voices than to contain their space of overlap lest it spread over larger sections of the work. Structural repetition is rarely exact, as “may” and “can” and the phrases in which they appear alternate without apparent pattern in a paragraph whose rhythms remind one of Gertrude Stein’s, another writer who certainly knows the pleasures of lists:

If you like to be looked at and I like to look at you, we may achieve an enjoyable interpersonal relationship. If you like to talk and I like to listen to you talk, this can be mutually rewarding. If you like to feel enclosed within a claustrum and I like to put my arms around you, we can both enjoy a particular kind of embrace. If you like to be supported and I like to hold you in my arms, we can enjoy such an embrace. If you like to be kissed and I like to kiss you, we may enjoy each other. If you like to be sucked or bitten and I like to suck or bite you, we may enjoy each other. If you like to have your skin rubbed and I like to do this to you, we can enjoy each other. . . . If you enjoy being hugged and I enjoy hugging you, it can be mutually enjoyable. If you enjoy being dominated and I enjoy controlling you, we may enjoy each other. If you enjoy communicating your experiences and ideas and aspirations and I enjoy being informed about the experiences, ideas and aspirations of others, we can enjoy each other. If you enjoy telling about the past and I enjoy hearing about the past, we may enjoy each other. If you enjoy speculating about and predicting the future and I enjoy being so informed, we can enjoy each other. If you wish to be like me and I wish to have you imitate me, we can enjoy each other. [*AIC*, 1:411–12]

At least as often as Tomkins’s paragraphs permit reader and writer to *do*—here to enjoy, but in other textual places to anger, or become excited or ashamed, or to enter scenes and perform scripts that call upon affective as well as perceptual and memory capacities—they permit one to *not do*:

It is not uncommon that two individuals, both very sociophilic, may be incapable of a sustained social relationship because of varying investments in one or another type of interpersonal interaction. Thus you may crave much body contact and silent communion and I wish to talk. You wish to stare deeply into my eyes, but I achieve intimacy only in the dark in sexual embrace. You wish to be fed and cared for, and I wish to exhibit myself and be looked at. You wish to be hugged and to have your skin rubbed, and I wish to reveal myself only by discussing my philosophy of life. You wish to reveal yourself through your view of the nature of man, but I can externalize myself only through communicating my passion for the steel and tape of a computer that almost thinks like a man. You wish to communicate your most personal feelings about me, but I can achieve social intimacy

only through a commonly shared high opinion about the merits of something quite impersonal, such as a particular theory or branch of knowledge or an automobile. [AIC, 1:413–14]

We got our first taste of Tomkins when we were looking for some usable ideas on the topic of shame. In a sodden landscape of moralistic or maudlin *idées reçues* about what is, to the contrary, the most mercurial of emotions, Tomkins's formulations startle because of their sharpness and daring, their amplitude, and a descriptive levelheadedness that in this dispiriting context sounds almost surreal. Tomkins considers shame, along with interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress, disgust, and, in his later writing, contempt (he calls this "dissembl"), to be the basic set of affects. He places shame, in fact, at one end of the affect polarity "shame-interest," suggesting that the pulsations of cathexis around shame, of all things, are what either enable or disenable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world:

Like disgust, [shame] operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest . . . will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure. . . . Such a barrier might be because one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or because one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger. [AIC, 2:123]

The emphasis in this account on the strange, rather than on the prohibited or disapproved, was congenial with our motivating intuition that the phenomenon of shame might offer new ways of short-circuiting the seemingly near-inescapable habits of thought that Foucault groups together under the term *repressive hypothesis*.² Contemporary theory and criticism make the most confident claims to have mastered techniques for putting the ruses of the repressive hypothesis firmly out of bounds, yet we are made skeptical of such claims both by the prevailing moralism of current theoretical writing, afflictive and perhaps even unprecedented in its intensity, and also by its impoverishing reliance on a bipolar analytic framework that can all too adequately be summarized as "kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic." Clearly, if there are theoretical adventures to be pursued beyond or to the side of the repressive hypothesis, they are not likely

2. Discussion of the repressive hypothesis is the structuring concern in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978).

to share the good dog/bad dog rhetoric of puppy obedience school.³ At the same time, the “strange”ness of Tomkins’s account also seemed nicely different from the engulfing, almost eschatological pathos surrounding shame in the popular discourse where it is currently most extensively discussed, that of the self-help and recovery movements, and the self psychology that theoretically underpins them.

Indeed, it was through the filter of self psychology and object-relations psychology that we first encountered Tomkins; to the degree that his work has been popularized, it has been because it offers a kind of origin myth (in the shame of the infant) for a genetic narrative of the individuation and filiation of a self. Tomkins’s theory of affect originated with his close observations of an infant in 1955; he was able to locate early expressions of shame at a period (around seven months) before the infant could have any concept of prohibition. Many developmental psychologists, responding to this finding, now consider shame the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop. Francis Broucek

3. Here is a possible taxonomy of the most common ways of (mis)understanding Foucault’s discussion of the repressive hypothesis. Current theorists seem to feel sure they understand that Foucault “says that”:

1) Some version of prohibition is the most important thing to understand, but it operates through producing rather than through eliminating things/kinds of persons/behaviors/subjectivities. (This is the approach of, say, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*.)

2) Some version of prohibition is the most important thing to understand, but it operates through internalized and apparently voluntary mechanisms, rather than through external, spectacular mechanisms. (This is the understanding of people who approach *The History of Sexuality* as simply a continuation of earlier works by Foucault such as *Discipline and Punish*.)

3) Some version of prohibition is the most important thing to understand, but it operates through multiple channels/discourses rather than through a singular law.

4) Some version of prohibition is the most important thing to understand, but it operates through a single, transcendent prohibition rather than through local, explicit ones. (This turns up as a kind of Lacanian-Foucauldianism.)

5) Some version of prohibition is the most important thing to understand, but it operates by disguising itself as nature, that is, as essence. Nature and essentialism are, and have always been, the defining ruses of repression/prohibition.

Some consequences of such readings of Foucault:

1) The most important question to ask about any cultural manifestation is, subversive or hegemonic? Intense moralism often characterizes such readings.

2) To demonstrate (or even assert) that something is not “natural” or not “essential” is always to perform a powerful act.

3) To find naturalizing or essentialist points in other people’s work is always politically and intellectually telling, and in self-evident ways. Every cultural manifestation must be scrutinized to determine whether, deep down, it is really denaturalizing (for example parodic) or really essentialist (for example “sincere”). The epistemological stress becomes infinitely insistent.

4) The “subversive or hegemonic?” structure of inquiry requires a wholesale reification of the status quo. One’s relation to it becomes reactive, like that of a consumer: accepting or refusing this or that manifestation of it, dramatizing extremes of compulsion and voluntariness.

writes, "shame is to self psychology what anxiety is to ego psychology—the keystone affect."⁴

In the context of an object-relations developmental narrative, this use of Tomkins is valuable as part of the repertoire of ways that such a psychology has of displacing the Freudian emphasis on Oedipality and repression. What it obscures, however, is how sublimely alien Tomkins's own work remains to any project of narrating the emergence of a core self. A reader who undergoes the four volumes of Tomkins's *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* feels the alchemy of the contingent involve itself so intimately with identity that Tomkins comes to seem the psychologist one would most like to read *face à face* with Proust. He more than countenances both the Proustian fascination with taxonomies of persons and the Proustian certainty that the highest interest of such taxonomies is ever in making grounds for disconfirmation and surprise.

Characteristically, in Tomkins these penchants were embodied in extravagant negotiations among the disparate, competing disciplines called "psychology" in America from the forties through and beyond the sixties—experimental, clinical, and applied alike. Applied, in this case, as personality theory; during his many years of teaching at Princeton, Tomkins worked concurrently on the development of personality tests for the Educational Testing Service, for example, and wrote a book on interpreting the Thematic Apperception Test—a book that was, as Alexander remarks in an obituary essay, "very well received as an intellectual achievement but I doubt if anyone ever used it in order to learn how to interpret a TAT record."⁵ The presumption of a consolidated core personality that would seem implicit in such a disciplinary location is challenged, however, everywhere in Tomkins's work, and at both the grossest and finest levels, by another disciplinary mobilization: cybernetics and systems theory, or—also pervasively—ethology, neuropsychology, per-

4. Francis J. Broucek, "Shame and Its Relationship to Early Narcissistic Developments," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 63, part 3 (1982): 369. In "A Timetable for Shame," in his useful anthology *The Many Faces of Shame*, ed. Donald L. Nathanson (New York, 1987), Nathanson hypothesizes:

The difference between the infant before the moment of shame (the infant in the moment of alert activity, of interest, excitement, or enjoyment) and the infant suddenly unable to function, this difference itself may be registered by the infant as a significant experience calling attention to and helping to define the self. In other words, I am suggesting that the physiological experience of the proto-affect shame is a major force in shaping the infantile self, and remains so throughout life. If this is true, then I suggest further that the adult experience of shame is linked to genitality, to self-expression, to physical appearance, to our entire construct of what it means to be lovable, initially and primarily simply because the episodes of shame experienced during the formative years (as these other psychic structures are established in the context of success and failure, of positive affect and of shame as the occasional accompaniment to failure) are crucial to the development of a sense of self. [P. 27]

5. Irving E. Alexander, "Silvan S. Tomkins: The Heart of the Matter," unpublished obituary, 1992.

ception and cognition, social psychology, and, as well, a prescient series of rereadings of Freud. Paul Goodman and Gregory Bateson, other fertile polymath figures comparably marked by the American postwar moment, didn't have as broad a center of gravity in disciplinary psychology (and therefore also couldn't exert the same pressure against it). The first publication of Tomkins's theory of affect was in French, in a volume edited by a differently comparable figure, Jacques Lacan.

Sublimely alien, we found this psychology to the developmental presumption and prescription of a core self; sublimely *resistant*, we might have added, to such presumption except that the sublimity lies in an exemplary cartographic distance, not in a dialectical struggle. Even rarer in American psychology of the cold war period is the plain absence, not only of homophobia, but of any hint of a heterosexist teleology. This silent and utterly scrupulous disentanglement is the more compelling for the range and heterogeneity of Tomkins's disciplinary sources; ethology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, and so forth are each structured around foundationally heterosexist assumptions, and each is differently so. Again, however, Tomkins's achievement seems to result not from a concerted antihomophobic project (nor from any marked gay interest, for that matter) but rather from, almost simply, finding a different place to begin.

Tomkins's resistance to heterosexist teleologies is founded in the most basic terms in his understanding of affect.⁶ A concomitant of distinguishing in the first place between an affect system and the drive system that it analogically amplifies is that, unlike the drives (for example, to breathe, to eat), "any affect may have any 'object.'" This is the basic source of complexity of human motivation and behavior" (*AIC*, 1:347). Furthermore, in a refusal of the terms of behaviorism, Tomkins describes the affect system as a whole as having "no single 'output'" (*AIC*, 3:66); and also unlike the drives, "affective amplification is indifferent to the means-end difference" (*AIC*, 3:67). It is these specifications that make affect theory such a useful site for resistance to teleological presumptions of the many sorts historically embedded in the disciplines of psychology.

6. His resistance is founded in them, but is hardly guaranteed by them; it is sobering to see how effortlessly, in the absence of Tomkins's own care, the heterosexist teleology can make itself at home even in work explicitly based on his. An example is Nathanson's *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* (New York, 1992), dedicated to Tomkins, that includes such passages as the two following, inconceivable in Tomkins's writing:

Just as most life forms can be divided into groups by their gender, mature individuals tend to form couples because of these sexual differences. Inherent in the system that causes us to be different on the basis of gender is also the force that creates attraction. . . . Sex refers to the passionate attraction between opposites, to the active process that begins as the coupling of male and female, unites them in sexual intercourse, and results in procreation and the maintenance of the species. [P. 260]

These are adults whose inner lives are the screaming face of an Edvard Munch painting, the hell of Picasso's *Guernica*, the nightmarish agitation of Leonard Bernstein's *Age*

The force of (what comes to seem) the powerfully gracious “may” of the first of these propositions, “any affect may have any ‘object,’” the “may” that emerges through the volumes as Tomkins’s least dispensable location, accrues at least partly from the highly complex, highly explicit layering of biological and machine models in his understanding of the human being. An early question for him was, “Could one design a truly humanoid machine?”

While pursuing this line of thought, I encountered Wiener’s early papers on cybernetics. . . . One could not engage in such a project without the concept of multiple assemblies of varying degrees of independence, dependence, interdependence, and control and transformation of one by another.

It was this general conception which, one day in the late 1940s, resulted in my first understanding of the role of the affect mechanism as a separate but amplifying co-assembly. I almost fell out of my chair in surprise and excitement when I suddenly realized that the panic of one who experiences the suffocation of interruption of his vital air supply has nothing to do with the anoxic drive signal per se [since gradual loss of oxygen, even when fatal, produces no panic]. A human being could be, and often is, terrified about anything under the sun. It was a short step to see that excitement had nothing per se to do with sexuality or with hunger, and that the apparent urgency of the drive system was borrowed from its co-assembly with appropriate affects as necessary amplifiers. Freud’s id suddenly appeared to be a paper tiger since sexuality, as he best knew, was the most finicky of drives, easily rendered impotent by shame or anxiety or boredom or rage.⁷

Note a most characteristic analytic structure here. What appears to be a diminution in the power assigned to the sexual drive nonetheless corresponds to a multiplication—a finite and concrete multiplication, it will emerge—of different possibilities for sexual relevance (defined in this case by the distinct negative affects shame, anxiety, boredom, rage). Sexuality is no longer an on/off matter whose two possibilities are labelled express or repress. Sexuality as a *drive* remains characterized here by a binary (potent/impotent) model, yet its link to attention, to motivation, or indeed to action occurs only through “co-assembly” with an affect system described as encompassing several more, and more qualitatively different, possibilities than on/off.

We will be discussing this pattern in the framework of Tomkins’s

of Anxiety. These are the tortured men who sought surcease in the bath houses that served as homosexual brothels but died horribly of AIDS. [P. 426]

7. Tomkins, “The Quest for Primary Motives: Biography and Autobiography of an Idea,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (Aug. 1981): 309; hereafter abbreviated “QPM.” The clarification concerning oxygen deprivation is on p. 322.

habit of layering digital (on/off) with analog (graduated and/or multiply differentiated) representational models, and we will be arguing for the great conceptual value of this habit. If it seems to “rhyme” structurally with what we have already referred to as his habit of layering biological with machine or computer models of the human being, we must nonetheless deprecate (as would Tomkins or indeed any systems theorist) the further homology that might identify the machine or computer with digital representation, and the biological organism with analogical representation. The tacit homology machine : digital :: animal : analogical (and the concomitant privileging of the machine/digital) is, we will be arguing, a very powerful structuring presumption for current theory, and emerges especially strongly as a reflexive “antibiologism.” But it represents bad engineering and bad biology, and it leads to bad theory. Even supposing information machines and living organisms to be altogether distinct classes, they certainly have in common that each comprises a heterogeneous mixture of digitally structured with analogically structured representational mechanisms. For that matter, the distinction between digital and analog is itself anything but absolute. Analogical measurement can be used, as in a thermostat or a neuron, to trigger an on/off switch, while patterns or cumulations of on/off switchings may, as in Donald Hebb’s 1949 model of neural firing in the brain, result in the formation of complex analogic structures.

In a 1970 paper, “Analog and Digital Communication: On Negation, Signification, and Meaning,” Anthony Wilden offers among the “guiding principles” on the subject:

1 The question of the analog and the digital is one of relationship, not one of entities. . . .

11 Switching from analog to digital [and vice versa] is necessary for communication to cross certain types of boundaries. A great deal of communication—perhaps all communication—undoubtedly involves constant switching of this type. . . .

17 Digital thought is analytic and two-valued; analog thought is dialectical and many-valued.

18 A digital system is of a higher level of organization and therefore of a lower logical type than an analog system. The digital system has greater ‘semiotic freedom’, but it is ultimately governed by the rules of the analog relationship between systems, subsystems, and supersystems in nature.⁸

Tomkins’s theory of affect, which reflects an intellectual moment close to this one, depends on a number of different kinds of crossing between

8. Anthony Wilden, “Analog and Digital Communication: On Negation, Signification, and Meaning,” *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London, 1972), pp. 188–89; hereafter abbreviated “ADC.” The essay is based on a paper presented in 1970 in a symposium on Lévi-Strauss.

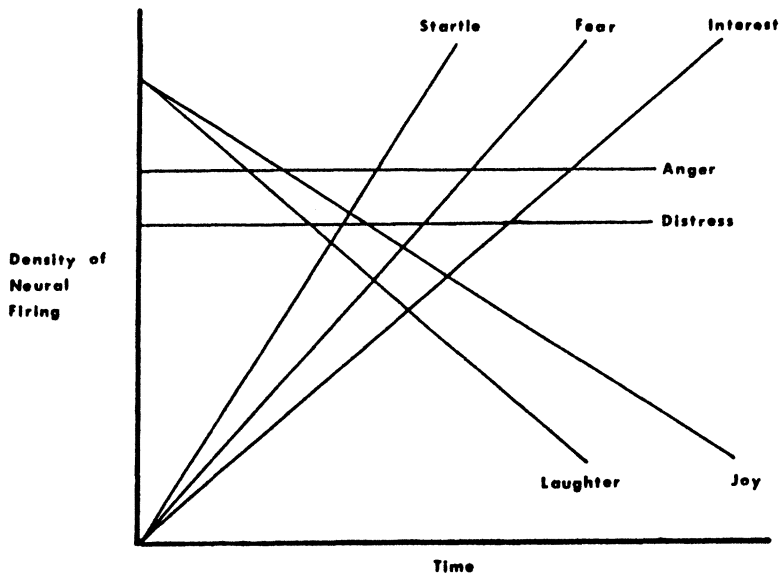


FIG. 1.—Graphical representation of a theory of innate activators of affect. From Silvan Tomkins, "The Quest for Primary Motives: Biography and Autobiography of an Idea," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (1981).

analog and digital forms of representation. For example, some of the affects he discusses are structured in the following way:

I would account for the differences in affect activation by three variants of a single principle—the density of neural firing. By density I mean the frequency of neural firing per unit of time. My theory posits three discrete classes of activators of affect, each of which further amplifies the sources which activate them. These are stimulation increase, stimulation level, and stimulation decrease.

Thus any stimulus with a relatively sudden onset and a steep increase in the rate of neural firing will innately activate a startle response. As shown in Figure 1, 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, as with 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 that reduced the rate of neural firing, as in the sudden reduction of excessive noise, would innately activate the rewarding smile of enjoyment. ["QPM," p. 317]

May we defer discussion of the fear, distress, and anger that will be triggered in theory-minded readers by the density of occurrence of the word

“innate” in this passage? Or for that matter, the laughter with which scientific readers today may register the reductiveness of the concept “density of neural firing”? We want instead to point to the way Hebb’s understanding of neural firing as a discrete, on/off (digital) event triggered by quantifiable (analog) stimuli is once again analogically quantified, in Tomkins’s graph, over the dimension of time. But in Tomkins’s graph this analogical quantification happens in a way that leads in turn to the on/off (digital) “activation” of any of several discrete affects. This part of Tomkins’s theory could thus be schematized as analog → digital → analog → digital. What this (digitalizing) schema misses, though, is that Tomkins’s theory ramifies into a “many-valued” (and in that sense analogic) understanding of affect: if the on/off of “neural firing” is qualitatively undifferentiated, the on/off of affect activation is qualitatively highly differentiated. (Qualitative differentiation is always in a sense analogical because, for one thing, to the degree that there are different affects, they sustain a claim to be represented via graph or map, and such representations are necessarily analogical.) Tomkins writes, “the general advantage of affective arousal to such a broad spectrum of levels and changes of levels of neural firing is to make the individual care about quite different states of affairs *in quite different ways*” (“QPM,” p. 318; italics added). And the “quite different states of affairs,” we should add, are never to be understood as purely external states of affairs; though Tomkins here uses the uncharacteristically simplified example of “a loud noise” to represent a stimulus, in the body of his work density of neural firing is virtually never a direct translation of some external event that could be discretely segregated as “stimulus.” Rather it already itself reflects the complex interleaving of endogenous and exogenous, perceptual, proprioceptive, and interpretive—causes, effects, feedback, motives, long-term states such as moods and theories, along with distinct transitory physical or verbal events. Against the behaviorists, Tomkins consistently argues that relevant stimuli for the affect system include internal as well as external events, and he concludes firmly that there is no basis—and certainly not the basis internal versus external—for a definitional distinction between response and stimulus. Tomkins reports on one stimulus-response experiment, for example, in a way that quite undoes the presumptive simplicity of the experience of electric shock, which had classically been considered the transparently aversive stimulus par excellence. “One had only to listen to the spontaneous exclamations throughout an experimental series,” he writes, “to become aware of the difficulty of evoking one and only one affect by the use of what seems an appropriate stimulus.” Simply by recording his subjects’ speech at the moments they received electric shocks, he offers a carnivalesque deconstruction in the place of the expected “results.” Among the circus of affective responses to the apparently identical stimulus: “Feels like when Papa spanked.” “A hun-

dred years ago you'd be sort of a criminal, wouldn't you?" "If you want a terrorizing pattern you've got it." "This isn't fair." "Oh, you rat, cut it out; it's maddening." "I'm not getting much out of this—I hope you are." "This experiment is stupid." "So that's what the shock feels like." "Afraid it might nauseate me." "I like the shocks." "Interesting to get in the hands of a psychologist." "Is this supposed to make me cautious?" "I don't want to be a shock trooper anyway." "Ouch, that startles you . . . didn't hurt." "Feels like a sport with a bet on." "It makes you sort of angry the first time." "Oh, Lord. I'm falling asleep" (*AIC*, 1:193–98).

We remarked earlier that scientifically minded readers would likely balk at the reductiveness of Tomkins's crucial notion of "density of neural firing." Although the notion of neural firing per se seems to be intelligibly used in this work, over the years of publication of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* Tomkins remains resistant to the specification of where or in what (presumably functionally specialized) neural locations this firing is taking place. Although *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* otherwise displays quite a lot of interest in brain localization, this one crucial concept, "density of neural firing," persists in treating the brain as a homogeneous mass that has, at best, only the potential for developing local qualitative specialization.

This understanding of the brain is, we want to argue, important for defining Tomkins's (very fruitful) historical relation to what we are calling the particular moment of "the cybernetic fold"—roughly from the late forties to the midsixties. By "the cybernetic fold" we mean the moment when scientists' understanding of the brain and other life processes was marked by the concept, the possibility, the imminence, of powerful computers, but the actual computational muscle of the new computers wasn't available yet. The cybernetic fold is then the moment of systems theory, and also, in a directly related but not identical development, the structuralist moment. Indeed part of our aim is to describe structuralism not as that mistaken thing that happened before poststructuralism but fortunately led directly to it, but rather as part of a rich moment, a rich intellectual ecology, a gestalt (including systems theory) that allowed it to mean more different and more interesting things than have survived its sleek trajectory into poststructuralism.⁹ We'll be arguing that the early cybernetic notion of the brain as a homogeneous, differentiable but not originally differentiated system is a characteristic and very fruitful em-

9. On this, see Vincent Descombes's suggestion that structuralism loses its most interesting defining features almost at the very moment that it becomes attached to literary study (Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding [Cambridge, 1980], pp. 85–87).

blem of many of the so far unrealized possibilities of this intellectual moment.¹⁰

The cybernetic fold might be described as a fold between postmodern and modern ways of hypothesizing about the brain and mind. The prospect of virtually unlimited computational power gave a new appeal to concepts such as feedback, which had been instrumentally available in mechanical design for over a century, but which, if understood as a continuing feature of many systems including the biological, would have introduced a quite unassimilable level of complexity to descriptive or predictive calculations. Between the time when it was unthinkable to essay such calculations and the time when it became commonplace to perform them, there intervened a period when they were available to be richly imagined. But during this period they were still imagined with a structural elegance and an interest in a conceptual economy of means and modelling that were not destined (and seemingly were not required) to survive the introduction of the actual technology.

The evocative lists that are such a distinctive feature of the writing of *Affect*, *Imagery*, *Consciousness* seem to bear the mark of this moment of technological imagination. With their minimal and apparently nonsignifying grammatical differentiations, the items on the lists gesture toward the possibility of random, virtually infinite permutation, some of it trivial, some of it highly significant. The suggestion of sheer, unlimited extent marks all possible outcomes as radically contingent. Yet the items on the lists, far from random, are always carefully chosen to open and indicate new vistas, to represent new kinds of possible entailments involved in any generalization. They can be read as either undoing or suggesting new taxonomic work. Tomkins's lists probably resemble most the long sentences in Proust where a speculation about someone's motive is couched in a series of long parallel clauses that begin "Whether because . . . ; or because . . . ; or because. . . ." A postmodern syntax that seems to vitiate the very possibility of understanding motive by pluralizing it as if mechanically, infinitely, seems with the same gesture to proffer semantic tools so irresistibly usable that they bind one ever more imaginatively and profoundly to the local possibilities of an individual psychology. Tomkins's lists invoke the technological juggernaut that would overwhelm and obviate their enumerations; by invoking it, however, they also momentarily forestall or displace it. Nor is the issue simplified by how regularly in these volumes Tomkins simply repeats, verbatim, a few of his key examples. His perseveration could suggest a machinelike interchangeability of parts in *Affect*, *Imagery*, *Consciousness* if it didn't more strongly

10. A very useful recent study of this moment is Steve Joshua Heims, *The Cybernetics Group* (Cambridge, 1991). Work shaped by this moment but only recently gaining currency includes two books by Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela: *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Boston, 1980), and *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (1988; Boston, 1992).

evoke the pathos of blockage and its overcoming, the psychic economies of (what Tomkins calls) "affluence scripts," "perceptual greed," and occasional shaming poverty of resource, that the work offers so many new "affordances" for understanding.

The epithet *fold* seems applicable to the cybernetic moment partly because systems theory, precisely through its tropism toward the image of an undifferentiated but differentiable ecology, had as one of its great representational strengths an ability to discuss how things differentiate: how quantitative differences turn into qualitative ones, how digital and analog representations leapfrog or interleave with one another, what makes the unexpected fault lines between regions of the calculable and the incalculable that are destined to evolve into chaos theory, and so forth. Where cognitive psychology has tried to render the mind's processes thoroughly transparent from the point of view of cognition, where behaviorism has tried to do the same thing from the point of view of behavioral "outcome," where psychoanalysis has profited from the conceptual elegance of a single bar (repression) between a single continuous "consciousness" and a single "unconscious," Tomkins's affect theory by contrast offers a wealth of sites of productive opacity. To valorize feedback in systems theory is also necessarily to valorize error and blindness as being specifically productive of structure. Think of Frank Rosenblatt's "Perceptron," for example, designed in this early moment to teach itself how to learn precisely through a process of trial and error. Its theoretical principles went into supposed obsolescence with the emergence of vastly more efficient computers, to reemerge only recently under the rubrics of connectionism and parallel distributed processing. As Tomkins writes, a truly formidable humanlike machine

would in all probability require a relatively helpless infancy followed by a growing competence through its childhood and adolescence. In short, it would require time in which to learn how to learn through making errors and correcting them. This much is quite clear and is one of the reasons for the limitations of our present automata. Their creators are temperamentally unsuited to create and nurture mechanisms which begin in helplessness, confusion and error. The automaton designer is an overprotective, overdemanding parent who is too pleased with precocity in his creations. As soon as he has been able to translate a human achievement into steel, tape and electricity, he is delighted with the performance of his brain child. Such precocity essentially guarantees a low ceiling to the *learning* ability of his automaton. [AIC, 1:116]

Tomkins emphasizes that the introduction of opacity and error at the cognitive level alone would not be sufficient even for powerful cognition. About the affect system, he writes,

We have stressed the ambiguity and blindness of this primary motivational system to accentuate what we take to be the necessary price which must be paid by any system which is to spend its major energies in a sea of risk, learning by making errors. The achievement of cognitive power and precision require a motivational system no less plastic and bold. 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. [AIC, 1:114]¹¹

Thus it is the inefficiency of the fit between the affect system and the cognitive system—and between either of these and the drive system—that enables learning, development, continuity, differentiation. Freedom, play, affordance, meaning itself derive from the wealth of mutually non-transparent possibilities for being wrong about an object—and by implication, about oneself.

But to return to figure 1. It is important that the “many-valuedness” of this analogical system refers to *more than two*, but also to *finitely many* values or dimensions (as for instance on a map, north, south, east, west), though, as in any analogical representation, there may be infinite gradations along the finitely specified dimensions.¹² This is a common enough and banal enough feature of very many representations; yet it seems to us that the fact that this affect theory is structured as it is, by *finitely many* ($n > 2$) values, is actually at the heart of the resistance it encounters from, or illumination it can offer to, the current thinking routines of “theory.” The resistance occurs because there seems to be some strong adhesion between the specification *finitely many* ($n > 2$) values and that conversation-stopping word, *innate*. (However, in Tomkins’s work this adhesion proves a thoroughly attenuable one—attenuated, perhaps, precisely by the layering and constant mutual interruption of biological and machine models.) Somehow it’s hard to hold on to the concept of eight or thirteen (and yet not infinite) different kinds of—of anything important—without having a biological model somewhere in the vicinity. This adhesion may

11. Computers designed according to such protocols

would be much more interesting than our present computers, but they would also have certain disadvantages. They would be capable of not computing for the designer for long periods of time when other computers were sending messages to them; when they were afraid of overly severe fluctuations in their sources of electricity; when having tried unsuccessfully to solve then insoluble problems, they became depressed; or when they became manic with overweening false confidence. In short, they would represent not the disembodied intelligence of an auxiliary brain but a mechanical intelligence intimately wed to the automaton’s own complex purposes. [AIC, 1:119]

12. Thus a point on a map could be “the square root of two degrees east of forty degrees north, eighty degrees east” without requiring the constitution of a new compass coordinate.

well be a historical development, as though some momentum of modernity (call it monotheism? call it the Reformation? call it capitalist rationalization?) has so evacuated the conceptual space between two and infinity that it may require the inertial friction of a biologism to even suggest the possibility of reinhabiting that space. We have no interest whatever in minimizing the continuing history of racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise abusive biologisms, or the urgency of the exposures of them, that have made the gravamen of so many contemporary projects of critique. At the same time, we fear that with the installation of an automatic antibiologism as the unshifting central tenet of “theory” we will lose conceptual access to an entire thought realm, the analogic realm of *finitely many* ($n > 2$) *values*. Access to this realm is important for, among other things, enabling a political vision of difference that might resist both binary homogenization and infinitizing trivialization.¹³

For an example of how affect fares under today’s routines of theory, we could look to a recent study by Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism*. We choose this example not because the book is unintelligent or unuseful—it is anything but—but rather because its achievement seems to depend on an exemplarily clear and explicated relation to the several theoretical currents (psychoanalytic, Marxist, Foucauldian) that underlie it.¹⁴ It is further unusual only in basing its argument on a theory of affect that it makes an explicit centerpiece of the book. That central theory, whose goal is “a politics of

13. Benedict Anderson, for example, writing in 1965, describes the complex devolutions between many-valued and two-valued systems of meaning in Javanese culture. He describes the “real legitimation for widely contrasting social and psychological types” offered by the “rich variety of concrete models” in the ancient, popular, and pervasive *wayang* mythology and analyzes the mechanisms by which this range of *finitely many* ($n > 2$) models can tend to get abstracted into a chain of binaries under the pressure of monotheism, nationalism, commercial urbanism, and the competing formal structures of film (Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* [1965; Ithaca, N.Y., 1969], p. 26).

This paper’s discussion of the voided space in contemporary thought between two and infinity is partly an attempt to work further on issues raised by Axiom 1: “People are different from each other” (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* [Berkeley, 1990], pp. 22–27).

14. Why, we’ve been asked, use a first book as our sole example in articulating this argument rather than refer by name (and of course the names might be legion and include Sedgwick) to other theorists more rankly steeped in these routines of theory and indeed more directly responsible for their popularization? We persist in this gracelessness for two reasons. First, we envisioned for this essay a gestalt strategy of involving its readers in a sudden perceptual reorganization and unexpected self-recognition—private in the first place—concerning some critical practices that might in this way be effectively defamiliarized. If we had designated a number of theorists about whom many readers will already have assigned themselves a *parti pris*, our strategy would have had no chance of success. Secondly, however, it makes sense that among the many other ways one might look at Cvetkovich’s book, one can look at it precisely as a first book that originated in a dissertation—as, that is, a rite of passage whose conventions can best dramatize the economy of transmissibility across academic disciplines that is our subject here.

affect that does not rest on an essentialist conception of affect,"¹⁵ is however only very cursorily specified:

Like sexuality, affect should be understood as discursively constructed. [*MF*, p. 30]

Not only do I assume that the link between sensational events and bodily sensations is constructed rather than natural, I also assume that the apparent naturalness of bodily sensation or affect is itself a construction. Like sexuality and other physical processes, affect is not a pre-discursive entity, a fact that is often obscured by the construction of affects or bodily sensations as natural. . . . Furthermore, if affective responses are not as natural as they seem to be, then the construction of affect as natural might well be part of a discursive apparatus that performs the work of what Foucault has described as the disciplining of the body. Discipline is powerful precisely because it functions as though it were natural rather than imposed. [*MF*, pp. 24–25]

Although Cvetkovich undertakes this inquiry in the name of "theorizing affect" (the title of an early chapter of the book), it is not immediately clear why her rather minimal specification that affect is "discursively constructed" rather than "natural" should claim the status of a theory. Unless, that is, precisely *that* specification is today understood to constitute *anything* as theory. Rather than broaching or summarizing an actual theory of affect, these sentences instead "theorize affect" in the sense of rounding up affect and herding it into the big tent of what is already understood to constitute the body of Theory. The brand on that body is relentlessly legible: "theory" has become almost simply coextensive with the claim (you can't say it often enough), *it's not natural*. An extraordinary claim is here presented as self-evident: "the value [*the* value!] of a theory, like the value of historical analysis, resides in its ability to challenge assumptions about 'nature'" (*MF*, pp. 43–44).

According to our argument so far, this reflexive antibiologism might be expected to concomit with several habits of argument that will stand in a seemingly paradoxical relation to the stated principles of Cvetkovich's work.

1) Foucauldian deprecations of the repressive hypothesis will be transformed virtually instantaneously into binarized, highly moralistic allegories of the subversive versus the hegemonic, resistance versus power. "If affect is historically constructed, it can then become, as Foucault suggests of sexuality under the rule of the repressive hypothesis, not the mechanism for the liberation of the self but instead the mechanism for

15. Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), p. 25; hereafter abbreviated *MF*.

the containment and discipline of the self" (*ME*, p. 31). "If affect can be a source of resistance, it is also . . . a mechanism for power" (*ME*, p. 40). "Foucault's suggestion that resistance is not exterior to power means that these domains can be both vehicles for resistance *and* vehicles for the imposition of power" (*ME*, p. 41).

2) A nominal deprecation of the question of essential truth becomes the ground for constant invocations and detective-like scrutinies of supposed truth claims by others—claims paraphrased and presented in the most absolute terms. One of the pivotal words for Cvetkovich's argument is "guarantee," for example: "the links between personal and social transformation are by no means guaranteed" (*ME*, p. 1); "the Victorian novel need not be defended in order to guarantee the possibility of social transformation" (*ME*, p. 41); "affect . . . cannot be counted on to guarantee a text's subversive tendencies" (*ME*, p. 34). The ontological options are reduced to guarantee versus no guarantee. Even apart from its oddly consumerist sound, this radical coarsening of relations to truth means that the epistemological stress of Cvetkovich's argument rather than being lightened is rendered ever more insistent. Characteristically, for instance, she descries after much deductive work that Fredric Jameson's discussion of mass culture is "suspiciously essentialist in its conception of affect" (*ME*, p. 29). The suspicion resides in the reading eye, not in the read text, but it's a common development these days, the strange metamorphosis from antiessentialist to private eye.

3) Perhaps most oddly for a "theory of affect," this one has no feelings in it. *Affect* is treated as a unitary category, with a unitary history and unitary politics. There is no theoretical room for any difference between being, say, amused, being disgusted, being ashamed, and being enraged. By analogy with Foucault's narrative about sexuality, Cvetkovich refers to a modern "history of the construction of affect as meaningful, one evident . . . in the eighteenth-century novels of sensibility and sentimentality and in the emphasis on feelings in Romantic poetry" (*ME*, pp. 30–31). "Feelings"—any particular feelings? Evidently not. The sublime, for another example, is described as "the high-culture version of affect" (*ME*, p. 35) (any particular affects?). And Cvetkovich's implication throughout is that genres are differentiated not in relation to the kinds of affect they may evoke or generate but far more simply by the presence or absence of some reified substance called Affect.

Surely the absence of different affects from this "theory of affect" is no oversight. It represents, instead, a theoretical decision, as if what is presented could not finally be "theory" if it made any definitional room at all for qualitative differences among affects. Wouldn't it after all—we imagine the quizzing from any well-drilled graduate seminar—wouldn't it risk essentialism to understand affects as qualitatively different from each other? Yes, it certainly would. In fact, if we are right in hypothesizing that the entire analogically structured thought realm of *finitely many*

($n > 2$) *values* is available today only in some relation to biological models and that the concepts of the essential, the natural, and the biological have by now become theoretically amalgamated through some historical process,¹⁶ then it makes all the sense in the world that a “theory” structured in the first place around hypervigilant antiessentialism and antinaturalism will stringently require the sacrifice of qualitative differences among, in this case, different affects. The hygiene of current antiessentialism seemingly depends on rigorous adherence to the (erroneously machine-identified) model of digital, on/off representation. Insofar as they are “theorized,” affects *must* turn into Affect.

Yes, we’d repeat, at this historical moment any definitional invocation of analogically conceived, qualitative differences in the form of *finitely many* ($n > 2$) *values* does indeed run the risk of reproducing a biologizing essentialism. But that risk is far from being obviated by even the most scrupulous practice of digitalization. The essentialism that adheres to digital models is structured differently from the essentialism of the analog, but at this moment it is probably all the more dangerous for that difference, precisely because, under the current routines of “theory,” it is not recognizable as an essentialism. Essence is displaced under these routines from the analogic possibility of finitely multiple qualitative differences to some prior place where an undifferentiated stream of originary matter or energy is being turned (infinitely) on or off. To see the latter as a less “essentialist” metaphoric than the former reflects, we would argue, only the habitual privileging of digital models wrongly equated with the machine over analog models wrongly equated with the biological.

For example, although Cvetkovich doesn’t discuss the scientific understandings of affect that tacitly underpin her argument—she may not even know they’re operative—her “theory of affect” is highly congruent with a particular theory of emotion that has become widely accepted with the spread of cognitive psychology. Indeed, her use of this theory without citation would seem to testify to its having become part of the “common-sense” consensus of current theory. It also represents, as it happens, the current (though still contested) common sense of cognitive science, as reflected by its completely uncritical reproduction in the 1987 *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*:

The single most important contribution [to the study of emotion] . . . was made by Stanley Schachter. . . . He postulated that only a general state of visceral arousal was necessary for the experience of emotion:

16. We would emphasize that this amalgamation occurs through a *historical* process; in Plato, for example, the essential, the biological, and the natural are very far from being assumed to be equivalent. This point was made to us by Timothy Gould. An important unpacking of these terms is performed by Janet E. Halley in “Sexual Orientation and the Politics of Biology: A Critique of the Argument from Immutability,” *Stanford Law Review* 46 (Feb. 1994): 503–68.

i.e. that different emotional experiences arise out of the same visceral background. Next he assumed that, given a state of visceral arousal, an individual will describe his feelings in terms of the cognitions (thoughts, past experiences, environmental signals) available at the time. . . . Visceral arousal was seen as a necessary condition for emotional experience, but the quality of the emotion depended on cognitive, perceptual evaluations of the external world and the internal state. . . . Current wisdom would suggest that any discrepancy, any interruption of expectations or of intended actions, produces undifferentiated visceral (autonomic) arousal. The *quale* of the subsequent emotion will then depend on the ongoing cognitive evaluation (meaning analysis, appraisal) of the current state of affairs. . . . [Emotions] are not necessarily remnants of our pre-sapient past, but rather they are important characteristics of an active, searching, and thinking human being. Novelty, discrepancy, and interruption generate visceral responses, while our cognitive system interprets the world as threatening, elating, frightening, or joyful. The human world is full of emotions not because we are animals at heart, but rather because it is still full of signals that elate or threaten, and replete with events and people that produce discrepancies and interruptions.¹⁷

It's easy to see what makes this theory of affect seem so congenial to "theory." "Discrepancies and interruptions" in an undifferentiated flow of "arousal" have a reassuringly mechanical Morse-code-like sound—no danger whatever, here, of encountering the fallacy that a representation might bear any nonarbitrary relation to the thing represented. Furthermore, the space for discursive social construction of affect seems guaranteed by the notion that (since we are not "animals at heart") the raw material of our arousal is infinitely malleable by a fully acculturated cognitive faculty.

If anything, we anticipate that this account will sound so unexceptionable to critical theory readers that it might be useful to remind you that it does retain (to say no worse) a certain counterintuitive force. So ask yourself this: how long does it take you after being awakened in the night by (a) a sudden noise, or (b) sexual arousal, to cognitively "analy[ze]" and "apprais[e]" . . . the current state of affairs" well enough to assign the appropriate "*quale*" to your emotion? That is, what is the temporal lag from the moment of sleep interruption to the "subsequent" moment when you can judge whether what you're experiencing is luxuriation or terror?

No, it doesn't take either of us very long either.

But regardless of whether this cognitive account of emotion is true, what we want to emphasize is that it is not less essentialist than an ac-

17. "Emotion," in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. Richard L. Gregory and O. L. Zangwill (Oxford, 1987), pp. 219–20.

count, like Tomkins's, that locates in the body some important part of the difference among different emotions. "Undifferentiated visceral arousal" is in no sense less biologically based than differentiated arousal, for all this article's anti-Darwinist eagerness to disassociate *Homo sapiens* from "our pre-sapient past." The implied biology is, however, different; it is far more thoroughly imbued with a Cartesian mind/body dualism. In fact, "undifferentiated visceral arousal" suggests a markedly homogeneous, lumpish, and recalcitrant bodily essence, one peculiarly unarticulated by structures or processes involving information, feedback, and representation. Those are all attributed, instead, to a distinct, disembodied, and temporally segregated "cognition." For all its antibehaviorist intention, such an account depends implicitly upon the strict behaviorist segregation of stimulus from response, even as it propagates that conceptual segregation as humanist common sense.

It would be plausible to see a variety of twentieth-century theoretical languages as attempts, congruent with this one, to detoxify the excesses of body, thought, and feeling by reducing the multiple essentialist risks of analog representation to the single, unavowedly essentialist certainty of one or another on/off switch. The Lacanian calculus of phallic presence or absence would be only the most blatant of these, but the critique of Lacan, as well as virtually every form of poststructuralism and many other projects of politically critical thought, exhibit the same structure. We don't want to minimize the importance, productiveness, or even what can be the amazing subtlety of thought that takes this form. But it's still like a scanner or copier that can reproduce any work of art in 256,000 shades of gray. However infinitesimally subtle its discriminations may be, there are crucial knowledges it simply cannot transmit unless it's equipped to deal with the coarsely reductive possibility that red is different from yellow is different again from blue.

The antibiologism of current theory assumes, as we've said, that it's the distance of any theory from a biological (or, by mistaken implication, an analog) basis that alone can make the possibility of doing any justice "to difference (individual, historical, and cross-cultural), to contingency, to performative force, and to the possibility of change." Yet there is no reason to believe that the necessarily analog models of the color wheel or, shall we say, the periodic table of the elements, constrain against an understanding of difference, contingency, performative force, or the possibility of change. Indeed, we've been arguing that these analog models may be irreplaceably crucial for access to certain important ranges of difference. There is not a choice waiting to be made, in evaluating theoretical models, between essentialism and no essentialism. If there's a choice it is between differently structured residual essentialisms. But why be limited to the digital model of the choice? A repertoire of risk, a color wheel of different risks, a periodic table of the infinitely recombinable elements of the affect system, a complex, multilayered phyllo dough of the analog

and the digital: these are the models that Tomkins's work makes us eager to deploy.

If, as Tomkins describes it, the lowering of the eyelids, the lowering of the eyes, the hanging of the head is the attitude of shame, it may also be that of reading—reading maps, magazines, novels, comics, and heavy volumes of psychology, if not billboards and traffic signs. We (those of us for whom reading was or is a crucial form of interaction with the world) know the force-field creating power of this attitude, the kind of skin that sheer textual attention can weave around a reading body. A noisy bus station or airplane can be excluded from consciousness, an impossible ongoing scene refused, a dull classroom monologue ignored. And none of these refusals is wholly compassed by a certain pernicious understanding of reading as escape. Escape from what? The “real world,” ostensibly, the “responsibility” of “acting” or “performing” in that world, yet this reading posture registers as extroversion at least as much as introversion, as public as it is private. All a reader need do to transform this “inner life” experience to an audible performance is begin reading aloud. Even this may not be necessary; Freud refers our sometime fascination with the sight of a child entirely caught up with playing, to “primary narcissism,” as if something about sustained and intense engagement simply *is* theatrical, and trances themselves are entrancing. The additional skin, shimmering as if shrink-wrapped around a body and book, or body and playing/working environment, sharply and sheerly delineates the conjunction or composition, making figural not escape or detachment but attention, interest.

How does the affect shame motivate a theoretical project such as the present one? It is striking that in Tomkins's writing shame is the exemplary affect for theory. Indeed, the notion of “theory” first emerges in volume two of *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* around the section “Production of a total affect-shame bind by apparently innocuous and well-intentioned parental action,” a “vignette” featuring as “our hero . . . a child who is destined to have every affect totally bound by shame” (*AIC*, 2:228). Tomkins hypothesizes a set of excruciating scenes in which a child is shamed out of expressing his excitement, distress, anger, fear, disgust, and even shame. Through increasingly skilled compression, summarizing, naming, and ordering, our hero elaborates these scenes into a shame theory. An affect theory is both cognitive and affective (for Tomkins, these mechanisms involve many kinds of interdependent transformations),¹⁸

18.

The distinction we have drawn between the cognitive half and the motivational half must be considered to be a fragile distinction between transformation and amplification as a specialized type of transformation. Cognitions coassembled with affects become hot and urgent. Affects coassembled with cognitions become better informed and

and has two components:

First, it includes an examination of all incoming information for its relevance to a particular affect, in this case, shame and contempt. This is the cognitive antenna of shame. Second, it includes a set of strategies for coping with a variety of shame and contempt contingencies, to avoid shame if possible or to attenuate its impact if it cannot be avoided. [*AIC*, 2:319–20]

The stronger the shame theory the more expensive it is for the person who holds it (“Affect theory must be effective to be weak” [*AIC*, 2:323]),¹⁹ and the more its antennae make “the shame-relevant aspects of any situation . . . become figural in competition with other affect-relevant aspects

smarter. . . . Amplification without transformation would be blind; transformation without amplification would be weak. [*AIC*, 4:7]

19. Tomkins suggests that the measure of a theory’s strength is not how well it avoids negative affect or finds positive affect, but the size and topology of the domain it organizes and its methods of determining that domain. His recurrent example of a weak theory is one that allows many of us to cross streets often without fear—those sets of actions summed up in the phrase “look both ways before you cross” that enable an individual to act as if afraid so as to avoid the actual experience of fear, that is, “affect acting at a distance” (*AIC*, 2:320). What is weak about this theory is its restricted domain, perhaps initially understood to include only walking across the street where one first learned the rule as a child, then analogically expanded to include walking across other streets or streetlike passages, then expanded more to include riding a bicycle or driving a car. Consider the case where this weak theory gets strong:

If the individual cannot find the rules whereby he can cross the street without feeling anxious [because of a series of unfortunate accidents, say], then his avoidance strategies will necessarily become more and more diffuse. Under these conditions 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. [*AIC*, 2:324]

A strong theory is not more successful at “preventing the experience of negative affect,” here fear, than a weak theory; in this case, it is quite the opposite. Both the cognitive antennae of the theory and the preventive strategies have changed. This individual has learned to count many more things as a street; this strong fear theorist is always ready to draw the line that expands his theory’s domain. “Digital distinctions introduce GAPS into continuums . . . whereas analog differences . . . FILL continuums,” writes Wilden (“ADC,” p. 186), and this helps to specify one difference between weak and strong theories: a weak theory’s domain can be thought of as pockets of terrains each in analogic relation to the others and expandable only by textured analogy. A strong theory’s domain is more digital—more highly organized and expandable by analogies evacuated of certain qualities. If a weak theory encounters some terrain unlike any it has ever tripped over—if it can’t understand this terrain as significantly similar or resemblant enough to one or more in its domain—it will throw up its hands, shrug its shoulders, remain dumb: “the analog does not possess the syntax necessary to say ‘No’ or to say anything involving ‘not’, one can REFUSE or REJECT in the analog, but one cannot DENY or NEGATE” (“ADC,” p. 163). A strong theory always has something to say, about anything, because it can always say “No.”

of the same situations" (*AIC*, 2:231); that is, the more often the theorist misrecognizes, imagines, sees, or seizes upon shame.

But why is shame the example here? Why is the concept of "affect theory"—meant to be quite general in its definition as "a simplified and powerful summary of a larger set of affect experiences" (*AIC*, 2:230)—first developed in chapters on humiliation? In the section called "Shame from shame theory" directly following the above vignette, Tomkins lists several possible alternative theories, each of which would, in the same situation, arouse distress, fear, or enjoyment; but shame's exemplary status makes us believe that for Tomkins not only shame but also theory come from shame theory. One reason this may be true is because shame and theory are partially analogous at a certain level of digitalization. Wilden writes,

A gestalt . . . is formed by the decision to digitalize a specific difference, so as to form a **DISTINCTION** between figure and ground. There is in effect a decision—which may be neural, or conscious, or unconscious, or habitual, or learned, or novel—to introduce a particular boundary or frame into an analog continuum. ["ADC," p. 174]

Any theory, to be a theory—to at least partially or temporarily specify a domain—requires or produces figure/ground relations, the function of what Tomkins calls the "cognitive antenna" of a theory. Shame, along with contempt ("dis smell") and disgust, are unlike the other six affects of Tomkins's graphical representation of a theory of innate activators of affect (see fig. 1) and are not in fact included in this graph. While each of the others—startle, fear, interest, anger, distress, and joy—is activated by a certain "frequency of neural firing per unit time" represented by a straight line of some (positive, negative, or zero) slope, shame, like disgust and contempt, is activated by drawing a boundary line or barrier, the "introduc[tion] of a particular boundary or frame into an analog continuum." That is, shame involves a gestalt; shame is the duck to interest's (or enjoyment's) rabbit.

Without positive affect, there can be no shame; only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush. Similarly, only something you thought might delight or satisfy can disgust. Both these affects produce bodily knowledges: disgust, as spitting out bad-tasting food, recognizes the difference between inside and outside the body and what should and should not be let in; shame, as precarious hyperreflexivity of the surface of the body, can turn one inside out—or outside in. Wilden writes, "in order for a system to be open to an environment . . . the system must be capable of punctuating itself as distinct from that environment so as to select messages within it" ("ADC," p. 174). Shame is one of those affects whose digitalizing mechanism works to "punctuat[e the system] as distinct." Perhaps along with contempt and

disgust it can be a switch point for the individuation of imaging systems, of consciousnesses, of bodies, of theories, of selves; an individuation that decides not necessarily an identity but a figuration, distinction, or mark of punctuation. And unlike contempt or disgust, shame is characterized by its failure ever to renounce its object cathexis, its relation to the desire for pleasure as well as the need to avoid pain.

What does it mean to fall in love with a writer? What does it mean, for that matter—or maybe we should ask, what else could it mean—to cathect in a similar way a theoretical moment not one's own? The present essay represents only a part of a project whose dimensions keep changing under our hands. Some of what we're up to is the ordinary literary-critical lover's discourse: we want to propagate among our audience nodes of reception for what we take to be an unfamiliar and highly exciting set of moves and tonalities. As people who fall in love with someone wish at the same time to exhibit themselves to others as being loved, we've also longed to do something we haven't been able even to begin here: to show how perfectly Tomkins understands *us*; to unveil a text spangled with unpathologizing, at the same time unteleologizing, reflections on "the depressive," on how one becomes addicted to thought, on "claustrophilia," on the teacher's transference; on the rich life of everyday theories, and how expensively theories turn into Theory.

We have been very conscious of wishing to defer a certain moment of accounting—not only out of protectiveness for Tomkins but out of a sense that, if the deferral proved possible, the terms of that accounting really might be richly altered. We have deferred, specifically, the confrontation between any cross-cultural perspective and Tomkins's hypothesis that there is a kind of affective table of the elements, comprising nine components, infinitely recombinable but rooted in the human body in nine distinctive and irreducible ways. At some level we have not demanded even of ourselves to ascertain whether we believe this hypothesis to be true; we have felt that there was so much to learn first by observing the autonomic nervous system of a routinized dismissal of it in the terms of today's Theory. The moralistic hygiene by which any reader of today is unchallengeably entitled to condescend to the thought of any moment in the past (maybe especially the recent past) is globally available to anyone who masters the application of two or three discrediting questions. How provisional, by contrast, how difficult to reconstruct, and how exorbitantly specialized of use are the tools that in any given case would allow one to ask, What was it possible to think or do at a certain moment of the past that no longer is? And how are those possibilities to be found, unfolded, allowed to move and draw air and seek new voices and uses in the very different disciplinary ecology of even a few decades' distance?

We see Tomkins, like Freud, as a disciplinarily excessive figure in

psychology, a writer of heterogeneous energies whose most extraordinary insights had to be interlined with self-ignorance, involved in contradiction, and inextricably interleaved with the speculative science of his time. He is also, therefore, like Freud, a figure through whose work a lot of sharply different, competing, and often conflicting interpretive paths require to be cleared. What we've wanted to do here is to offer some tentative maps for reading, and also to engage other readers, hoping to make that many-handed work possible to begin.