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Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You

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In 2003, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published the essay «Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading. Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You» as part of the anthology *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. In it, Sedgwick asks why Western critique operates mostly with paranoid readings, readings that aim to expose hidden violent structures, and suggests a «reparative» approach that focusses not only on what is being written, or said, or done but how and to what end. The text was a starting point for Geraldine Tedder’s essay «You Are Probably Completely Oblivious That This Text Actually Is About You» [b-n-l/you-are-probably-completely-oblivious-that-this-text-actually-is-about-you/] and will kick off a series of texts in line with Sedgwick’s thinking as to what it might or might not mean to read and write «reparatively».





Sometime back in the middle of the first decade of the AIDS epidemic, I was picking the brains of a friend of mine, the activist scholar Cindy Patton, about the probable natural history of HIV. This was at a time when speculation was ubiquitous about whether the virus had been deliberately engineered or spread, whether HIV represented a plot or experiment by the U.S. military that had gotten out of control, or perhaps that was behaving exactly as it was meant to. After hearing a lot from her about the geography and economics of the global traffic in blood products, I finally, with some eagerness, asked Patton what she thought of these sinister rumors about the virus's origin. «Any of the early steps in its spread could have been either accidental or deliberate,» she said. «But I just have trouble getting interested in that. I mean, even suppose we were sure of every element of a conspiracy: that the lives of Africans and African Americans are worthless in the eyes of the United States; that gay men and drug users are held cheap where they aren't actively hated; that the military deliberately researches ways to kill noncombatants whom it sees as enemies; that people in power look calmly on the likelihood of catastrophic environmental and population changes. Supposing we were ever so sure of all those things—what would we know then that we don't already know?»

In the years since that conversation, I've brooded a lot over this response of Patton's. Aside from a certain congenial, stony pessimism, I think what I've found enabling about it is that it suggests the possibility of unpacking, of disentangling from their impacted and overdetermined historical relation to each other some of the separate elements of the intellectual baggage that many of us carry around under a label such as «the hermeneutics of suspicion.» Patton's comment suggests that for someone to have an unmystified, angry view of large and genuinely systemic oppressions does not intrinsically or necessarily enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences. To know that the origin or spread of HIV *realistically might* have resulted from a state-assisted conspiracy—such knowledge is, it turns out, separable from the question of whether the energies of a given aids activist intellectual or group might best be used in the tracing and exposure of such a possible plot. They might, but then again, they might not. Though ethically very fraught, the choice is not self-evident; whether or not to undertake this highly compelling tracing-and-exposure project represents a strategic and local decision, not necessarily a categorical imperative. Patton's response to me seemed to open a space for moving from the rather fixated question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?

I suppose this ought to seem quite an unremarkable epiphany: that knowledge *does* rather than simply is it is by now very routine to discover. Yet it seems that a lot of the real force of such

discoveries has been blunted through the habitual practices of the same forms of critical theory that have given such broad currency to the formulae themselves. In particular, it is possible that the very productive critical habits embodied in what Paul Ricoeur memorably called the «hermeneutics of suspicion»—widespread critical habits indeed, perhaps by now nearly synonymous with criticism itself—may have had an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller.

Ricoeur introduced the category of the hermeneutics of suspicion to describe the position of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their intellectual offspring in a context that also included such alternative disciplinary hermeneutics as the philological and theological «hermeneutics of recovery of meaning.» His intent in offering the former of these formulations was descriptive and taxonomic rather than imperative. In the context of recent U.S. critical theory, however, where Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud by themselves are taken as constituting a pretty sufficient genealogy for the mainstream of New Historicist, deconstructive, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism, to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is, I believe, widely understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities. The phrase now has something like the sacred status of Fredric Jameson's «Always historicize»—and, like that one, it fits oddly into its new position in the tablets of the Law. *Always* historicize? What could have less to do with historicizing than the commanding, atemporal adverb «always»? It reminds me of the bumper stickers that instruct people in other cars to «Question Authority.» Excellent advice, perhaps wasted on anyone who does whatever they're ordered to do by a strip of paper glued to an automobile! The imperative framing will do funny things to a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Not surprisingly, the methodological centrality of suspicion to current critical practice has involved a concomitant privileging of the concept of paranoia. In the last paragraphs of Freud's essay on the paranoid Dr. Schreber, there is discussion of what Freud considers a «striking similarity» between Schreber's systematic persecutory delusion and Freud's own theory. Freud was indeed later to generalize, famously, that «the delusions of paranoiacs have an unpalatable external similarity and internal kinship to the systems of our philosophers»—among whom he included himself (12:79, 17:271). For all his slyness, it may be true that the putative congruence between paranoia and theory was unpalatable to Freud; if so, however, it is no longer viewed as unpalatable. The articulation of such a congruence may have been inevitable, at any rate; as Ricoeur notes, «For Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the fundamental category of consciousness is the relation hidden-shown or, if you prefer, simulated-manifested. … Thus the distinguishing characteristic of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche is the general hypothesis concerning both the process of false consciousness and the method of deciphering. The two go together, since the man of suspicion carries out in reverse the work of falsification of the man of guile» (33–34).

The man of suspicion double-bluffing the man of guile: in the hands of thinkers after Freud, paranoia has by now candidly become less a diagnosis than a prescription. In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant. I myself have no wish to return to the use of «paranoid» as a pathologizing diagnosis, but it seems to me a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds.

Even aside from the prestige that now attaches to a hermeneutics of suspicion in critical theory as a whole, queer studies in particular has had a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative. Freud, of course, traced every instance of paranoia to the repression of

specifically same-sex desire, whether in women or in men. The traditional, homophobic psychoanalytic use that has generally been made of Freud's association has been to pathologize homosexuals as paranoid or to consider paranoia a distinctively homosexual disease. In *Homosexual Desire*, however, a 1972 book translated into English in 1978, Guy Hocquenghem returned to Freud's formulations to draw from them a conclusion that would not reproduce this damaging non sequitur. If paranoia reflects the *repression* of same-sex desire, Hocquenghem reasoned, then paranoia is a uniquely privileged site for illuminating not homosexuality itself, as in the Freudian tradition, but rather precisely the mechanisms of homophobic and heterosexist enforcement against it. What is illuminated by an understanding of paranoia is not how homosexuality works, but how homophobia and heterosexism work—in short, if one understands these oppressions to be systemic, how the world works.

Paranoia thus became by the mid-1980s a privileged *object* of antihomophobic theory. How did it spread so quickly from that status to being its uniquely sanctioned *methodology*? I have been looking back into my own writing of the 1980s as well as that of some other critics, trying to retrace that transition—one that seems worthy of remark now but seemed at the time, I think, the most natural move in the world. Part of the explanation lies in a property of paranoia itself. Simply put, paranoia tends to be contagious; more specifically, paranoia is drawn toward and tends to construct symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies. As Leo Bersani writes, «To inspire interest is to be guaranteed a paranoid reading, just as we must inevitably be suspicious of the interpretations we inspire. Paranoia is an inescapable interpretive doubling of presence» (188). It sets a thief (and, if necessary, becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guile; «it takes one to know one.» A paranoid friend, who believes I am reading her mind, knows this from reading mine; also a suspicious writer, she is always turning up at crime scenes of plagiarism, indifferently as perpetrator or as victim; a litigious colleague as well, she not only imagines me to be as familiar with the laws of libel as she is, but eventually makes me become so. (All these examples, by the way, are fictitious.)

Given that paranoia seems to have a peculiarly intimate relation to the phobic dynamics around homosexuality, then, it may have been structurally inevitable that the reading practices that became most available and fruitful in antihomophobic work would often in turn have been paranoid ones. There must have been historical as well as structural reasons for this development, however, because it is less easy to account on structural terms for the frequent privileging of paranoid methodologies in recent nonqueer critical projects such as feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, deconstruction, Marxist criticism, or the New Historicism. One recent discussion of paranoia invokes «a popular maxim of the late 1960s: ‹Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're *not* out to get you› » (Adams 15). In fact, it seems quite plausible that some version of this axiom (perhaps «Even a paranoid can have enemies,» uttered by Henry Kissinger) is so indelibly inscribed in the brains of baby boomers that it offers us the continuing illusion of possessing a special insight into the epistemologies of enmity. My impression, again, is that we are liable to produce this constative formulation as fiercely as if it had a self-evident imperative force: the notation that even paranoid people have enemies is wielded as if its absolutely necessary corollary were the injunction «so *you can never be paranoid enough*.»

But the truth value of the original axiom, assuming it to be true, doesn't actually make a paranoid imperative self-evident. Learning that «just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you don't have enemies,» somebody might deduce that being paranoid is not an effective way to get rid of enemies. Rather than concluding «so you can never be paranoid enough,» this person might instead be moved to reflect «but then, just because you have enemies doesn't mean you have to be paranoid.» That is to say, once again: for someone to have an unmystified view of systemic oppressions does not *intrinsically* or *necessarily* enjoin that

person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences. To be other than paranoid (and of course, we'll need to define this term much more carefully), to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does *not*, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression.

How are we to understand paranoia in such a way as to situate it as one kind of epistemological practice among other, alternative ones? Besides Freud's, the most usable formulations for this purpose would seem to be those of Melanie Klein and (to the extent that paranoia represents an affective as well as cognitive mode) Silvan Tomkins. In Klein, I find particularly congenial her use of the concept of *positions*—the schizoid/paranoid position, the depressive position—as opposed to, for example, normatively ordered *stages*, stable *structures*, or diagnostic *personality types*. As Hinshelwood writes in his *Dictionary of Kleinian Thought*, «The term ‹position› describes the characteristic posture that the ego takes up with respect to its objects… [Klein] wanted to convey, with the idea of position, a much more flexible to-and-fro process between one and the other than is normally meant by regression to fixation points in the developmental phases» (394). The flexible to-and-fro movement implicit in Kleinian *positions* will be useful for my discussion of paranoid and reparative critical *practices*, not as theoretical ideologies (and certainly not as stable personality types of critics), but as changing and heterogeneous relational stances.

The greatest interest of Klein's concept lies, it seems to me, in her seeing the paranoid position always in the oscillatory context of a very different possible one: the depressive position. For Klein's infant or adult, the paranoid position—understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety—is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one. By contrast, the depressive position is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting: this is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or «repair» the murderous part-objects into something like a whole—though, I would emphasize, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*. Once assembled to one's own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.

Given the instability and mutual inscription built into the Kleinian notion of positions, I am also, in the present project, interested in doing justice to the powerful reparative practices that, I am convinced, infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects, as well as in the paranoid exigencies that are often necessary for nonparanoid knowing and utterance. For example, Patton's calm response to me about the origins of HIV drew on a lot of research, her own and other people's, much of which required being paranoiacally structured.

For convenience's sake, I borrow my critical examples as I proceed from two influential studies of the past decade, one roughly psychoanalytic and the other roughly New Historicist—but I do so for more than the sake of convenience, as both are books (Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*) whose centrality to the development of my own thought, and that of the critical movements that most interest me, are examples of their remarkable force and exemplarity. Each, as well, is interestingly located in a tacit or ostensibly marginal, but in hindsight originary and authorizing relation to different strains of queer theory. Finally, I draw a sense of permission from the fact that neither book is any longer very representative of the most recent work of either author, so that observations about the reading practices of either book may, I hope, escape being glued as if allegorically to the name of the author.

I would like to begin by setting outside the scope of this discussion any overlap between paranoia per se on the one hand, and on the other hand the states variously called dementia praecox (by Kraepelin), schizophrenia (by Bleuler), or, more generally, delusionality or psychosis. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, the history of psychiatry has attempted various mappings of this overlap: «Kraepelin differentiates clearly between paranoia on the one hand and the paranoid form of dementia praecox on the other; Bleuler treats paranoia as a sub-category of dementia praecox, or the group of schizophrenias; as for Freud, he is quite prepared to see certain so-called paranoid forms of dementia praecox brought under the head of paranoia. … [For example, Schreber's] case of ‹paranoid dementia› is essentially a paranoia proper [and therefore not a form of schizophrenia] in Freud's eyes» (297). In Klein's later writings, meanwhile, the occurrence of psychotic-like mental events is seen as universal in both children and adults, so that mechanisms such as paranoia have a clear ontological priority over diagnostic categories such as dementia. The reason I want to insist in advance on this move is, once again, to try to hypothetically disentangle the question of truth value from the question of performative effect.

I am saying that the main reasons for questioning paranoid practices are other than the possibility that their suspicions can be delusional or simply wrong. Concomitantly, some of the main reasons for practicing paranoid strategies may be other than the possibility that they offer unique access to true knowledge. They represent a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge. Paranoia knows some things well and others poorly.

I'd like to undertake now something like a composite sketch of what I mean by paranoia in this connection—not as a tool of differential diagnosis, but as a tool for better seeing differentials of practice. My main headings are:

Paranoia is *anticipatory*.
Paranoia is *reflexive and mimetic*.
Paranoia is *a strong theory*.
Paranoia is a theory of *negative affects*.
Paranoia places its faith in *exposure*.

PARANOIA IS ANTICIPATORY

That paranoia is anticipatory is clear from every account and theory of the phenomenon. The first imperative of paranoia is *There must be no bad surprises*, and indeed, the aversion to surprise seems to be what cements the intimacy between paranoia and knowledge per se, including both epistemophilia and skepticism. D. A. Miller notes in *The Novel and the Police* , «Surprise … is precisely what the paranoid seeks to eliminate, but it is also what, in the event, he survives by reading as a frightening incentive: he can never be paranoid enough» (164).

The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known. As Miller's analysis also suggests, the temporal progress and regress of paranoia are, in principle, infinite. Hence perhaps, I suggest, Butler's repeated and scouringly thorough demonstrations in *Gender Trouble* that there can have been no moment prior to the imposition of the totalizing Law of gender difference; hence her unresting vigilance for traces in other theorists' writing of nostalgia for such an impossible prior moment. No time could be too early for one's having-already-known, for its having-already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen. And no loss could be too far in the future to need to be preemptively discounted.

PARANOIA IS REFLEXIVE AND MIMETIC

In noting, as I have already, the contagious tropism of paranoia toward symmetrical epistemologies, I have relied on the double senses of paranoia as reflexive and mimetic. Paranoia seems to require being imitated to be understood, and it, in turn, seems to understand only by imitation. Paranoia proposes both *Anything you can do (to me) I can do worse*, and *Anything you can do (to me) I can do first*—to myself. In *The Novel and the Police*, Miller is much more explicit than Freud in embracing the twin propositions that one understands paranoia only by oneself practicing paranoid knowing, and that the way paranoia has of understanding anything is by imitating and embodying it. That paranoia refuses to be only *either* a way of knowing *or* a thing known, but is characterized by an insistent tropism toward occupying both positions, is wittily dramatized from the opening page of this definitive study of paranoia: a foreword titled «But Officer…» begins with an always-already-second-guessing sentence about how «Even the blandest (or bluffest) ‹scholarly work› fears getting into trouble,» including trouble «with the adversaries whose particular attacks it keeps busy anticipating» (vii). As the book's final paragraph notes about *David Copperfield*, Miller too «everywhere intimates a … pattern in which the subject constitutes himself ‹against› discipline by assuming that discipline in his own name» (220) or even his own body (191).

It seems no wonder, then, that paranoia, once the topic is broached in a nondiagnostic context, seems to grow like a crystal in a hypersaturated solution, blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding *or* things to understand. I will say more later about some implications of the status of paranoia as, in this sense, inevitably a «strong theory.» What may be even more important is how severely the mimeticism of paranoia circumscribes its potential as a medium of political or cultural struggle. As I pointed out in a 1986 essay (in which my implicit reference was, as it happens, to one of the essays later collected in *The Novel and the Police*), «The problem here is not simply that paranoia is a form of love, for—in a certain language—what is not? The problem is rather that, of all forms of love, paranoia is the most ascetic, the love that demands least from its object. … The gorgeous narrative work done by the Foucauldian paranoid, transforming the simultaneous chaoses of institutions into a consecutive, drop-dead-elegant diagram of spiralling escapes and recaptures, is also the paranoid subject's proffer of himself and his cognitive talent, now ready for anything it can present in the way of blandishment or violence, to an order-of-things *morcelé* that had until then lacked *only* narratibility, a body, cognition» (*Coherence* xi).

At the risk of being awfully reductive, I suggest that this anticipatory, mimetic mechanism may also shed light on a striking feature of recent feminist and queer uses of psychoanalysis. Lacan aside, few actual psychoanalysts would dream of being as rigorously insistent as are many oppositional theorists—of whom Butler is very far from the most single-minded—in asserting the inexorable, irreducible, uncircumnavigable, omnipresent centrality, at every psychic juncture, of the facts (however factitious) of «sexual difference» and «the phallus.» From such often tautological work, it would be hard to learn that—from Freud onward, including, for example, the later writings of Melanie Klein—the history of psychoanalytic thought offers richly divergent, heterogeneous tools for thinking about aspects of personhood, consciousness, affect, filiation, social dynamics, and sexuality that, though relevant to the experience of gender and queerness, are often not centrally organized around «sexual difference» at all. Not that they are necessarily prior to «sexual difference»: they may simply be conceptualized as somewhere to the side of it, tangentially or contingently related or even rather unrelated to it.

Seemingly, the reservoir of such thought and speculation could make an important resource for theorists committed to thinking about human lives otherwise than through the prejudicious gender reifications that are common in psychoanalysis as in other projects of modern philosophy and science. What has happened instead, I think, is something like the following.

First, through what might be called a process of vigilant scanning, feminists and queers have rightly understood that no topic or area of psychoanalytic thought can be declared a priori immune to the influence of such gender reifications. Second, however—and, it seems to me, unnecessarily and often damagingly—the lack of such a priori immunity, the absence of any guaranteed nonprejudicial point of beginning for feminist thought within psychoanalysis has led to the widespread adoption by some thinkers of an anticipatory mimetic strategy whereby a certain, stylized violence of sexual differentiation must always be *presumed* or *self-assumed* —even, where necessary, imposed—simply on the ground that it can never be finally *ruled out*. (I don't want to suggest, in using the word «mimetic,» that these uses of psychoanalytic gender categories need be either uncritical of or identical to the originals. Butler, among others, has taught us a much less deadening use of «mimetic.») But, for example, in this post-Lacanian tradition, psychoanalytic thought that is not in the first place centrally organized around phallic «sexual difference» must seemingly be translated, with however distorting results, into that language before it can be put to any other theoretical use. The contingent possibilities of thinking otherwise than through «sexual difference» are subordinated to the paranoid imperative that, if the violence of such gender reification cannot be definitively halted in advance, it must at least never arrive on any conceptual scene *as a surprise*. In a paranoid view, it is more dangerous for such reification ever to be unanticipated than often to be unchallenged.

PARANOIA IS A STRONG THEORY

It is for reasons like these that, in the work of Silvan Tomkins, paranoia is offered as the example par excellence of what Tomkins refers to as «strong affect theory»—in this case, a strong humiliation or humiliation-fear theory. As Chapter 3 explains, Tomkins's use of the term «strong theory»—indeed, his use of the term «theory» at all—has something of a double valence. He goes beyond Freud's reflection on possible *similarities between*, say, paranoia and theory; by Tomkins's account, which is strongly marked by early cybernetics' interest in feedback processes, all people's cognitive/affective lives are organized according to alternative, changing, strategic, and hypothetical affect theories. As a result, there would be from the start no ontological difference between the theorizing acts of a Freud and those of, say, one of his analysands. Tomkins does not suggest that there is no metalevel of reflection in Freud's theory, but that affect itself, ordinary affect, while irreducibly corporeal, is also centrally shaped, through the feedback process, by its access to just such theoretical metalevels. In Tomkins, there is no distance at all between affect theory in the sense of the important explicit theorizing some scientists and philosophers do around affects, and affect theory in the sense of the largely tacit theorizing all people do in experiencing and trying to deal with their own and others' affects.

To call paranoia a strong theory is, then, at the same time to congratulate it as a big achievement (it's a strong theory rather as, for Harold Bloom, Milton is a strong poet) but also to classify it. It is one kind of affect theory among other possible kinds, and by Tomkins's account, a number of interrelated affect theories of different kinds and strengths are likely to constitute the mental life of any individual. Most pointedly, the contrast of strong theory in Tomkins is with weak theory, and the contrast is not in every respect to the advantage of the strong kind. The reach and reductiveness of strong theory—that is, its conceptual economy or elegance—involve both assetsanddeficits.WhatcharacterizesstrongtheoryinTomkinsisnot,after all, how well it avoids negative affect or finds positive affect, but the size and topology of the domain that it organizes. «Any theory of wide generality,» he writes,

> is capable of accounting for a wide spectrum of phenomena which appear to be very remote, one from the other, and from a common source. This is a commonly accepted criterion by which the explanatory power of any scientific theory can be

> evaluated. To the extent to which the theory can account only for «near» phenomena, it is a weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain. As it orders more and more remote phenomena to a single formulation, its power grows. … A humiliation theory is strong to the extent to which it enables more and more experiences to be accounted for as instances of humiliating experiences on the one hand, or to the extent to which it enables more and more anticipation of such contingencies before they actually happen. (Affect 2:433–34)

As this account suggests, far from becoming stronger through obviating or alleviating humiliation, a humiliation theory becomes stronger exactly insofar as it fails to do so. Tomkins's conclusion is not that all strong theory is ineffective—indeed, it may grow to be only too effective—but that «*affect theory must be effective to be weak*»: «We can now see more clearly that although a restricted and weak theory may not always successfully protect the individual against negative affect, it is difficult for it to remain weak unless it does so. Conversely, a negative affect theory gains in strength, paradoxically, by virtue of the continuing failures of its strategies to afford protection through successful avoidance of the experience of negative affect. …

It is the repeated and apparently uncontrollable spread of the experience of negative affect which prompts the increasing strength of the ideo-affective organization which we have called a strong affect theory» (2:323–24).

An affect theory is, among other things, a mode of *selective* scanning and amplification; for this reason, any affect theory risks being somewhat tautological, but because of its wide reach and rigorous exclusiveness, a strong theory risks being strongly tautological:

> We have said that there is over-organization in monopolistic humiliation theory. By this we mean not only that there is excessive integration between sub-systems which are normally more independent, but also that each subsystem is over-specialized in the interests of minimizing the experience of humiliation. … The entire cognitive apparatus is in a constant state of alert for possibilities, imminent or remote, ambiguous or clear.
>
> Like any highly organized effort at detection, as little as possible is left to chance. The radar antennae are placed wherever it seems possible the enemy may attack. Intelligence officers may monitor even unlikely conversations if there is an outside chance something relevant may be detected or if there is a chance that two independent bits of information taken together may give indication of the enemy's intentions. … But above all there is a highly organized way of interpreting information so that what is possibly relevant can be quickly abstracted and magnified, and the rest discarded. (Affect 2:433)

This is how it happens that an explanatory structure that a reader may see as tautological, in that it can't help or can't stop or can't do anything other than prove the very same assumptions with which it began, may be experienced by the practitioner as a triumphant advance toward truth and vindication.

More usually, however, the roles in this drama are more mixed or more widely distributed. I don't suppose that too many readers—nor, for that matter, perhaps the author—would be too surprised to hear it noted that the main argument or strong theory of *The Novel and the Police* is entirely circular: everything can be understood as an aspect of the carceral, therefore the carceral is everywhere. But who reads *The Novel and the Police* to find out whether its main

argument is true? In this case, as also frequently in the case of the tautologies of «sexual difference,» the very breadth of reach that makes the theory strong also offers the space—of which Miller's book takes every advantage—for a wealth of tonal nuance, attitude, worldly observation, performative paradox, aggression, tenderness, wit, inventive reading, obiter dicta, and writerly panache. These rewards are so local and frequent that one might want to say that a plethora of only loosely related weak theories has been invited to shelter in the hypertrophied embrace of the book's overarching strong theory. In many ways, such an arrangement is all to the good—suggestive, pleasurable, and highly productive; an insistence that everything means one thing somehow permits a sharpened sense of all the ways there are of meaning it. But one need not read an infinite number of students' and other critics' derivative rephrasings of the book's grimly strong theory to see, as well, some limitations of this unarticulated relation between strong and weak theories. As strong theory, and as a locus of reflexive mimeticism, paranoia is nothing if not teachable. The powerfully ranging and reductive force of strong theory can make tautological thinking hard to identify even as it makes it compelling and near inevitable; the result is that both writers and readers can damagingly misrecognize whether and where real conceptual work is getting done, and precisely what that work might be.

PARANOIA IS A THEORY OF NEGATIVE AFFECTS

While Tomkins distinguishes among a number of qualitatively different affects, he also for some purposes groups affects together loosely as either positive or negative. In these terms, paranoia is characterized not only by being a strong theory as opposed to a weak one, but by being a strong theory of a negative affect. This proves important in terms of the overarching affective goals Tomkins sees as potentially conflicting with each other in each individual: he distinguishes in the first place between the general goal of seeking to minimize negative affect and that of seeking to maximize positive affect. (The other, respectively more sophisticated goals he identifies are that affect inhibition be minimized and that the power to achieve the preceding three goals be maximized.) In most practices—in most lives—there are small and subtle (though cumulatively powerful) negotiations between and among these goals, but the mushrooming, self-confirming strength of a monopolistic strategy of anticipating negative affect can have, according to Tomkins, the effect of entirely blocking the potentially operative goal of seeking positive affect. «The only sense in which [the paranoid] may strive for positive affect at all is for the shield which it promises against humiliation,» he writes. «To take seriously the strategy of *maximizing* positive affect, rather than simply enjoying it when the occasion arises, is entirely out of the question» (*Affect* 2:458–59).

Similarly, in Klein's writings from the 1940s and 1950s, it again represents an actual achievement—a distinct, often risky positional shift—for an infant or adult to move toward a sustained *seeking of pleasure* (through the reparative strategies of the depressive position), rather than continue to pursue the self-reinforcing because self-defeating strategies for *forestalling pain* offered by the paranoid/schizoid position. It's probably more usual for discussions of the depressive position in Klein to emphasize that that position inaugurates ethical possibility—in the form of a guilty, empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care. Such ethical possibility, however, is founded on and coextensive with the subject's movement toward what Foucault calls «care of the self,» the often very fragile concern to provide the self with pleasure and nourishment in an environment that is perceived as not particularly offering them.

Klein's and Tomkins's conceptual moves here are more sophisticated and, in an important way, less tendentious than the corresponding assumptions in Freud. To begin with, Freud subsumes pleasure seeking and pain avoidance together under the rubric of the supposedly primordial «pleasure principle,» as though the two motives could not themselves radically differ.[1] Second, it is the pain-forestalling strategy alone in Freud that (as anxiety) gets

extended forward into the developmental achievement of the «reality principle.» This leaves pleasure seeking as an always presumable, unexaminable, inexhaustible underground wellspring of supposedly «natural» motive, one that presents only the question of how to keep its irrepressible ebullitions under control. Perhaps even more problematically, this Freudian schema silently installs the anxious paranoid imperative, the impossibility but also the supposed necessity of forestalling pain and surprise, as «reality»—as the only and inevitable mode, motive, content, and proof of true knowledge.

In Freud, then, there would be no room—except as an example of self-delusion—for the Proustian epistemology whereby the narrator of *À la recherche*, who feels in the last volume «jostling each other within me a whole host of truths concerning human passions and character and conduct,» recognizes them *as* truths insofar as «*the perception of [them] caused me joy*» (6:303; emphasis added). In the paranoid Freudian epistemology, it is implausible enough to suppose that truth could be even an accidental occasion of joy, inconceivable to imagine joy as a guarantor of truth. Indeed, from any point of view it is circular, or something, to suppose that one's pleasure at knowing something could be taken as evidence of the truth of the knowledge. But a strong theory of positive affect, such as Proust's narrator seems to move toward in *Time Regained*, is no *more* tautological than the strong theory of negative affect represented by, for example, his paranoia in *The Captive*. (Indeed, to the extent that the pursuit of positive affect is far less likely to result in the formation of very strong theory, it may tend rather less toward tautology.) Allow each theory its own, different prime motive, at any rate—the anticipation of pain in one case, the provision of pleasure in the other—and neither can be called more realistic than the other. It's not even necessarily true that the two make different judgments of «reality»: it isn't that one is pessimistic and sees the glass as half empty, while the other is optimistic and sees it as half full. In a world full of loss, pain, and oppression, both epistemologies are likely to be based on deep pessimism: the reparative motive of seeking pleasure, after all, arrives, by Klein's account, only with the achievement of a depressive position. But what each looks for—which is again to say, the motive each has *for looking*—is bound to differ widely. Of the two, however, it is only paranoid knowledge that has so thorough a practice of disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth.

PARANOIA PLACES ITS FAITH IN EXPOSURE

Whatever account it may give of its own motivation, paranoia is characterized by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se—knowledge in the form of exposure. Maybe that's why paranoid knowing is so inescapably narrative. Like the deinstitutionalized person on the street who, betrayed and plotted against by everyone else in the city, still urges on you the finger-worn dossier bristling with his precious correspondence, paranoia for all its vaunted suspicion acts as though its work would be accomplished if only it could finally, this time, somehow get its story truly known. That a fully initiated listener could still remain indifferent or inimical, or might have no help to offer, is hardly treated as a possibility.

It's strange that a hermeneutics of suspicion would appear so about the effects of exposure, but Nietzsche (through the genealogy of morals), Marx (through the theory of ideology), and Freud (through the theory of ideals and illusions) already represent, in Ricoeur's phrase, «convergent procedures of demystification» (34) and therefore a seeming faith, inexplicable in their own terms, in the effects of such a proceeding. In the influential final pages of *Gender Trouble*, for example, Butler offers a programmatic argument in favor of demystification as «the normative focus for gay and lesbian practice» (124), with such claims as that «drag implicitly *reveals* the imitative structure of gender itself « (137); «we see sex and gender *denaturalized* by means of a performance» (138); «gender parody *reveals* that the original identity … is an imitation» (138); «gender performance will *enact and reveal* the

performativity of gender itself « (139); «parodic repetition … *exposes* the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity» (141); «the parodic repetition of gender exposes … the illusion of gender identity» (146); and «hyperbolic exhibitions of ‹the natural› … *reveal* its fundamentally phantasmatic status» (147) as well as «*exposing* its fundamental unnaturalness» (149; all emphases added).

What marks the paranoid impulse in these pages is, I would say, less even the stress on reflexive mimesis than the seeming faith in exposure. The archsuspicious author of *The Novel and the Police* also speaks, in this case, for the protocols of many less interesting recent critics when he offers to provide «the ‹flash› of increased visibility necessary to render modern discipline a problem in its own right» (D. A. Miller, ix)—as though to make something visible as a problem were, if not a mere hop, skip, and jump away from getting it solved, at least self-evidently a step in that direction. In this respect at least, though not in every one, Miller in *The Novel and the Police* writes as an exemplary New Historicist. For, to a startling extent, the articulations of New Historicist scholarship rely on the prestige of a single, overarching narrative: exposing and problematizing hidden violences in the genealogy of the modern liberal subject.

With the passage of time since the New Historicism was new, it’s becoming easier to see the ways that such a paranoid project of exposure may be more historically specific than it seems. «The modern liberal subject»: by now it seems, or ought to seem, anything but an obvious choice as the unique terminus ad quem of historical narrative. Where *are* all these supposed modern liberal subjects? I daily encounter graduate students who are dab hands at unveiling the hidden historical violences that underlie a secular, universalist liberal humanism. Yet these students’ sentient years, unlike the formative years of their teachers, have been spent entirely in a xenophobic Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush America where «liberal» is, if anything, a taboo category and where «secular humanism» is routinely treated as a marginal religious sect, while a vast majority of the population claims to engage in direct intercourse with multiple invisible entities such as angels, Satan, and God.

Furthermore, the force of any interpretive project of *unveiling hidden violence* would seem to depend on a cultural context, like the one assumed in Foucault’s early works, in which violence would be deprecated and hence hidden in the first place. Why bother exposing the ruses of power in a country where, at any given moment, 40 percent of young black men are enmeshed in the penal system? In the United States and internationally, while there is plenty of hidden violence that requires exposure there is also, and increasingly, an ethos where forms of violence that are hypervisible from the start may be offered as an exemplary spectacle rather than remain to be unveiled as a scandalous secret. Human rights controversy around, for example, torture and disappearances in Argentina or the use of mass rape as part of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia marks, not an unveiling of practices that had been hidden or naturalized, but a wrestle of different frameworks *of* visibility. That is, violence that was *from the beginning* exemplary and spectacular, pointedly addressed, meant to serve as a public warning or terror to members of a particular community is combated by efforts to *displace and redirect* (as well as simply expand) its aperture of visibility.

A further problem with these critical practices: What does a hermeneutics of suspicion and exposure have to say to social formations in which visibility itself constitutes much of the violence? The point of the reinstatement of chain gangs in several Southern states is less that convicts be required to perform hard labor than that they be required to do so under the gaze of the public, and the enthusiasm for Singapore-style justice that was popularly expressed in the United States around the caning of Michael Fay revealed a growing feeling that well-publicized shaming stigma is just what the doctor ordered for recalcitrant youth. Here is one remarkable index of historical change: it used to be opponents of capital punishment who argued that, if practiced at all, executions should be done in public so as to shame state and

spectators by the airing of previously hidden judicial violence. Today it is no longer opponents but death penalty cheerleaders, flushed with triumphal ambitions, who consider that the proper place for executions is on television. What price now the cultural critics' hard-won skill at making visible, behind permissive appearances, the hidden traces of oppression and persecution?

The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends, in addition, on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent? As Peter Sloterdijk points out, cynicism or «enlightened false consciousness»—false consciousness that knows itself to be false, «its falseness already reflexively buffered»—already represents «the universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for suckers» (5). How television-starved would someone have to be to find it shocking that ideologies contradict themselves, that simulacra don't have originals, or that gender representations are artificial? My own guess is that such popular cynicism, though undoubtedly widespread, is only one among the heterogeneous, competing theories that constitute the mental ecology of most people. Some exposés, some demystifications, some bearings of witness do have great effectual force (though often of an unanticipated kind). Many that are just as true and convincing have none at all, however, and as long as that is so, we must admit that the efficacy and directionality of such acts reside somewhere else than in their relation to knowledge per se.

Writing in 1988—that is, after two full terms of Reaganism in the United States—D. A. Miller proposes to follow Foucault in demystifying «the intensive and continuous ‹pastoral› care that liberal society proposes to take of each and every one of its charges» (viii). As if ! I'm a lot less worried about being pathologized by my therapist than about my vanishing mental health coverage—and that's given the great good luck of having health insurance at all. Since the beginning of the tax revolt, the government of the United States—and, increasingly, those of other so-called liberal democracies— has been positively rushing to divest itself of answerability for care to its charges, with no other institutions proposing to fill the gap.

This development, however, is the last thing anyone could have expected from reading New Historicist prose, which constitutes a full genealogy of the secular welfare state that peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, along with a watertight proof of why things must become more and more like that forever. No one can blame a writer in the 1980s for not having foreseen the effects of the Republicans' 1994 Contract with America. But if, as Miller says, «Surprise … is precisely what the paranoid seeks to eliminate,» it must be admitted that, as a form of paranoia, the New Historicism fails spectacularly. While its general tenor of «things are bad and getting worse» is immune to refutation, any more specific predictive value—and as a result, arguably, any value for making oppositional strategy—has been nil. Such accelerating failure to anticipate change is, moreover, as I've discussed, entirely in the nature of the paranoid process, whose sphere of influence (like that of the New Historicism itself) only expands as each unanticipated disaster seems to demonstrate more conclusively that, guess what, *you can never be paranoid enough*.

To look from a present day vantage at Richard Hofstadter's immensely influential 1963 essay «The Paranoid Style in American Politics» is to see the extent of a powerful discursive change. Hofstadter's essay is a prime expression of the complacent, coercive liberal consensus that practically begs for the kind of paranoid demystification in which, for example, D. A. Miller educates his readers. Its style is mechanically even-handed: Hofstadter finds paranoia on both left and right: among abolitionists, anti-Masons and anti-Catholics and anti-Mormons, nativists and populists and those who believe in conspiracies of bankers or

munitions makers; in anyone who doubts that JFK was killed by a lone gunman, «in the popular left-wing press, in the contemporary American right wing, and on both sides of the race controversy today» (9). Although these categories seem to cover a lot of people, there remains nonetheless a presumptive «we»—apparently still practically everyone—who can agree to view such extremes from a calm, understanding, and encompassing middle ground, where «we» can all agree that, for example, though «innumerable decisions of … the cold war can be faulted,» they represent «simply the mistakes of well-meaning men» (36). Hofstadter has no trouble admitting that paranoid people or movements can perceive true things, though «a distorted style is … a possible signal that may alert us to a distorted judgment, just as in art an ugly style is a cue to fundamental defects of taste» (6):

> A few simple and relatively non-controversial examples may make [the distinction between content and style] wholly clear. Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, a great deal of publicity was given to a bill…
>
> to tighten federal controls over the sale of firearms through the mail. When hearings were being held on the measure, three men drove 2,500 miles to Washington from Bagdad, Arizona, to testify against it. Now there are arguments against the Dodd bill which, however unpersuasive one may find them, have the color of conventional political reasoning. But one of the Arizonans opposed it with what might be considered representative paranoid arguments, insisting that it was «a further attempt by a subversive power to make us part of one world socialistic government» and that it threatened to «create chaos» that would help «our enemies» to seize power. (5)

I won't deny that a person could get nostalgic for a time when paranoid gun lobby rhetoric sounded just plain nutty—a «simple and relatively non-controversial» example of «distorted judgment»—rather than representing the almost uncontested platform of a dominant political party. But the spectacular datedness of Hofstadter's example isn't only an index of how far the American political center has shifted toward the right since 1963. It's also a sign of how normative such paranoid thinking has become at every point in the political spectrum. In a funny way, I feel closer today to that paranoid Arizonan than I do to Hofstadter—even though, or do I mean because, I also assume that the Arizonan is a homophobic white-supremacist Christian Identity militia member who would as soon blow me away as look at me. Peter Sloterdijk does not make explicit that the wised-up popular cynicism or «enlightened false consciousness» that he considers now to be near ubiquitous is, specifically, paranoid in structure. But that conclusion seems inescapable. Arguably, such narrow-gauge, everyday, rather incoherent cynicism is what paranoia looks like when it functions as weak theory rather than strong theory. To keep arriving on this hyperdemystified, paranoid scene with the «news» of a hermeneutics of suspicion, at any rate, is a far different act from what such exposures would have been in the 1960s.

Subversive and demystifying parody, suspicious archaeologies of the present, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure: as I have been arguing, these infinitely doable and teachable protocols of unveiling have become the common currency of cultural and historicist studies. If there is an obvious danger in the triumphalism of a paranoid hermeneutics, it is that the broad consensual sweep of such methodological assumptions, the current near professionwide agreement about what constitutes narrative or explanation or adequate historicization may, if it persists unquestioned, unintentionally impoverish the gene pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills. The trouble with a shallow gene pool, of course, is its diminished ability to respond to environmental (e.g., political) change.

Another, perhaps more nearly accurate way of describing the present paranoid consensus, however, is that rather than entirely displacing, it may simply have required a certain disarticulation, disavowal, and misrecognition of other ways of knowing, ways less oriented around suspicion, that are actually being practiced, often by the same theorists and as part of the same projects. The monopolistic program of paranoid knowing systematically disallows any explicit recourse to reparative motives, no sooner to be articulated than subject to methodical uprooting. Reparative motives, once they become explicit, are inadmissible in paranoid theory both because they are about pleasure («merely aesthetic») and because they are frankly ameliorative («merely reformist»).[2] What makes pleasure and amelioration so «mere»? Only the exclusiveness of paranoia's faith in demystifying exposure: only its cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution, explosion of gender roles, or whatever, is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious (as if otherwise it wouldn't have been) and intolerable (as if intolerable situations were famous for generating excellent solutions).

Such ugly prescriptions are not seriously offered by most paranoid theory, but a lot of contemporary theory is nonetheless regularly *structured as if* by them. The kind of aporia we have already discussed in *The Novel and the Police*, where readers are impelled through a grimly monolithic structure of strong paranoid theory by successive engagement with quite varied, often apparently keenly pleasure-oriented, smaller-scale writerly and intellectual solicitations, appears in a lot of other good criticism as well. I certainly recognize it as characterizing a fair amount of my own writing. Does it matter when such projects misdescribe themselves or are misrecognized by readers? I wouldn't suggest that the force of any powerful writing can ever attain complete transparency to itself, or is likely to account for itself very adequately at the constative level of the writing. But suppose one takes seriously the notion, like the one articulated by Tomkins but also like other available ones, that everyday theory qualitatively affects everyday knowledge and experience; and suppose that one doesn't want to draw much ontological distinction between academic theory and everyday theory; and suppose that one has a lot of concern for the quality of other people's and one's own practices of knowing and experiencing. In these cases, it would make sense—if one had the choice—not to cultivate the necessity of a systematic, self-accelerating split between what one is doing and the reasons one does it.

While paranoid theoretical proceedings both depend on and reinforce the structural dominance of monopolistic «strong theory,» there may also be benefit in exploring the extremely varied, dynamic, and historically contingent ways that strong theoretical constructs interact with weak ones in the ecology of knowing—an exploration that obviously can't proceed without a respectful interest in weak as well as strong theoretical acts. Tomkins offers far more models for approaching such a project than I've been able to summarize. But the history of literary criticism can also be viewed as a repertoire of alternative models for allowing strong and weak theory to interdigitate. What could better represent «weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain,» than the devalued and near obsolescent New Critical skill of imaginative close reading?[3] But what was already true in Empson and Burke is true in a different way today: there are important phenomenological and theoretical tasks that can be accomplished only through local theories and nonce taxonomies; the potentially innumerable mechanisms of their relation to stronger theories remain matters of art and speculative thought.

Paranoia, as I have pointed out, represents not only a strong affect theory but a strong *negative* affect theory. The question of the strength of a given theory (or that of the relations between strong and weak theory) may be orthogonal to the question of its affective *quale*, and each may be capable of exploration by different means. A strong theory (i.e., a wide-ranging

and reductive one) that was not mainly organized around anticipating, identifying, and warding off the negative affect of humiliation would resemble paranoia in some respects but differ from it in others. I think, for example, that that might be a fair characterization of the preceding section of the present chapter. Because even the specification of paranoia as a theory of negative affect leaves open the distinctions between or among negative affects, there is the additional opportunity of experimenting with a vocabulary that will do justice to a wide affective range. Again, not only with the negative affects: it can also be reifying and, indeed, coercive to have only one, totalizing model of positive affect always in the same featured position. A disturbingly large amount of theory seems explicitly to undertake the proliferation of only one affect, or maybe two, of whatever kind—whether ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, *jouissance*, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation. It's like the old joke: «Comes the revolution, Comrade, everyone gets to eat roast beef every day.» «But Comrade, I don't like roast beef.» «Comes the revolution, Comrade, you'll like roast beef.» Comes the revolution, Comrade, you'll be tickled pink by those deconstructive jokes; you'll faint from ennui every minute you're not smashing the state apparatus; you'll definitely want hot sex twenty to thirty times a day. You'll be mournful *and* militant. You'll never want to tell Deleuze and Guattari, «Not tonight, dears, I have a headache.»

To recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities. Here, perhaps, Klein is of more help than Tomkins: to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates.[4] Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.[5]

Where does this argument leave projects of queer reading, in particular? With the relative deemphasis of the question of «sexual difference» and sexual «sameness,» and with the possibility of moving from a Freudian, homophobia-centered understanding of paranoia to other understandings of it, like Klein's or Tomkins's, that are not particularly Oedipal and are less drive-oriented than affect-oriented, I am also suggesting that the mutual inscription of queer thought with the topic of paranoia may be less necessary, less definitional, less completely constitutive than earlier writing on it, very much including my own, has assumed. A more ecological view of paranoia wouldn't offer the same transhistorical, almost automatic conceptual privileging of gay/lesbian issues that is offered by a Freudian view.

On the other hand, I think it will leave us in a vastly better position to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices, many of which can well be called reparative, that emerge from queer experience but become invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic. As Joseph Litvak writes, for example (in a personal communication, 1996),

> It seems to me that the importance of «mistakes» in queer reading and writing … has a lot to do with loosening the traumatic, inevitable-seeming connection between mistakes and humiliation. What I mean is that, if a lot of queer energy, say around adolescence, goes into what Barthes calles «le vouloir-être-intelligent» (as in «If I have to be miserable, at least let me be brainier than

> everybody else»), accounting in large part for paranoia's enormous prestige as the very signature of smartness (a smartness that smarts), a lot of queer energy, later on, goes into … practices aimed at taking the terror out of error, at making the making of mistakes sexy, creative, even cognitively powerful. Doesn't reading queer mean learning, among other things, that mistakes can be good rather than bad surprises?

It's appropriate, I think, that these insights would be contingent developments rather than definitional or transhistorical ones: they aren't things that would inevitably inhere in the experience of every woman-loving woman or man-loving man, say. For if, as I've shown, a paranoid reading practice is closely tied to a notion of the inevitable, there are other features of queer reading that can attune it exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency.

The dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality, after all, in which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so, takes its shape from a generational narrative that's characterized by a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: it happened to my father's father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son, and it will happen to my son's son. But isn't it a feature of queer possibility—only a contingent feature, but a real one, and one that in turn strengthens the force of contingency itself—that our generational relations don't always proceed in this lockstep?

Think of the epiphanic, extravagantly reparative final volume of Proust, in which the narrator, after a long withdrawal from society, goes to a party where he at first thinks everyone is sporting elaborate costumes pretending to be ancient, then realizes that they are old, and so is he—and is then assailed, in half a dozen distinct mnemonic shocks, by a climactic series of joy-inducing «truths» about the relation of writing to time. The narrator never says so, but isn't it worth pointing out that the complete temporal disorientation that initiates him into this revelatory space would have been impossible in a heterosexual *père de famille*, in one who had meanwhile been embodying, in the form of inexorably «progressing» identities and roles, the regular arrival of children and grandchildren?

> And now I began to understand what old age was—old age, which perhaps of all the realities is the one of which we preserve for longest in our life a purely abstract conception, looking at calendars, dating our letters, seeing our friends marry and then in their turn the children of our friends, and yet, either from fear or from sloth, not understanding what all this means, until the day when we behold an unknown silhouette … which teaches us that we are living in a new world; until the day when a grandson of a woman we once knew, a young man whom instinctively we treat as a contemporary of ours, smiles as though we were making fun of him because it seems that we are old enough to be his grandfather—and I began to understand too what death meant and love and the joys of the spiritual life, the usefulness of suffering, a vocation, etc. (6:354–55)

A more recent contingency, in the brutal foreshortening of so many queer life spans, has deroutinized the temporality of many of us in ways that only intensify this effect. I'm thinking, as I say this, of three very queer friendships I have. One of my friends is sixty; the other two are both thirty, and I, at forty-five, am exactly in the middle. All four of us are academics, and we have in common a lot of interests, energies, and ambitions; we have each had, as well, variously intense activist investments. In a «normal» generational narrative, our identifications with each other would be aligned with an expectation that in another fifteen years, I'd be situated comparably to where my sixty-year-old friend is, while my thirty-year-old friends would be situated comparably to where I am.

But we are all aware that the grounds of such friendships today are likely to differ from that model. They do so in inner cities, and for people subject to racist violence, and for people deprived of health care, and for people in dangerous industries, and for many others; they do so for my friends and me. Specifically, living with advanced breast cancer, I have little chance of ever being the age my older friend is now. My friends who are thirty are equally unlikely ever to experience my present, middle age: one is living with an advanced cancer caused by a massive environmental trauma (basically, he grew up on top of a toxic waste site); the other is living with hiv. The friend who is a very healthy sixty is much the likeliest of us to be living fifteen years from now.

It's hard to say, hard even to know, how these relationships are different from those shared by people of different ages on a landscape whose perspectival lines converge on a common disappearing-point. I'm sure ours are more intensely motivated: whatever else we know, we know there isn't time to bullshit. But what it means to identify with each other must also be very different. On this scene, an older person doesn't love a younger as someone who will someday be where she now is, or vice versa. No one is, so to speak, passing on the family name; there's a sense in which our life narratives will barely overlap. There's another sense in which they slide up more intimately alongside one another than can any lives that are moving forward according to the regular schedule of the generations. It is one another immediately, one another as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further, whom we each must learn best to apprehend, fulfill, and bear company.

At a textual level, it seems to me that related practices of reparative knowing may lie, barely recognized and little explored, at the heart of many histories of gay, lesbian, and queer intertextuality. The queer-identified practice of camp, for example, may be seriously misrecognized when it is viewed, as Butler and others view it, through paranoid lenses. As we've seen, camp is most often understood as uniquely appropriate to the projects of parody, denaturalization, demystification, and mocking exposure of the elements and assumptions of a dominant culture. And the degree to which camping is motivated by love seems often to be understood mainly as the degree of its self-hating complicity with an oppressive status quo. By this account, the x-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse in camp sees through to an unfleshed skeleton of the culture; the paranoid aesthetic on view here is one of minimalist elegance and conceptual economy.

The desire of a reparative impulse, on the other hand, is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self. To view camp as, among other things, the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices is to do better justice to many of the defining elements of classic camp performance: the startling, juicy displays of excess erudition, for example; the passionate, often hilarious antiquarianism, the prodigal production of alternative historiographies; the «over»- attachment to fragmentary, marginal, waste or leftover products; the rich, highly interruptive affective variety; the irrepressible fascination with ventriloquistic experimentation; the disorienting juxtapositions of present with past, and popular with high culture.[6] As in the writing of D. A. Miller, a glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment, unexplained upwellings of threat, contempt, and longing cements together and animates the amalgam of powerful part-objects in such work as that of Ronald Firbank, Djuna Barnes, Joseph Cornell, Kenneth Anger, Charles Ludlam, Jack Smith, John Waters, and Holly Hughes.

The very mention of these names, some of them attaching to almost legendarily «paranoid» personalities, confirms, too, Klein's insistence that it is not people but mutable positions—or, I would want to say, practices— that can be divided between the paranoid and the reparative; it is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and

disseminate the richest reparative practices. And if the paranoid or the depressive positions operate on a smaller scale than the level of individual typology, they operate also on a larger: that of shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse.

Like Proust, the reparative reader «helps himself again and again»; it is not only important but *possible* to find ways of attending to such reparative motives and positionalities. The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, has been in the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative motive itself. No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.

«Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is About You,» in *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky, pp. 123-151. Copyright, 2003, Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder. www.dukeupress.edu

NOTES

[1] Laplanche and Pontalis, in their entry under «Pleasure Principle,» show that Freud was long aware of this problem. They paraphrase: «Must we therefore be content with a purely economic definition and accept that pleasure and unpleasure are nothing more than the translation of quantitative changes into qualitative terms? And what then is the precise correlation between these two aspects, the qualitative and the quantitative? Little by little, Freud came to lay considerable emphasis on the great difficulty encountered in the attempt to provide a simple answer to this question» (323). In Chapter 3, Adam Frank and I describe Tomkins's work on affect in terms that try to respond to this way of posing the problem.

[2] The barely implicit sneer with which Leo Bersani wields the term «redemption» throughout *The Culture of Redemption* might be one good example of the latter kind of usage—except that Bersani's revulsion seems to attach, not quite to the notion that things could be ameliorated, but rather to the pious reification of Art as the appointed agent of such change.

[3] Thanks to Tyler Curtain for pointing this out to me.

[4] I am thinking here of Timothy Gould's interpretation (in a personal communication, 1994) of Emily Dickinson's poem that begins « ‹Hope› is the thing with feathers—/ That perches in

the soul—» (116, poem no. 254). Gould suggests that the symptoms of fluttering hope are rather like those of posttraumatic stress disorder, with the difference that the apparently absent cause of perturbation lies in the future, rather than in the past.

[5] I don't mean to hypostatize, here, «the way it actually did» happen, or to deny how constructed a thing this «actually did» may be—within certain constraints. The realm of what *might have happened but didn't* is, however, ordinarily even wider and less constrained, and it seems conceptually important that the two not be collapsed; otherwise, the entire possibility of things' *happening differently* can be lost.

[6] Michael Moon's *A Small Boy and Others* is one book that conveys this richer sense of queer culture.

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