

my Buddhist imagination, besides Hal and Michael and Mary C., includes Sharon Cameron, Don Lopez, Tina Meyerhoff, Nancy Waring, and, beam-



borrowed from the discussion of *The Wings of the Dove* in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the writing in *Touching Feeling* originally appeared in other contexts. But this collection of essays also represents a distinct project, one that has occupied a decade's work, which has nonetheless, and with increasing stubbornness, refused to become linear in structure. I think it is best described as a project to explore promising tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy.

No doubt the ambition of thinking other than dualistically itself shaped the project's resistance to taking the form of a book-length, linear argument on a single topic. A lot of voices tell us to think nondualistically, and even what to think in that fashion. Fewer are able to transmit how to go about it, the cognitive and even affective habits and practices involved, which are less than amenable to being couched in prescriptive forms. At best, I'd hope for this book to prompt recognition in some of the many people who successfully work in such ways; and where some approaches may be new or unarticulated, a sense of possibility. The ideal I'm envisioning here is a mind receptive to thoughts, able to nurture and connect them, and susceptible to happiness in their entertainment.

Especially since the 1960s any number of Western academic, popular, and professional discourses have been cumulatively invoking nondualistic approaches in physics, gender and sexuality, art, psychology and psychoanaly-

sis, deconstruction, postcolonial relations, pedagogy, religion and spirituality, race, mind-body problematics, the recovery movement, and science studies, among many other areas. But of course it's far easier to deprecate the confounding, tendentious effects of binary modes of thinking—and to expose their often stultifying perseveration—than it is to articulate or model other structures of thought. Even to invoke *nondualism*, as plenty of Buddhist sutras point out, is to tumble right into a *dualistic trap*. I've always assumed that the most useful work of this sort is likeliest to occur near the boundary of what a writer can't figure out how to say readily, never mind prescribe to others: in the *Jacoblike wrestling*—or *t'ai chi*, as it may be—that *confounds agency with passivity, the self with the book and the world, the ends of the work with its means*, and, maybe most alarmingly, *intelligence with stupidity*. If so, maybe there's been something encouraging in the *structural recalitrance of Touching Feeling*.

Among the forms of stubbornness this book embodies (yes, I'm a Taurus), one of the most obvious is its fixation on a small number of theoretical texts, all of them in print by 1990. I'm fond of observing how *obsession is the most durable form of intellectual capital*. More or less explicitly, all these essays explore a sense of exciting and so far unexhausted possibility—as well as frustration—stirred up by four difficult texts: J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, the introductory volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, and the first three volumes of Silvan Tomkins's *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (excerpted in Tomkins, *Shame*). Additionally, except for the less-known work of Tomkins, the essays respond to the critical and pedagogical receptions and uses of those influential texts—respond to them often with what has been, for me at least, a *vitalizing if sometimes coarse or unlovely exasperation*. What I wish were equally evident (maybe it is in some places) is plain *gratitude* at the privilege of being an interlocutor in conversations I've experienced as so politically, intellectually, and imaginatively *crucial*.

At the same time, one of the cumulative stories told by *Touching Feeling* may be of a *writer's decreasing sense of having a strong center of gravity in a particular intellectual field*. Such *encounters* as those with *mortality* and with *Buddhism, which shape the two last chapters*, have had some slip-slidy effects, for better or worse, on the strong consciousness of vocation that made a book like *Epistemology of the Closet* sound confident of its intervention on contemporaneous scenes of sexuality and critical theory. By contrast,

the work I've done in parallel with *Touching Feeling* over the past decade has included several editorial experiments in collaboration; a poetry book; the extended, double-voiced *haibun* of *A Dialogue on Love*; a lot of cancer journalism; and, increasingly, the nonlinguistic work of textile art. At the same time, interestingly, my classroom life has grown consistently more textured and relaxed. While I've struggled to make room in *Touching Feeling* for a sense of reality that would exclude none of these elements, I've also had to ungrasp my hold on some truths that used to be self-evident—including the absolute privilege of the writing act itself.

In her celebrated poem "One Art," Elizabeth Bishop's repeated refrain is "The art of losing isn't hard to master." In its insistence on a purgative aesthetic, it's the one poem of hers I've never liked; I picture it on a refrigerator magnet, say, urging dieters not to open the door. A more congenial version to me would invoke *the art of loosing*: and not as one art but a cluster of related ones. Ideally life, loves, and ideas might then sit freely, for a while, on the palm of the open hand. I would have liked *Touching Feeling* to be as open as that, and even as concentrated. In this introduction I can only unfold a few of the main topoi that have failed to become either dispensable or quite placeable during its writing.

#### PERFORMATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

*Touching Feeling* is rooted in an intransigent fascination with some effects and implications surrounding J. L. Austin's foundational work on performative utterances. While the concept of performativity has propelled notably divergent trains of thought in several disciplines, I have been most responsive to one line that extends through Derrida to the early work of Judith Butler, a line that proved particularly influential in the development of gender studies and queer studies throughout the 1990s.

The "queer" potential of performativity is evidently related to the tenuousness of its ontological ground, signaled by the fact that it begins its intellectual career all but repudiated in advance by the coiner of the term. Austin introduces performativity in the first of his 1955 Harvard lectures (later published as *How to Do Things with Words*), only to disown it somewhere around the eighth. He disowns or dismantles "performativity," that is, as the name of a distinct and bounded category of utterances that might be opposed to the merely "constative" or descriptive, noting that "every genuine speech

act is both" (147). Thus the use that deconstruction has had for "performativity" begins with the recognition of it as a property or aspect common to all utterances. Linguistics and analytic philosophy, by contrast, in spite of Austin's demurral, long remained interested in the process of classifying utterances as performatives versus constatives.

Yet, as Shoshana Felman points out in *The Literary Speech Act*, Austin's own performance in these lectures is anything but a simple one. One of their sly characteristics is a repeated tropism toward, an evident fascination with, a particular class of examples of performative utterance. Presented first as pure, originary, and defining for the concept; dismissed at the last as no more than "a marginal limiting case" of it, if indeed either the examples or the concept can be said to "survive" the analytic operation of the lectures at all (Austin 150); nonetheless reverted to over and over as if no argument or analysis, no deconstruction or dismantlement could really vitiate or even challenge the self-evidence of their exemplary force — these sentences are what Austin's work installs in the mind as performativity tout court, even while rendering nominally unusable the concept of performativity tout court. Famously, these are a cluster of sentences about which "it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing [a thing] . . . or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (3). Examples include "I promise," "I bequeath . . .," "I christen . . .," "I apologize," "I dare you," "I sentence you . . ."

In the present book, departing from Austin's usage, I refer to these exemplary instances as *explicit performative utterances*. They have several syntactic and semantic features in common: they are in the (1) first-person singular (2) present (3) indicative (4) active; (5) the verb in each one names precisely the act (in Austin's term, the illocution) that the utterance itself performs; and (6) the adverb "hereby" could be inserted in each of them without distorting their form or meaning. Thus, "I [hereby] apologize" apologizes, "I [hereby] sentence" sentences, and so on.

If the category *explicit performative utterance* proves clarifying at all, it will not do so by sweeping the table clear of dubious cases. There are plenty of sentences whose force seems unproblematically performative in a classically Austinian sense but that violate each of the above rules. "The meeting is adjourned" violates 1 and 4, for example; "The court will come to order" violates 1 and 2; "You're out" violates 1 and 5; "Present!" violates 1, 2, and 3, if not also 6.

But the point of the narrowed category is not to introduce yet another level at which to play the game of seeking exceptions and of teasing out qualifying from nonqualifying utterances. Instead, I think the category is more useful in a spatialized mode of thought. If, as Austin himself says, there is finally no yes/no distinction between performative and nonperformative utterances, then it could be more helpful to imagine a maplike set of relations: a map that might feature *explicit performative utterances*, conforming strictly to rules 1 through 6, at its middle, and a multitude of other utterances scattered or clustered near and far, depending on the various ways they might resemble or differ from those examples. In Chapter 2 of *Touching Feeling*, "Around the Performative," I go further with this spatializing impulse, positing a new class of *periperformative* utterances whose complex efficacy depends on their tangency to, as well as their difference from, the explicit performatives.

Even this broad level of interest in the forms of performative language represents a departure from the deconstructive/queer lineage to which I referred earlier. For from Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler, the trajectory of literary and gender theory has angled increasingly away from (what might be called) the grammatical moment, or the grammatical impulse, in discussions of performativity. Let me oversimplify here in positing that both deconstruction and gender theory have invoked Austinian performativity in the service of an epistemological project that can roughly be identified as antiessentialism. Austinian performativity is about how language constructs or affects reality rather than merely describing it. This directly *productive* aspect of language is most telling, for antiessentialist projects, when the utterances in question are closest to claiming a simply descriptive relation to some freestanding, ostensibly extradiscursive reality. Analogously in the area of history, the same antiessentialist projects have foregrounded Foucault's repeated demonstrations of the productive force both of taxonomies and disciplines that have claimed to be simply descriptive and of prohibitions whose apparent effect is simply to negate. That language itself can be productive of reality is a primary ground of antiessentialist inquiry.

To that degree, both deconstruction and gender theory seem to have an interest in unmooring Austin's performative from its localized dwelling in a few exemplary utterances or kinds of utterance and showing it instead to be a property of language or discourse much more broadly. You could caricature Derrida as responding to Austin's demonstration of explicit per-

formatives by saying, "But the only really interesting part of it is how all language is performative"; and Judith Butler as adding, "Not only that, but it's most performative when its performativity is least explicit — indeed, arguably, most of all when it isn't even embodied in actual words."

I have no quarrel to make with these powerful demonstrations, nor indeed with the antiessentialism that impels them. I would remark, though, on how both Derrida's and Butler's performativities, because they are in the service of an antiessentialist epistemological motive, can seem to be cast in the reverse image of the hypostatized grammatical taxonomies that have characterized, for example, John Searle's or Emil Benveniste's positivistic uses of Austin. That is to say, Derrida and Butler seem to emerge from a juncture at which Austin's syntactic taxonomies, which were originally both provisional and playful, can persist only as reductively essentializing; the move from *some* language to *all* language seems required by their antiessentialist project. Perhaps attending to the textures and effects of particular bits of language, as I try to do in many of these essays, requires a step to the side of antiessentialism, a relative lightening of the epistemological demand on essential truth.

I have also taken a distinct step to the side of the deconstructive project of analyzing apparently nonlinguistic phenomena in rigorously linguistic terms, as when Butler analyzes a particular gestural style as a variety of performative utterance ("Performative" 272–73). Like much deconstructive work, *Touching Feeling* wants to address aspects of experience and reality that do not present themselves in propositional or even in verbal form alongside others that do, rather than submit to the apparent common sense that requires a strict separation between the two and usually implies an ontological privileging of the former. What may be different in the present work, however, is a disinclination to reverse those priorities by subsuming nonverbal aspects of reality firmly under the aegis of the linguistic. I assume that the line between words and things or between linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation. With Wittgenstein, however, I have an inclination to deprecate the assignment of a very special value, mystique, or thingness to meaning and language. Many kinds of objects and events *mean*, in many heterogeneous ways and contexts, and I see some value in not reifying or mystifying the linguistic kinds of meaning unnecessarily.

Up to this point I have been treating performativity as if its theoretical

salience all came directly from work on speech acts following Austin. Yet in many contemporary usages, especially in gender and cultural studies, it seems to be tied primarily to, motivated primarily by the notion of a performance in the defining instance theatrical. Butler's early work articulates an invitation to, in her words, "consider gender . . . as . . . an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'" ("Performative" 272–73). "Performative" at the present moment carries the authority of two quite different discourses, that of theater on the one hand, and of speech act theory and deconstruction on the other. Partaking in the prestige of both discourses, it nonetheless, as Butler suggests, means very differently in each. The stretch between theatrical and deconstructive meanings of "performative" can seem to span the polarities of nonverbal and verbal action. It also spans those of, at either extreme, the *extroversion* of the actor (aimed entirely outward toward the audience) and the *introversion* of the signifier (if "I apologize" only apologizes, "I sentence" only sentences, and so on). Michael Fried's opposition between theatricality and absorption seems custom-made for this paradox about "performativity": in its deconstructive sense performativity signals absorption; in the vicinity of the stage, however, the performative is the theatrical. But in another range of usages, a text such as Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* uses "performativity" to mean an extreme of something like *efficiency* — postmodern representation as a form of capitalist efficiency — while, again, the deconstructive "performativity" of Paul de Man or J. Hillis Miller seems to be characterized by the *dislinkage* precisely of cause and effect between the signifier and the world. At the same time, it's worth keeping in mind that even in deconstruction, more can be said of performative speech acts than that they are ontologically dislinked or introversively nonreferential. Following on de Man's demonstration of "a radical estrangement between the meaning and the performance of any text" (298), one might want to dwell not so much on the nonreference of the performative but rather on (what de Man calls) its necessarily "aberrant" (301) relation to its own reference: the torsion, the mutual perversion, as one might say, of reference and performativity. The first two chapters of *Touching Feeling* are especially involved with this unsettling aberrance between performativity and theatricality: the first in the lifelong, profound, and unrequited longing with which Henry James fantasized about the British theater; the second in an analysis of bourgeois mar-

riage and chattel slavery as two versions of mobile theater—of the traveling proscenium—in nineteenth-century narrative.

#### BEYOND, BENEATH, AND BESIDE

I have already indicated that, for all its interest in performativity, the thrust of *Touching Feeling* is not to expose residual forms of essentialism lurking behind apparently nonessentialist forms of analysis. Nor is it to unearth unconscious drives or compulsions underlying the apparent play of literary forms. Nor again is it to uncover violent or oppressive historical forces masquerading under liberal aesthetic guise.

Without attempting to devalue such critical practices, I have tried in this project to explore some ways around the topos of depth or hiddenness, typically followed by a drama of exposure, that has been such a staple of critical work of the past four decades. *Beneath* and *behind* are hard enough to let go of; what has been even more difficult is to get a little distance from *beyond*, in particular the bossy gesture of “calling for” an imminently perfected critical or revolutionary practice that one can oneself only adumbrate.

Instead, as its title suggests, the most salient preposition in *Touching Feeling* is probably beside. Invoking a Deleuzian interest in planar relations, the irreducibly spatial positionality of *beside* also seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos.

*Beside* is an interesting preposition also because there’s nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who’s shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.

Spatializing disciplines such as geography and anthropology do, though, have the advantage of permitting ecological or systems approaches to such issues as identity and performance. For instance, the anthropologist Esther

Newton includes in *Mother Camp*, her 1972 study of female impersonators in the United States, the floor plans of two drag clubs (71, 89). The plans are part of her field data on shows at each venue, and one of the strengths of her spatially precise analysis is an extra alertness to the multisided interactions among people “beside” each other in a room. Thus, while a performer in one kind of room remains alone onstage and afterwards does no mixing with the audience, the performer in the other room remains in near-constant interaction with the band leader, club manager, members of the audience, and other performers both older and younger, in and out of various kinds of drag, amateur and professional. The effect underlines Newton’s continuous assumption that drag is less a single kind of act than a heterogeneous system, an ecological field whose intensive and defining relationality is internal as much as it is directed toward the norms it may challenge. When Butler draws on Newton’s work at the end of *Gender Trouble*, on the other hand, the ecological attention to space collapses in favor of a temporal emphasis on gender as “stylized repetition” and “social temporality” (J. Butler 140–41). With the loss of its spatiality, however, the internally complex field of drag performance suffers a seemingly unavoidable simplification and reification. In fact, I think this loss of dimension may explain why many early readers, wrongly, interpreted Butler’s discussion as prescribing a simplistic voluntariness. Although temporal and spatial thinking are never really alternative to each other, I’ve consistently tried in *Touching Feeling* to push back against an occupational tendency to underattend to the rich dimension of space.

#### RUSES OF THE REPRESSIVE HYPOTHESIS

The jokes that stick in people’s minds are the ones they don’t quite get. *Touching Feeling* displays, I think, something like that relation to Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Foucault’s volume reminds me of a joke because its argument is so promising and economical; my sense of not getting it comes from the way its very elegance seems also to make its promise unfulfillable.

To me, the almost delirious promise of the book is most attached to Foucault’s identification of the “repressive hypothesis” and his suggestion that there might be ways of thinking around it. According to the repressive hypothesis that Foucault deprecates, the history of sexuality could only be that

of the “negative relation” between power and sex, of “the insistence of the rule,” of “the cycle of prohibition,” of “the logic of censorship,” and of “the uniformity of the apparatus” of scarcity and prohibition: “Whether one attributes it to the form of the prince who formulates rights, of the father who forbids, of the censor who enforces silence, or of the master who states the law, in any case one schematizes power in a juridical form, and one defines its effects as obedience” (82–85). Foucault, on the other hand, though he is far from claiming “that sex has not been prohibited or barred or masked or misapprehended since the classical age” (12), is more struck by the proliferation of modern discourses of sexuality than by their suppression. Or, more interestingly, he perceives that there may really be no “rupture” between “repression and the critical analysis of repression” (10); responding to the paradox of a society “which speaks verbosely of its own silence, [and] takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say” (8), he sees the modern period as defined, to the contrary, by “the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (18). Thus, the would-be liberatory repressive hypothesis itself comes to be seen as a kind of ruse for mandating ever more of the oppressive verbal proliferation that had also gone on before and around it.

For a project of getting away from dualistic modes of thinking—especially about sex—what better point of departure than this discussion of the repressive hypothesis? Yet in reading Foucault’s book more carefully, and especially in seeing the working out of its problematics in the writing of other scholars, it seemed increasingly clear that Foucault’s book was divided against itself in what it wanted from its broad, almost infinitely ramified and subtle critique of the repressive hypothesis. I knew what I wanted from it: some ways of understanding human desire that might be quite to the side of prohibition and repression, that might hence be structured quite differently from the heroic, “liberatory,” inescapably dualistic righteousness of hunting down and attacking prohibition/repression in all its chameleonic guises. If the critical analysis of repression is itself inseparable from repression, then surely to think with any efficacy has to be to think in some distinctly different way.

Foucault’s searchingly critical analysis of the persistence of the repres-

sive hypothesis through so many, supposedly radical and discontinuous discourses—Marxist, psychoanalytic, and libertarian, as well as liberal—certainly indicates that the project of thinking otherwise remained a prime motivation of his study. And to a considerable extent, his writings after this volume attempt to carry that project further. But the triumphally charismatic rhetorical force of *Volume 1* also suggests that Foucault convinced himself—certainly he has convinced many readers—that that analysis itself represented an exemplary instance of working outside of the repressive hypothesis. Rather than working outside of it, however, *Volume 1*, like much of Foucault’s earlier work, might better be described as propagating the repressive hypothesis ever more broadly by means of displacement, multi-  
plication, and hypostatization.

If my evaluation is accurate, here is a possible taxonomy of the most common ways of (mis?)understanding Foucault’s discussion of the repressive hypothesis. Recent theorists seem to feel sure they understand his volume as arguing one of the following:

1. Even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand. But it operates through *producing* rather than through eliminating things/kinds of persons/behaviors/subjectivities.
2. Even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand. But it operates through *internalized* and apparently voluntary mechanisms, rather than through external, spectacular negative sanctions.
3. Even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand. But it bubbles up through *multiple*, often minute channels and discourses rather than through a singular law imposed from above.
4. Even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand. But it operates through a single, *transcendental* prohibition (language itself, say, or the Name of the Father) rather than through local, explicit ones.
5. Even beyond the repressive hypothesis, some version of prohibition is still the most important thing to understand. But it operates by disguising itself as *nature* (i.e., as essence). Nature and essentialism are, and have always been, the defining ruses of repression/prohibition.

It seems clear that, however heuristically powerful these trains of thought may be, none of them can fulfill Foucault's implicit promise: that there might be ways of stepping outside the repressive hypothesis, to forms of thought that would not be structured by the question of prohibition in the first place. But then, why would anyone hope to do so? Given the plain reality of prohibition, which Foucault admits, as a feature of every human discourse, let alone those of sexuality, it seems as though interest in side-stepping the repressive hypothesis could spring only from naïveté, whether willful or sincere: from a terminal reluctance to face reality.

But in responding so strongly to Foucault's implicit promise, I was actually not moved by the fantasy of a world without repression or prohibition. My discontent with the interpretations listed above is not, either, that they are too pessimistic or insufficiently utopian. Instead, impressed by Foucault's demonstration of the relentlessly self-propagating, adaptive structure of the repressive hypothesis, I came to see a cognitive danger in these interpretations: a moralistic tautology that became increasingly incapable of recognizing itself as such.

Or better than "tautology," drawn from the static language of logic, might be a systems description. Say that attempts to step aside from the repressive hypothesis, based on continuing rigorous study of its protean inclusivity, form an insoluble loop of positive feedback. It's as if A and B are in bed together under a dual-control electric blanket, but with the controls accidentally reversed: if A gets cold and turns up the temperature, B's side of the blanket will get warmer, whereupon B will turn down the temperature, making A's side even colder, so A turns up the temperature further—on B's side, and so on ad infinitum.

Chapter 4 of *Touching Feeling* analyzes such conceptual feedback loops—self-reinforcing, in Silvan Tomkins's terms, as opposed to self-fulfilling—in greater detail. Briefly, in the case of Foucault's volume and its effects, I would say that his analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation has led, in many cases, to its conceptual reimposition in the even more abstractly reified form of the hegemonic and the subversive. The seeming ethical urgency of such terms masks their gradual evacuation of substance, as a kind of Gramscian-Foucauldian contagion turns "hegemonic" into another name for the status quo (i.e., everything that *is*) and defines "subversive" in, increasingly, a purely negative relation to that (an extreme of the same "negative relation" that had, in Foucault's argument,

defined the repressive hypothesis in the first place). It's the same unhelpful structure that used to undergird historical arguments about whether a given period was one of "continuity" or "change." Another problem with reifying the status quo is what it does to the middle ranges of agency. One's relation to *what is* risks becoming reactive and bifurcated, that of a consumer: one's choices narrow to accepting or refusing (buying, not buying) this or that manifestation of it, dramatizing only the extremes of compulsion and voluntariness. Yet it is only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change.

#### TEXTURE AND AFFECT

A goodish Foucauldian subject, I'm rather abashed that *Touching Feeling* includes so little sex. A lot of the reason is the quotidian chance of my own life, as cancer therapy that aims to blot up every trace of circulating estrogen makes sexuality a less and less stimulating motive of reflection. It's also seemed, with the strategic banalization of gay and lesbian politics as well as their resolute disavowal of relation to the historical and continuing AIDS epidemic, as though in many areas the moment may be past when theory was in a very productive relation to sexual activism.

The closest this book comes to a sustained, directly sexual thematic is in Chapter 1, in a discussion of Henry James's fascination with the image of a hand that penetrates a rectum and disimpacts or "fishes out" the treasure imagined as collecting there. In an essay that has influenced me a lot, Renu Bora uses James's intense fecal interest as his point of departure for a remarkably productive discussion of the whole issue of texture. He develops the observation that to perceive texture is always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time. To perceive texture is never only to ask or know *What is it like?* nor even just *How does it impinge on me?* Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it? These are the kind of intrinsically interactive properties that James J. Gibson called "affordances" in his 1966 book, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, and, like Tomkins's work on affect, this approach to perception owes a great deal to the postwar moment of cybernetics and systems theory.

As Bora's essay shows, I haven't perceived a texture until I've instanta-

neously hypothesized whether the object I'm perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted, or fluffed up. Similarly, to perceive texture is to know or hypothesize whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack, to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak. Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object.

Walter Benjamin characterized one way of exploiting the reversible properties of textural objects and subjects when he wrote, "Even if a bourgeois is unable to give his earthly being permanence, it seems to be a matter of honour with him to preserve the traces of his articles and requisites of daily use in perpetuity. The bourgeoisie cheerfully takes the impression of a host of objects. For slippers and pocket watches, thermometers and egg cups, cutlery and umbrellas it tries to get covers and cases. It prefers velvet and plush covers which preserve the impression of every touch. For the . . . style of the end of the second empire, a dwelling becomes a kind of casing" (46). "This style views [the dwelling] as a kind of case for a person and embeds him in it together with all his appurtenances, tending his traces as nature tends dead fauna embedded in granite. One should not fail to recognize that there are two sides to this process. The real or sentimental value of the objects thus preserved is emphasized. They are removed from the profane eyes of non-owners, and in particular their outlines are blurred in a characteristic way. It is not strange that resistance to controls, something that becomes second nature to asocial persons, returns in the propertied bourgeoisie" (46-47).

Going from Victorian plush to postmodern shine, Bora notes that "smoothness is both a type of texture and texture's other" (99). His essay makes a very useful distinction between two kinds, or senses, of texture, which he labels "texture" with one x and "textxture" with two x's. Textxture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or a metal-work pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify textxture in this sense. But there is also the texture—one x this time—that defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information; there is texture, usually glossy if not positively tacky, that insists instead on

the polarity between substance and surface, texture that signifies the willed erasure of its history. One consequence of Bora's treatment of the concept: however high the gloss, there is no such thing as textural lack. ✓

Bora performs a bravura analysis of the textural history of the concept of fetishism, including both psychoanalytic and commodity fetishism, that seems to make the displacements of fetishism move, as if at the speed of light, along the displacements of the manufactured or overhighlighted surface. But the narrative-performative density of the other kind of texture—its inefaceable historicity—also becomes susceptible to a kind of fetish-value. An example of the latter might occur where the question is one of exoticism, of the palpable and highly acquirable textural record of the cheap, precious work of many foreign hands in the light of many damaged foreign eyes.

Bora's essay also emphasizes that although texture seems to have some kind of definitional grounding with reference to the sense of touch, texture itself is not coextensive with any single sense, but rather tends to be liminally registered "on the border of properties of touch and vision" (101). Indeed, other senses beyond the visual and haptic are involved in the perception of texture, as when we *hear* the brush-brush of corduroy trousers or the crunch of extra-crispy chicken.

If texture involves more than one sense, it is also true that the different properties, and radically divergent modern histories, of different perceptual systems are liable to torque and splay the history of texture as well. The sense of physical touch itself, at least so far, has been remarkably unsusceptible to being amplified by technology. Women who do breast self-examination are occasionally taught to use a film of liquid soap, a square of satiny cloth, or even a pad of thin plastic filled with a layer of water to make the contours of the breast more salient to their fingers. But this minimal sensory enhancement is merely additive compared to the literally exponential enhancements of visual stimulus since Leeuwenhoek and Newton. The narrator of *Middlemarch*, one of the definitive novels of texture, can zoom in a mere two sentences from telescope to microscope (Eliot 83). Once such visual ranges become commonplace the authority of the fingers will never be the same—though their very resistance to amplification may mean that they represent one kind of perceptual gold standard. Indeed, the increasingly divergent physical scales (and the highly differential rates of their change) that characterize the relation between touch and vision in



✓ the modern period result in understandings of texture that make it as apt to represent crises and fissures of meaning as metonymic continuities.

Thus, the need to discuss texture across senses brings with it a need to think about texture across different scales. Technologies of travel, for example, as well as of vision emphasize that, although texture has everything to do with scale, there is no one physical scale that intrinsically is the scale of texture. As your plane circles over an airport, texture is what a whole acre of trees can provide. But when you're chopping wood, a single tree may constitute shape or structure within your visual field, whereas texture pertains to the level of the cross-grained fibers of the wood in relation to the sleek bite of the axe.

Furthermore, whatever the scale, one bump on a surface, or even three, won't constitute texture. A repeated pattern like polka dots might, but it depends on how big they are or how close you are: from across the room you might see them as a flat sheet of gray; at a few feet, the dots make a visible texture; through a magnifying glass you'll see an underlying texture of paper or fabric unrelated to the two or three rounded shapes that make a big design. Texture, in short, comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure.

In a challenge to Benjamin's identification of textural salience with bourgeois privacy, William Morris makes a utopian use of these textural properties in his speculative novel *News from Nowhere*, where political equality, communitarian ethics, productive aesthetic pleasure, and psychological equanimity extend unbroken from one to another surface of congruent scale; and the characteristic Morris pattern of equidistant, unforegrounded, unbroken, and perspectiveless ornamentation drawn "from nature" spreads from landscape to architecture to interior design to male and female raiment to the body itself and back again. With their liberatory, elastic aesthetic of texture these characters express "intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells, such as a lover has in the fair flesh of the woman he loves" (158); conversely, their clothing is ornamented out of "liking to see the coverings of our bodies beautiful like our bodies are — just as a deer's or an otter's skin has been made beautiful from the first" (165).

It is also worth noting how unexpectedly the definition of performativity itself is inflected by the language of texture. The thematics that Austin

applies to his taxonomic work on the performative are of a mucky consistency that makes a startling contrast with his dandified fastidious syntax; it is as though the dimensions of true/false (for the constative) and happy/unhappy (for the performative) are always in danger of wiping out along the confounding axis of wet/dry. According to Austin, for all the dry Jack Benny-like hilarity of his style, with his project we are liable to find ourselves "bogging], by logical stages, down" (13), or to have "two new keys in our hands, and, of course, simultaneously two new skids under our feet" (25). "To feel the firm ground of prejudice slipping away is exhilarating," he writes, "but brings its revenges" (61); "I shall only," he promises later, "give you a run around, or rather a flounder around" (151). Clearly for Austin, taxonomic work with particular sentences is not a rigid, Searlean reification of performativity, but rather the filthy workshop of its creation, criss-crossed with skid marks, full of dichotomies that are "in need, like so many dichotomies, of elimination" (149); it represents the vital, perhaps painful, not-yet-differentiated quick from which the performative emerges.

In ways like these, texture seems like a promising level of attention for shifting the emphasis of some interdisciplinary conversations away from the recent fixation on epistemology (which suggests that performativity/performance can show us whether or not there are essential truths and how we could, or why we can't, know them) by asking new questions about phenomenology and affect (what motivates performativity and performance, for example, and what individual and collective effects are mobilized in their execution?). The title I've chosen for these essays, *Touching Feeling*, records the intuition that a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions. But the same double meaning, tactile plus emotional, is already there in the single word "touching"; equally it's internal to the word "feeling." I am also encouraged in this association by the dubious epithet "touchy-feely," with its implication that even to talk about affect virtually amounts to cutaneous contact.

If anything, the association between touch and affect may be too obvious: its common sense seems to offer too easy support to modern assumptions about the centrality of sexual desire to all human contact and feeling. The post-Romantic "power/knowledge" regime that Foucault analyzes, the one that structures and propagates the repressive hypothesis, follows the Freudian understanding that one physiological drive — sexuality, libido, desire — is the ultimate source, and hence in Foucault's word is seen to em-

body the "truth," of human motivation, identity, and emotion. In my own first book on sexuality, for example, I drew on this modern consensus in explaining the term "male homosocial desire": "For the most part, I will be using 'desire' in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido'—not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 2). This consensus view does not exclude emotions, but as the quotation suggests, it views emotion primarily as a vehicle or manifestation of an underlying libidinal drive. Excitement, rage, even indifference are seen as more or less equivalent transformations of "desire." The nature or quality of the affect itself, seemingly, is not of much more consequence than the color of the airplane used to speed a person to a destination.

Reducing affect to drive in this way permits a diagrammatic sharpness of thought that may, however, be too impoverishing in qualitative terms. Each essay in *Touching Feeling* tries in some way to offer alternatives to that habitual subordination of affect to drive. Chapter 3 discusses some early stages of Adam Frank's and my encounter with the writing of Silvan Tomkins, the psychologist whose theories underpin most of these approaches.<sup>1</sup> For Tomkins, the difference between the drive system and the affect system is not that one is more rooted in the body than the other; he understands both to be thoroughly embodied, as well as more or less intensively interwoven with cognitive processes. The difference instead is between more specific and more general, more and less constrained: between biologically based systems that are less and more capable of generating complexity or degrees of freedom.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for example, the drives are relatively narrowly constrained in their aims: breathing will not satisfy my hunger, nor will sleeping satisfy my need to excrete waste. The drives are also relatively time-constrained, inasmuch as I need to breathe within the next minute, drink something today, and eat within the next few weeks to sustain life. Most important, their range of objects is also relatively constrained: only a tiny subset of gases satisfy my need to breathe or of liquids my need to drink. In these and several other ways, sexuality is clearly the least constrained (most affectlike) of the drives. "Had Freud not smuggled some of the properties of the affect system into his conception of the drives, his system would have been of much less interest," Tomkins writes, and he also sees Freudian theory as damaged by using sexuality to represent drives in general (*Shame*

49). But to the (limited) degree that sexuality is a drive, it shares the immediate instrumentality, the defining orientation toward a specified aim and end different from itself, that finally distinguishes the drives from the affects.

Short of a complete summary of Tomkins, these dimensions may stand for the significant differences between affects and drives. Affects have far greater freedom than drives with respect to, for example, time (anger can evaporate in seconds but can also motivate a decades-long career of revenge) and aim (my pleasure in hearing a piece of music can make me want to hear it repeatedly, listen to other music, or study to become a composer myself). Especially, however, affects have greater freedom with respect to object, for unlike the drives, "any affect may have any 'object.'" This is the basic source of complexity of human motivation and behavior" (7). The object of affects such as anger, enjoyment, excitement, or shame is not proper to the affects in the same way that air is the object proper to respiration: "There is literally no kind of object which has not historically been linked to one or another of the affects. Positive affect has been invested in pain and every kind of human misery, and negative affect has been experienced as a consequence of pleasure and every kind of triumph of the human spirit. . . . The same mechanisms enable [people] to invest any and every aspect of existence with the magic of excitement and joy or with the dread of fear or shame and distress" (54). Affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy.

This freedom of affects also gives them a structural potential not enjoyed by the drive system: in contrast to the instrumentality of drives and their direct orientation toward an aim different from themselves, the affects can be autotelic: "There is no strict analog in the affect system for the rewarding effect of drive consummation. It is rather the case that affect arousal and reward are identical in the case of positive affects; what activates positive affects 'satisfies'" (58; emphasis added). In Tomkins's extended thought experiment about how to create a genuinely human automaton, ★

[the machine] would require an affect system. What does this mean in terms of a specific program? There must be built into such a machine a number of responses which have self-rewarding and self-punishing characteristics. This means that these responses are inherently acceptable or inherently un-

acceptable. These are essentially aesthetic characteristics of the affective responses—and in one sense no further reducible. Just as the experience of redness could not be further described to a color-blind man, so the particular qualities of excitement, joy, fear, sadness, shame, and anger cannot be further described if one is missing the necessary effector and receptor apparatus. This is not to say that the physical properties of the stimuli and the receptors cannot be further analyzed. This analysis is without limit. It is rather the phenomenological quality which we are urging has intrinsic rewarding or punishing characteristics.

If and when the automaton learns English we would require a spontaneous reaction to joy or excitement of the sort “I like this,” and to fear and shame and distress “Whatever this is, I don’t care for it.” We cannot define this quality in terms of the immediate behavioral responses to it, since *it is the gap between these affective responses and instrumental responses which is necessary* if it is to function like a human motivational response. (42; emphasis added)

It makes sense, then, that Tomkins considers sexuality “the drive in which the affective component plays the largest role”: not only is it “the least imperious of all the drives,” but it is the only one “in which activation of the drive even without consummation has a rewarding rather than a punishing quality. It is much more exciting and rewarding,” he understates, “to feel sexually aroused than to feel hungry or thirsty” (60). Even though sexual desire is usually oriented toward an aim and object other than itself, it is much more malleable in its aims and objects than are the other drives, and also, like the positive affects, has the potential of being autotelic.

The most important commonsensical assumption about drives that Tomkins shows to be false is that, because they are more immediately tied to survival, they are therefore experienced more directly, more urgently, and more robustly than are affects. Common sense holds, that is, that the drive system is the primary motivator of human behavior, to which the affects are inevitably secondary. Tomkins shows the opposite to be true: that motivation itself, even the motivation to satisfy biological drives, is the business of the affect system:

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 [because gradual loss of oxygen, even when fatal, produces no panic because there is no trigger for the affect of surprise]. . . . 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. (“Quest” 309)

In short, the drive system cannot be properly understood as a primary structure in which the affects function as subordinate details or supports. In fact, because of their freedom and complexity, “affects may be either much more casual than any drive could be or much more monopolistic. . . . Most of the characteristics which Freud attributed to the Unconscious and to the Id are in fact salient aspects of the affect system. . . . Affects enable both insatiability and extreme lability, fickleness and finickiness” (52).

If texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together, then, it is not because they share a particular delicacy of scale, such as would necessarily call for “close reading” or “thick description.” What they have in common is that *at whatever scale they are attended to*, both are irreducibly phenomenological. To describe them primarily in terms of structure is always a qualitative misrepresentation. Attending to psychology and materiality at the level of affect and texture is also to enter a conceptual realm that is not shaped by lack nor by commonsensical dualities of subject versus object or of means versus ends.

Differences among the successive essays in *Touching Feeling* seem to trace several concurrent narratives whose meaning is not evident to me. The sexual interest of the essays, as I’ve mentioned, seems to decrease, whereas the sense of pedagogy deepens. All the essays are very involved with affect, but the particular affect, shame, whose fascination led me so far into the forest of affect theory let go its hold on me there. By the end of the book, the positive affects (interest-excitement and, especially, enjoyment-joy, in Tomkins’s schema) are much more involving. That these are not only the happy but also the autotelic affects seems resonant with this volume’s placement of Buddhism. If such narratives can be braided together, what appears will hardly be more linear than the account I tried to compose in *A Dialogue on Love*, where the therapist’s notes near the end invoke

SILK WORK — TURNING FABRIC INTO OTHER FABRIC / CHILDHOOD BLANKET WITH THE SATIN BINDING / SKIN HUNGER / BRO'S PILLOW "PIFFO," HIS DROOLING, "MAKING FISHES" ON IT / MAY SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HOW HUNGRY OUR SKIN WAS FOR TOUCH; BUT ALSO ABOUT OUR HAVING THE PERMISSION TO DEVELOP AUTONOMOUS RESOURCES / . . . . TREASURE SCRAPS OF SILK / SOMEHOW THE SILK AND SHIT GO TOGETHER — THE WASTE PRODUCTS, FANTASIES OF SELF SUFFICIENCY, NOT DEPENDENT, SPINNING STRAW INTO GOLD. (206)

JUDITH SCOTT, TEXTILE ARTIST

The photograph on the frontispiece of *Touching Feeling* was the catalyst that impelled me to assemble the book in its present form. It is one of many taken by the California photographer Leon A. Borensztein of Judith Scott (b. 1943) with her work.

The sculpture in this picture is fairly characteristic of Scott's work in its construction: a core assembled from large, heterogeneous materials has been hidden under many wrapped or darned layers of multicolored yarn, cord, ribbon, rope, and other fiber, producing a durable three-dimensional shape, usually oriented along a single axis of length, whose curves and planes are biomorphically resonant and whose scale bears comparison to Scott's own body. The formal achievements that are consistent in her art include her inventive techniques for securing the giant bundles, her subtle building and modulation of complex three-dimensional lines and curves, and her startlingly original use of color, whether bright or muted, which can stretch across a plane, simmer deeply through the multilayered wrapping, or drizzle graphically along an emphatic suture.

All of Scott's work that I've seen on its own has an intense presence, but the subject of this photograph also includes her relation to her completed work, and presumptively also the viewer's relation to the sight of that dyad. For me, to experience a subject-object distance from this image is no more plausible than to envision such a relation between Scott and her work. She and her creation here present themselves to one another with equally expansive welcome. Through their closeness, the sense of sight is seen to dissolve in favor of that of touch. Not only the artist's hands and bare forearms but her face are busy with the transaction of texture. Parents and babies, twins (Scott is a twin), or lovers might commune through such haptic ab-

sorption. There is no single way to understand the "besideness" of these two forms, even though one of them was made by the other. The affect that saturates the photo is mysterious, or at least multiple, in quality: besides the obvious tenderness with which Scott embraces the sculpture, her relaxed musculature and bowed head suggest sadness, for example, as perhaps does the abandon with which she allows her features to be squashed against it. The height and breadth of her embrace could suggest either that she is consoling or herself seeks consolation from the sculpture, which is slightly canted toward her while she stands upright on her own feet; the loose-jointed breadth of her embrace can also be read as a sign of her Down syndrome. Yet the jaunty top and bottom points of the rounded shape are only the most visible of the suggestions that this soberly toned black and white photograph is at the same time ablaze with triumph, satisfaction, and relief.

Inevitably, both before and since her recent recognition within the framework of "outsider" art, Scott has been repeatedly diagnosed in terms of lack. Her deafness, the one deficit that went undiagnosed until middle age, led to extreme exaggerations of the severity of her retardation; classed as "ineducable" in childhood, she was warehoused in a crushingly negligent Ohio asylum system for over thirty-five years (MacGregor 49–51; Smith). Even after she emerged as an artist with the support of California's Creative Growth Art Center, her most encouraging and excited teacher, the fiber artist Sylvia Seventy, inexplicably decided that she was color blind (MacGregor 69) and unable to decide for herself when a piece was finished (72). And John MacGregor, the psychoanalytic critic of Art Brut who has been her strongest proponent, is nonetheless compulsive in applying to her the language of emphatic negation: "There is not the slightest possibility that Judith envisions the eventual outcome, the final form, of her work" (33); "Judith was certainly not engaged in the production of works of art" (72); "Judith is completely unaware of the existence of sculpture" (92); "The notion of abstract, non-representational form is a complex idea totally outside of Judith's ability to conceptualize" (109). MacGregor also seems to consider that all of Scott's artistic activity — maybe all her activity, in fact — must be categorized as "unconscious," perhaps because she does not use language (106, 111).

I don't suppose it's necessarily innocuous when a fully fluent, well-rewarded language user, who has never lacked any educational opportunity, fastens with such a strong sense of identification on a photograph,

an oeuvre, and a narrative like these of Judith Scott's. Yet oddly, I think my identification with Scott is less as the subject of some kind of privation than as the holder of an obscure treasure, or as a person receptively held by it. The drama of Scott's talent is surely heightened by her awful history, her isolation from language, and what I assume must be frequent cognitive frustrations. But the obvious fullness of her aesthetic consciousness, her stubbornly confident access to autotelic production, her artist's ability to continue asking new, troubling questions of her materials that will be difficult and satisfying for them to answer—these privileges seem to radiate at some angle that is orthogonal to the axis of disability.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith is fond of the notion of the "senile sublime," as she calls it, and I've always been attracted to it, too. She uses it in conversation to describe various more or less intelligible performances by old brilliant people, whether artists, scientists, or intellectuals, where the bare outlines of a creative idiom seem finally to emerge from what had been the obscuring puppy fat of personableness, timeliness, or sometimes even of coherent sense. Who wouldn't find it attractive, the idea of emerging into a senile sublime? I do feel close to Scott in that we evidently share a sensibility in which fibers and textures have particular value, relationally and somehow also ontologically. But in acknowledging the sense of tenderness toward a treasured gift that wants exploring, I suppose I also identify with the very expressive sadness and fatigue in this photograph. Probably one reason Scott's picture was catalytic for this hard-to-articulate book: it conveys an affective and aesthetic fullness that can attach even to experiences of cognitive frustration. In writing this book I've continually felt pressed against the limits of my stupidity, even as I've felt the promising closeness of transmissible gifts.

#### NOTES

1. So far, I have been following common usage in using "affect" and "emotion" interchangeably. In the rest of this section, however, I focus on "affects" in Tomkins's sense. For Tomkins, a limited number of affects—analogueous to the elements of a periodic table—combine to produce what are normally thought of as emotions, which, like the physical substances formed from the elements, are theoretically unlimited in number. See Tomkins, *Shame* 34–74.
2. In this context Tomkins does not use "freedom" in the sense of an individual's volun-

tarity; for his useful discussion of the relation between freedom and complexity, see *Shame* 35–52, which offers some tools for a systems-theory approach to what I referred to above as "the middle ranges of agency."

3. Note that it is the *responses*, not the stimuli, that have inherent affective qualities. This represents an important difference from behaviorists, whose ideas Tomkins had no patience with, although, to twenty-first-century readers, his writing style can make him sound like them.