Transferrential Poetics, Poeto From Poet Warhol

ADAM FRANK

TRANSFERENTIAL POETICS,
FROM POE TO WARHOL

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Introduction: Affect in the Scene of Writing

This book explores the poetics elaborated from the 1840s to the 1980s by four American writers, thinkers, and artists: Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and Andy Warhol. I have discerned in the work of these artists an acutely receptive and reflexive attention to the movement of feeling across and between text and reader, or composition and audience, and have therefore named the object of my study *transferential poetics*. To help me describe and understand these transferential movements, I turn to several theories of affect that have entered literary criticism and the theoretical humanities in the past two decades, especially Silvan Tomkins's affect theory and the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein and Wilfred Bion. These theories have permitted me to develop techniques of attention to and a vocabulary to describe compositional force and audience response (my own, in the first instance). By offering new interpretations of a handful of challenging major artists, this book aims to demonstrate how theories of affect may be used to improve the practice of criticism in a specific focus on poetics.

At the same time that it seeks to contribute to practical criticism and to the study of feeling in the humanities, *Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol* advances a set of concepts that may carry over into other critical domains, in particular to studies of media and performance. The work and poetics of each of the artists I study is crucially informed either by technological media contexts (Poe, Warhol) or contexts of performance (James, Stein) or both. While scholars have usually focused on one or the other of these significant contexts, this book brings together questions of

affect, media, and performance by way of the concept of theatricality. As I will show, the writing and poetics of these four artists are peculiarly, if differently, theatricalizing. What might it mean for their writing, or writing in general, to be theatricalizing? What relation does this theatricalization of writing have to the transferential movements of affect I have noticed? And how do these in turn relate to the context of technological media? I will answer these questions through a reading of the theatrical metaphor in Jacques Derrida's essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing." The transferential poetics of my study can come into focus only because affect in this period has been reframed and become distinctively, and distinctly, available to writing, perception, and thinking. The name that this book proposes for the remarkable twentieth-century availability of affect to perception is *television*. I will turn to Derrida's essay later in this introduction to explore the roles of affect, theatricality, and technology in a changing scene of writing; at that point I will explain the privileged place of television in this book's historical trajectory.

First, I would like to introduce and offer preliminary discussions of some of the key terms for this project: *poetics*, *affect*, and *transference*. I begin with the term *poetics*, by which I mean those guiding ideas, theories, or phantasies of how writing (and other aesthetic work) may touch or make contact with an audience. My use of the term *poetics* differs from the received definition's emphasis, as the *OED* has it, on form: "The creative principles informing any literary, social or cultural construction, or the theoretical study of these; a theory of form." I define poetics more in terms of compositional force, as consisting of powerful wishes about and images of how an audience will respond to a work; in this way poetics always embed ideas about emotional connection and disconnection. But my use of the term shares with the dictionary definition the sense that poetics may either reside in a given work (as its "creative principles") or appear as a separate theoretical study that aims to understand that work. Poetics as theoretical study may take the shape of a critical essay such as Aristotle's *Poetics* or Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition," a lecture such as Stein's "Composition as Explanation," or a book of criticism such as this one. At the same time poetics may inhabit a work as at once motivated and motivating, a guiding theory nearer the compositional bone, as closely imbricated in the practice of composition as possible without becoming collapsed into it or entirely identified with it. For example, Poe offered allegories of writer-reader relations in many of his short stories, which, I suggest in chapter 2, serve as wishful proposals or guides to his readers' responses and a key aspect of his famous poetics of effect. Poetics can sometimes appear as explicit study and implicit

guide simultaneously: the sentences of Stein's "Composition as Explanation," I observe in chapter 1, at once explain her poetic strategies and enact them. In my understanding, then, poetics offers a kind of theory of how poesy or composition gets across—an uncanny theory that may be verbally announced as such but need not be.

The notion of theory that defines my approach to poetics comes from the writing of Silvan Tomkins, a twentieth-century U.S. psychologist whose work Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and I helped to introduce into the humanities almost twenty years ago.¹ An affect theory, according to Tomkins, is "a simplified and powerful summary of a larger set of affect experiences" that organizes and helps to navigate one's emotional life by selecting and magnifying specific affects and combinations of affect and by offering strategies for dealing with them.² An individual may have different theories of, say, what it means to have an angry argument with a loved one: a quarrel can be a discouraging obstacle to shared experience or an exciting sign of intimacy or both. Affect theories tend to be both determined (they have histories) and determining (they create the situations to which they apply); at the same time, they are changeable (they can be overwritten or altered) and operate at various scales and degrees of reflection. Sedgwick puts it this way: "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."³ Like poetics, affect theories may be explicit attempts to explain the workings of affect from the outside, or they may serve to guide or navigate experiences of affect themselves. I define poetics in terms of affect theory to acknowledge several things: that composition is always motivated (consciously and unconsciously); that compositions always seek to touch a reader or audience in some manner; and that such contact can take many forms. To put this last point another way, different poetics offer distinct sets of affect theories, with some poetics emphasizing the withholding of emotion or the rejection of readers to the point of a wished-for destruction. The work of each of the writers and artists I explore in this book has been characterized in terms of such negative or perverse contact, whether Poe's shameless, excessive manipulations, James's frustrating circumlocutions, Stein's confusing opacities, or Warhol's seemingly affectless deflections.

That the tools of affect theory can improve the practice of criticism in the specific study of poetics: this is one of the main contentions of

Transferential Poetics, from Poe to Warhol. In this way it clearly participates in the ongoing “affective turn” in the humanities.⁴ My goal in this introduction is not to survey the large field of affect studies but to return to the usefulness for criticism of Tomkins’s understanding of affect (especially in conjunction with that of object-relations theory). For as often as Tomkins’s work has been cited and used to authorize an interest in affect or feeling, it does not appear to have made much of a dent in day-to-day critical practice. In fact it has been difficult to know just how literary criticism can take up and use Tomkins’s lively, complex work, in part, it would seem, because his writing does not appear to be very literary. The pointed contrast here is with Freud, whose classical education and use of Greek tragedy to legitimate and give evidence for his theories, as Sarah Winter has shown, helped to establish his writing as part of the literary critical canon of the twentieth-century university; psychoanalysis and literature appear to implicate one another from their inception.⁵ Tomkins’s work, more informed by mid-twentieth-century cybernetics, systems theory, and modern drama than by Greek tragedy, no doubt sounds significantly stranger to many humanities professors than Freud’s. At this point in the twenty-first century, however, Tomkins’s writing, if it has yet to sound like critical common sense, nevertheless fits (although not quite squarely) with the emerging place of biology and the neurosciences in contemporary attempts to understand the enmeshings of psyches and somas in technological and media landscapes. His writing, my book suggests, continues to offer vocabulary and tools for a broader affective approach to the criticism of works across mediums.⁶

This book is somewhat unusual in that most scholars concerned with an affective approach to media have taken up the writing of Gilles Deleuze.⁷ Those of us working in the field have noted the divergence between followers of Deleuze and followers of Tomkins, the incompatibilities of their vocabulary and theoretical disposition, so in this context it is worth pointing out that both camps or schools would appear to disagree more substantively with cognitive theories of emotion popular in analytic philosophy than with one another. The differences between Tomkins and Deleuze strike me as overdetermined by the mutual antagonism between French theoretical and Anglo-American empirical writing (as if Tomkins were an unproblematic empiricist!). It would be the work of another project to assess the real similarities and differences between their conceptualizations of affect. To introduce this book I have chosen to describe the reasons why I continue to prefer Tomkins’s thinking about affect over others, especially for the purposes of criticism: his particular emendation of Freud’s drive theory, his structuralist emphasis

on gaps, and his phenomenologically rich, differentiated account of the affects. These characteristics of Tomkins's approach offer an unusual perspective on twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory and, accompanying this, a hard-won critical traction on the category of (what critics used to call) "the body" that I do not see in other approaches to affect.

In his critique and emendation of Freud's drive theory Tomkins offers the most sophisticated and least pathologizing theory of motivation that I have encountered. Both Freud and Tomkins understood the value of motivational error for learning, that is, the productive possibility that we can be wrong about our desires, wishes, or wants. But where Freud located the possibility of motivational error in the relations between and among conscious and unconscious processes that record and realize the struggle between our base, biological drives (especially the sex drive) and the mechanisms of repression that create civilization, Tomkins located motivational error in the structure of a biologically based affect system and its independence from both the drives and cognition. "The distinction," as he puts it near the start of his four-volume *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962–63, 1991–92), "is not between higher and lower, between spiritual and biological, but between *more general* and *more specific biological motives*" (1: 29, emphasis in the original). Tomkins proposed eight or nine innate affects as the more general biological motives in humans: the negative ones, fear-terror, distress-grief, anger-rage, shame-humiliation, and contempt-disgust (which he later divided into two: disgust and dissmell); the positive ones, interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy; and the reorienting affect of surprise-startle. These constitute the affect system, which is distinguished from the drive system by way of a variety of freedoms—of time, of intensity, of density, of combination, and, most significantly, of object. "Had Freud not smuggled some of the properties of the affect system into his conception of the drives," suggests Tomkins, "his system would have been of much less interest than it was" (1: 127).⁸

Any affect may have any object, whereas few objects will satisfy the drives of hunger, thirst, or respiration. This freedom of object opens out onto worlds of motivational possibility but makes it difficult for us to know just what our affects are about: we always know that our thirst is about the lack of water, but we can't always tell what is making us afraid or excited. This gap (or lack of proprietary relation) between motive and object is one of several productive gaps in Tomkins's structuralist model of the affects, a model that is nonpathologizing in part because of his tendency, both dispositional and a result of his midcentury historical context, to think in terms of organized complexity. By contrast with the more linear determinations of both drive theory and the behaviorist emphasis

on stimulus-response, Tomkins sought explanations that take account of circular feedback relations, the interleaving of analog with digital difference, and both over- and underdetermination. Consider something as simple as his choice to hyphenate the names of the basic affects so as to index ranges of intensity. This choice effectively multiplies possible experiences of a single affect. For example, the low-level irritation of waiting in line at the grocery store and the intense fury of witnessing an act of police brutality can both be found on the spectrum of anger-rage. If these feel like very different emotional experiences (impatience vs. indignation), it is because affects are experienced in co-assemblies with other affects, cognitions, or drive signals. That is, affects are almost always embedded in feelings, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and other psychic states and events, core elements that Tomkins's theory offers an analytical tool for understanding.⁹

Because Tomkins offers a qualitatively differentiated space of affective response, as well as ways of assembling these responses with other psychophysiological states, his work invites careful phenomenological accounts of feeling. Such accounts ground the critical method that I develop in this book, one that begins with a deceptively simple question: what information does subjective, emotional response give us? Answering this question requires, first, my careful introspective attention to what happens in aesthetic experience, whether that of reading a text, looking at a visual artwork, listening to music, viewing a film, or watching a television program. An act of introspection almost always yields some facts about my feelings, although I would not characterize these facts as value-free since affect theories inevitably operate in the process of self-examination. These theories select some feelings against others and weight the vocabulary that I use to describe my experience; informed by Tomkins's writing, my descriptions tend to reinforce a Tomkinsian way of perceiving affect. Still, this vocabulary has helped me to make sense of the difference between being gripped, embarrassed, or nauseated when reading a Poe story. My excitement, shame, or disgust can lead to very different understandings of what a given composition might want from me. I use this method, for example, in chapter 2, where I follow the peculiar shamelessness of much of Poe's writing to develop an account of expression that does not rely on idealized self-presence and interiority. There I read the rhythmic beating of "The Tell-Tale Heart" as a sonic medium for projecting shame-humiliation out toward the reader, a transferential moment that tells me something about a particular affect theory that the composition is using (and that I may share). My method in this book consists of identifying such transferential moments, describing and analyzing them in some detail, and trying to specify what I am learning from them.

Transfential moment: here is one of this book's key methodological ideas. This idea is clearly indebted to the psychoanalytic concept of transference (more on which below) and, at the same time, is closely related to the method that Tomkins calls "inverse archaeology," an attention to how "affect is at once individual and private and social and shared non-verbal communication."¹⁰ The method of inverse archaeology is based on Tomkins's understanding of affect as a hinge mechanism directed both outward and inward, which acts both on and between bodies and operates at the interface of physiology and psychology. Affect as hinge is, at least in part, a consequence of its location: "Affect is primarily facial behaviour" (*AIC* 1: 205–6), taking place on the skin and muscles of the face as well as in the tones of voice. This emphasis on faciality is one way that Tomkins distinguishes his understanding of affect from expressivist theories for which emotion is, in the first instance, internal to the body. For example, the James-Lange theory defines emotion in terms of the secondary awareness of organic changes within the body. (I discuss the similarities and differences between these theories in more detail in chapter 4.) While Tomkins agrees with such a physiological emphasis, he locates affective responses primarily on the face rather than within the bodily organs; he sometimes calls the face the primary organ of affect, just as the lungs are the primary organ of respiration and the heart the primary organ of the circulation of the blood. He puts it this way: "We regard the relationship between the face and the viscera as analogous to that between the fingers, forearm, upper arm, shoulders and body. The finger does not 'express' what is in the forearm, or shoulder or trunk. It rather leads than follows the movements in these organs to which it is an extension" (1: 205).¹¹ Affects participate in complex feedback loops that move rapidly both inward and outward, to the self and to others, and sometimes to the self as an other, serving as a hinge mechanism between individual and group.

What I find most appealing about Tomkins's approach to affect is this understanding of its hinge nature. The figure of a hinge strikes me as both more useful and more accurate than the metaphor of "blurring the boundaries" that has been prevalent in cultural studies for so long. Rather than collapsing any number of key binary oppositions (individual/group, form/content, the aesthetic/the political, and many others), Tomkins's systems theoretical approach can assist in thinking the simultaneous dependence, interdependence, and independence of the opposed elements. For example, in his own writing he neither excludes ideological considerations nor makes ideology an explanatory ground or condition for all affective experience. Instead he offers a vocabulary

for phenomenological analysis that links individual, bodily experiences with larger social and political dynamics.¹² This book's method suggests that paying close attention to transferential moments, as well as to the poetics that aim for such moments, can be particularly telling of the hinges between levels of experience, a method that I describe in chapter 1 as compositional.

In addition to Tomkins's affect theory this book engages in considerable detail with the work of Melanie Klein and her followers in the school of object-relations theory, work that I have found to be at least as helpful as Tomkins's for my thinking. Klein also focused on the qualitative aspects of affective experience, albeit from within a fundamentally psychoanalytic orientation toward the drive or instinct of sexuality. Klein differed from Freud in her approach to sexuality, however, focusing less on its sources (the erogenous zones) and aims (discharge or sublimation), than on the objects of the sexual instinct. In focusing on good and bad object relations, those qualitative relations that initiate in the earliest exchanges between infant and mother (and which can be roughly translated in terms of Tomkins's positive and negative affects), Klein offered a substantial reorientation of psychoanalytic theory, a movement away from thermodynamic models (libido and the economics of sexual energy) and toward models of information exchange and performativity. The notion of transferential poetics that I develop in this book comes in large part from Klein's elaboration of Freud's theory of the transference, which was due to her emphasis on infantile experience and her understanding of the constant movement of part-objects in projective and introjective identification.

Freud first remarked transference phenomena in the context of psychoanalytic treatment: the displacement of the analysand's feelings of love and hate for a parent onto the analyst. Initially cast as an awkward event (patients falling in love with their doctors), Freud came to understand the transference as it offers material necessary for the analysis and treatment, eventually specifying this material in terms of repetitions, reenactments, or reanimations: "A whole series of earlier psychical experiences is brought to life not as something in the past, but as a current relationship with the doctor."¹³ Transference phenomena would appear, in Tomkins's terms, to derive from the affect system's freedom of object, and Klein would develop the notion in this more general direction, suggesting that, "in some form or other, transference operates throughout life and influences all human relations."¹⁴ Klein's theory of the transference emerged from her clinical experience using play technique to analyze children. Most other analysts followed Freud in assuming that

young children could not be properly analyzed precisely because of their inability to undergo the displacements of transference. Against this theory Klein proposed that transference phenomena were based on yet earlier infantile experience. As she put it, "My use of the term 'object-relations' is based on my contention that the infant has from the beginning of post-natal life a relation to the mother (although focusing primarily on her breast) which is imbued with the fundamental elements of an object-relation, i.e. love, hatred, phantasies, anxieties, and defences" (49). She goes on to draw the logical inference a few pages later: "I hold that transference originates in the same processes which in the earliest stages determine object-relations" (53).

While displaced affect remained an important element in Klein's understanding of transference, her focus shifted away from the idea of reenactment of a past relation and toward the present of unconscious phantasy. As Robert Hinshelwood puts it, "The practice of Kleinian psychoanalysis has become an understanding of the transference as an expression of unconscious phantasy, active right here and now in the moment of the analysis."¹⁵ Reenactments of the past become negotiations, through phantasy, of present difficulties in the analytic session. Because phantasy, for Klein, makes use of the infantile defenses that she called projective and introjective identification, a large part of Kleinian psychoanalysis depends on the analyst's attention to the constant movements of identification taking place between analyst and analysand. These movements of projective and introjective identification constitute the ground for object relations and create a rich and shifting topography, more dynamic and complex than that offered by Freud's structural model of the psyche. For the critical purposes of this book, the movements of identification offer an approach to describing and understanding the relations between aesthetic objects and audiences. I introduce and explore Klein's idea of unconscious phantasy in chapter 1 in discussing Stein's poetics of mistake and confusion. Confusion, I argue, comes with the territory of infantile phantasy, for, as Klein puts it, "altogether, in the young infant's mind every external experience is interwoven with his phantasies and on the other hand every phantasy contains elements of actual experience, and it is only by analyzing the transference situation to its depth that we are able to discover the past both in its realistic and phantastic aspects."¹⁶

Klein's notion of phantasy shares something basic with Tomkins's notion of theory: both organize feelings and wishes into scenarios that serve to guide or navigate experience, and they are both omnipresent in our thinking and feeling lives. But Kleinian phantasy, based on very early experience, is less cognitive than Tomkins's notion of theory, especially

insofar as phantasy deals with those intense feelings of destructiveness that Klein called envy. In chapter 1 I describe Klein's understanding of envy, which is based on Freud's controversial concept of the death instinct, and its inevitable role in creating confusion; at the same time I offer a tentative revision of Freud's idea of the death instinct by way of Tomkins's theory of the negative affects. In that chapter, and elsewhere in this book, I try to integrate Tomkins's and Klein's ideas, which strike me as (for the most part) compatible approaches to thinking about affective and emotional experience.¹⁷ I take up as well the work of Klein's most influential follower, Wilfred Bion. Bion is known for his development of Klein's idea of projective identification as a defense against envy, his innovative theories of group phenomena (he coined the phrase *group therapy*), and a remarkable theory of thinking. He eventually brought these theories together in his writing on the fundamental, reversible relation of container and contained. Chapter 3 brings Bion's writing on groups to a reading of James's *What Maisie Knew*, and chapter 4 brings his theory of the container-contained relation to a reading of Stein's lecture "Plays," where I suggest that her theatrical works aim to create reciprocal emotional relations that, according to Bion, condition the activity of thinking itself. My final chapter proposes that Warhol takes up Stein's landscape poetics as particularly suitable for engaging with an American theatrical culture transformed by mass media.

These preliminary discussions of poetics, affect, and transference will, I hope, serve to introduce the reader to the theoretical approaches to affect that I take in this book. More nuanced discussions follow. I turn now to the contexts of media and performance that motivate this book's chronological and national focus and to the idea of theatricality that brings these contexts together. There is some substantial conceptual intimacy between theatricality and affect, based, I suspect, on a fundamental fact: that theatrical performance almost inevitably foregrounds expressive bodies, in particular framing the face and the voice—the primary physiological mediums of affective communication—as aesthetic experience. For this reason theater has often been exemplary or figural in the classic studies of emotion, from Descartes's encounter with mechanical puppets or theatrical automata in the royal gardens of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (one context for *Les passions de l'âme* [1649]) to Adam Smith's several uses of the figure of theater in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and Charles Darwin's inclusion of photographs of actors in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).¹⁸ Tomkins too turns to theatrical concepts in elaborating what he calls "a dramaturgic model for the

study of personality” (AIC 3: 83) in his later writing on scenes and scripts, which amends and specifies what he had earlier termed “affect theory.”

I would like to unfold this conceptual intimacy between theatricality and affect through a selective reading of Derrida’s essay “Freud and the Scene of Writing.” While this essay does not represent itself as a study of affect—if anything, Derrida claims to seek what he elsewhere calls “a way out of affectivity”—it makes use of theatrical metaphor throughout.¹⁹ I will track and unfold the significance of this metaphor, and in this way repeat or reenact Derrida’s own method of tracking the metaphor of writing and inscription in several of Freud’s works. Of course, this pursuit of metaphor is a standard critical practice, no more Derrida’s than mine, even while it has become powerfully inflected by deconstructive style. As Christopher Johnson suggests in a reading that I have found helpful, “‘deconstruction,’ as it has come to be called, is inseparable from Derrida’s general theory of writing,” aspects of which he convincingly compares with basic principles from systems theory.²⁰ In unfolding Derrida’s use of the metaphor of scene/stage, especially in relation to the idea of system, I will begin to locate a role for affect in his general theory. While the notion of affect does not often appear as such in his writing, Derrida does summon or evoke it at crucial junctures. Consider, for example, a famous passage in *Of Grammatology* that seeks a history of writing based on “an adventure of relationships between the face and the hand” (this refers to André Leroi-Gourhan’s argument in *Gesture and Speech*) and proposes a difficult, perhaps impossible methodological imperative: “We must attempt to recapture the unity of gesture and speech, of body and language, of tool and thought, before the originality of the one and the other is articulated and without letting this profound unity give rise to confusionism.”²¹ Affect as hinge, as I described it earlier (or *brisure*, as Derrida would put it), is precisely what connects and divides these binary pairs, what creates confusion and thereby gives rise to the need to articulate or differentiate them. That affect is fundamentally compositional and confusing but can nonetheless be thought, indeed that affect both motivates and obstructs thinking, is the argument of my next chapter.²²

The title of Derrida’s essay immediately signals the importance of the theatrical metaphor: “Freud et la scène de l’écriture,” which could also be translated as “Freud and the Stage of Writing.” Throughout this piece Derrida makes full use of the semantic resources of the French phrase *mise-en-scène* in both its specifically theatrical definition as, literally, a putting on stage—of stage properties, lighting, music, and other aspects of setting—and its more general sense as environment or milieu. (Stein’s

approach to plays as landscapes captures a similar set of meanings.) In the background of Derrida's essay (with occasional intrusions into the foreground) is Antonin Artaud's writing on the theater of cruelty and its insistence on *mise-en-scène* "as the point of departure for all theatrical relation."²³ The word *scène* (scene/stage) first appears in Derrida's discussion of Freud's account of verbal representation in dreams. Here, as Johnson points out, "the already theatrical overtones of Freud's use of the word *Darstellbarkeit* are emphasized and extended by Derrida's play on the terms 'représentation' (performance) and 'répétition [générale]' (rehearsal)."²⁴ Derrida assimilates the way words work in dreams with the way they work on stage, emphasizing how in both cases (alphabetic) words signify in a manner similar to other visual and aural forms, describing "the Freudian break" this way: "Freud doubtless conceives of the dream as a displacement similar to an original form of writing which puts words on stage without becoming subservient to them; and he is thinking here, no doubt, of a model of writing irreducible to speech which would include, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic, and phonetic elements" (209). In "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" Derrida makes the point more clearly and with explicit reference to Artaud: "On the stage of the dream, as described by Freud, speech has the same status [as that assigned to it in Artaud's theater of cruelty]. . . . Present in dreams, speech can only behave as an element among others, sometimes like a 'thing' which the primary process manipulates according to its own economy" (241).

The first use that Derrida makes of the theatrical metaphor, then, is in the service of a non-logocentric theory of speech in which words are material entities that no longer serve as representatives of ideas according to a linear code. In the dream and on the stage—that of Artaud's theater but also, as I will argue below, in theatricality more generally—multiple meanings emerge from a complex set of mutually contextualizing systems that are not solely linguistic and do not depend on a "radical" break between signifier and signified (209). In these pages Derrida tracks Freud's insistence on the inadequacy of translation as a way to understand dream interpretation because, in the dream, verbal expression, "its sonority, the materiality of the expression, does not disappear before the signified, or at least cannot be traversed and transgressed as it is in conscious speech. It acts as such, with the efficacy Artaud assigned it on the stage of cruelty. The materiality of a word cannot be translated or carried over into another language" (210). In addition, Derrida explains, the metaphor of translation works on a model of transcription and mistakenly "presupposes a text which would already be there, immobile"

(211); as he puts it later in the same paragraph, “The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united—a text nowhere present” (211).

Derrida’s argument concerning the topographical model that Freud ambivalently sketches in *The Interpretation of Dreams* resembles the critique of structuralism he makes elsewhere in *Writing and Difference*, a critique that seeks to supplement ideas of static structure with those of force, play, and duration. He does not reject structuralist models, insisting on “the necessity not of abandoning but of rethinking the space or topology of this [nontranscriptive] writing” (212). The second use that Derrida makes of the theatrical metaphor, then, is as a way to rethink the space of writing in terms of a complex, dynamic, differentiated space in which the binaries of presence/absence, origin/copy, thing/representation can be displaced by a rather different distinction: onstage/offstage. This distinction, implied by the notion of *mise-en-scène* (since what is put on stage must come from somewhere, and what leaves it must go somewhere), captures various aspects of the space of writing as Derrida wishes to rethink it. For example, on stage and off are functional divisions rather than materially different spaces, especially in Artaud’s theater, which seeks to replace the stage and auditorium “by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action.”²⁵ To use Anthony Wilden’s helpful terminology, theater and stage become spaces of analog difference rather than digital opposition.²⁶ Necessarily perspectival (in Artaud’s theater as well as more generally), the distinction between on and off stage depends on structural considerations that can be altered (the curtain, the proscenium arch, the configuration of the hall and arrangement of the audience), considerations that are fundamentally social, at once effects and reciprocal causes of group behavior and decision.²⁷ If actors, props, words, music, lights, and other theatrical elements belong both on stage and off, then what makes meaning are the relations between them as they move among the many spaces on and off the stage. These are the movements of writing in Derrida’s general sense.

That the scene/stage becomes Derrida’s primary metaphor for rethinking the space of writing becomes more explicit in his discussion of the “Note on the ‘Mystic Writing Pad.’” In this essay Freud returns to the fundamental problem of the much earlier *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, that of producing a physical theory of the brain that can accommodate at once the newness of perception and the storage capacities of memory, or, as Derrida puts it, the “potential for indefinite preservation

and an unlimited capacity for reception" (222). Thirty years after writing the *Project* Freud discovered a mechanical model that satisfies these requirements in the form of a toy. The Mystic Writing Pad famously consists of a transparent sheet laid over a wax slab receptive to impressions from a stylus, which disappear from the sheet as soon as it is lifted but remain in the wax perpetually. Derrida argues that this model conveys both the spatiality and the temporality of psychic writing, what he calls spacing: "Temporality as spacing will be not only the horizontal discontinuity of a chain of signs, but also will be writing as the interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels. . . . We find neither the continuity of a line nor the homogeneity of a volume; only the differentiated duration and depth of a stage, and its spacing" (225). Spacing invokes the stage dynamics I described earlier, the movements of elements on stage and off, and especially the timing of these movements. Here is the *Nachträglich* nature of perception in which what appears on the stage of awareness is always a consequence of a set of relations between what is off stage, remembered or forgotten. Derrida puts it this way: "Writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself [is conscious of itself]. . . . The 'perceived' may be read only in the past, beneath perception and after it" (224).

Both Tomkins's notion of theory and Klein's of unconscious phantasy aim to capture this dynamic between perception and memory and seek to understand the role of affect or object relations in this dynamic. From the perspective of my reading, it is no accident that in this discussion of temporality and spacing Derrida evokes the notion of affect without naming it. In a difficult set of passages he emphasizes the fact that "at least two hands are needed to make the apparatus [the Mystic Writing Pad] function, as well as a system of gestures" (226), and after pointing to "a multiplicity of agencies or origins" (226) for psychical writing, poses a rhetorical question: "Is this not the original relation to the other and the original temporality of writing, its 'primary' complication: an originary spacing, deferring, and erasure of the simple origin, and polemics on the very threshold of what we persist in calling perception? The stage of dreams, 'which follow old facilitations,' was a stage of writing. But this is because 'perception,' the first relationship of life to its other, the origin of life, had always already prepared representation" (226). One form of this "original relation to the other," I suggest, is affect or (otherwise put) object relations, especially when understood as motivational system.²⁸ Derrida offers "perception" as the name for "the first relationship of life to its other," but missing from this account is what motivates the dynamic relations between perception and memory/forgetting. This is

why he turns immediately to Freud's theory of motivation in terms of repression of the drives. "Writing is unthinkable without repression" (226), Derrida asserts, and proposes that "the condition for writing is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship" (226). As I remarked earlier, Tomkins's affect theory offers an alternative to Freud's understanding of motivation, and in chapter 2 I explicitly recast repression in terms of Tomkins's description of the inhibiting and amplifying qualities of the affect system. I would rewrite Derrida's assertion as follows: writing is unthinkable without the inhibiting and amplifying relations between and among the affects and the other systems of the psyche. It is less "the vigilance and failure of censorship" per se that acts to create the intermittencies that condition writing than it is the multiple inhibitions as well as amplifications emergent from a complex affect system.

I am arguing that Derrida makes room for affect in his general theory of writing through the metaphor of the stage as it serves to foreground the materiality of verbal expression and to rethink the space of writing. The stage and its movements (on and off) set out a complex, differentiated spatiality and temporality that offer a way to reimagine the interacting, multiple agencies or systems of psychic writing without requiring a single, sovereign subject: "The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a *system* of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found" (226–27, emphasis in the original). Instead of sociological approaches that use communication models to describe the relations between subject and society (or subject and structure), relying on only the simplest accounts of motivation, Derrida turns to what he calls "the *sociality* of writing as *drama*": "In order to describe the structure, it is not enough to recall that one always writes for someone; and the oppositions sender-receiver, code-message, etc., always remain extremely coarse instruments. We would search the 'public' in vain for the first reader: i.e., the first author of a work. And the 'sociology of literature' is blind to the war and the ruses perpetrated by the author who reads and by the first reader who dictates, for at stake here is the origin of the work itself. The *sociality* of writing as *drama* requires an entirely different discipline" (226–27, emphasis in the original). In invoking "the author who reads" and "the first reader who dictates" Derrida draws out the close coincidence of writing, reading, and performance, the fundamental multiplicity and circuitousness even of individual subjectivity. (I return to this point in chapter 3 in a discussion

of Henry James's scenic method and group psychology.) Drama, here, is Derrida's shorthand for the staging of multiple agencies or systems in complex interaction across levels or "strata," a staging that does not begin from the subject/structure opposition so central to mid-twentieth-century critical and philosophical projects.

While it is tempting to take up Derrida's (characteristically extravagant) gesture toward "an entirely different discipline" in the passage above and that he makes again at the end of the essay, it is no longer necessary to oppose his general theory of writing to sociological approaches. Rather than returning to an old debate that casts deconstructive and Marxist-materialist analyses as antagonistic or mutually exclusive, I would simply point out that these approaches, while distinct, can and have been powerfully brought together, for example, in Jonathan Goldberg's *Writing Matter* (1990). Goldberg reads sixteenth-century English handwriting manuals as they implemented, extended, and regulated access to the italic hand or "hand of power" (from which descends our cursive writing), pursuing an episode in the history of writing precisely along Derridean lines, "a history of technology that is also the history of 'man,' the programmed/programming machine: the human written."²⁹ Goldberg's attention to the role of graphic technologies in the writing or scripting of the human and in historical institutions of governance navigates between deconstructive insight and materialist criticism, and his final chapter, "The Hand in Theory," demonstrates that "Marxist materialism can communicate with deconstructive protocols once the hand of Engels is relocated within a graphic discourse" (314). In that same chapter Goldberg turns to "Freud and the Scene of Writing" and Derrida's brief sketches of "a new psychoanalytic graphology." "Here, Melanie Klein perhaps opens the way," Derrida writes, for Klein's "entire thematic, her analysis of the constitution of good and bad objects, her genealogy of morals could doubtless begin to illuminate, if followed prudently, the entire problem of the archi-trace . . . in terms of valuation and devaluation" (231). Goldberg queries the privilege Derrida accords this "psychoanalytic graphology," worrying that psychoanalysis aims always to "reveal that sexuality is the truth of the path we are said to tread on the way to Being."³⁰ But Goldberg sees in Klein's analyses of children's phantasies about writing that "the sexual way is also, and always already, graphic" (310), reading Derrida's gesture toward Klein this way: "The 'privilege' of a psychoanalytic graphology, therefore, does not privilege the psyche or the discipline of psychoanalysis. It leads, rather, to a recognition of the ways in which being (human, material) is scripted. Within the logocentric script of the West, it leads to the hand" (311).

I have found Goldberg's work and its emphasis on graphic technologies helpful for conceptualizing the relations between the historical and affect theoretical aspects of my project. To explain this I should first note that the importance of historical context for my research has shifted: an earlier version of this project focused on poetics by way of the history of technologies of graphic reproduction and their role in the emergence of mass media.³¹ A number of years ago I realized that the technologies I was most drawn to were those that transformed specifically affective communication: the graphic technologies, emerging from the 1840s on (telegraphy, photography, phonography, film, wireless), that could reproduce at a distance, and distribute to great numbers, the face and the voice. These technologies, institutionalized in the forms of radio and cinema in the first half of the twentieth century and television in the second half, became the basis for mass media. It would be possible to describe the historical changes that took place in the environment of these technologies during this time in sociological terms: the institutions that intensively developed and captured the new graphic technologies industrialized or modernized affective communication, with the immersive twentieth-century experiences of mass media a consequence of such social processes. This sociological description would complement Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's analysis of the culture industry in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) or Raymond Williams's somewhat different account of the emergence of broadcasting in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974). Some version of this sociological description might also complement the more formalist approaches of Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Kittler, and Niklas Luhmann. None of these accounts describes the shifts in technology or the emergence of mass media in terms of a change in specifically affective communication. One contribution this project makes to media studies is to emphasize affect as the key category for conceptualizing the historical emergence and significance of mass media. Tomkins's systems theoretical approach offers a promising way to address the fraught question of the causal relations between technologies, institutions, and subjectivities, a question that I pursue in my final chapter, on Warhol and television.

In its current form, however, this book inflects a sociological idiom with a Derridean emphasis on writing in its description of technological change and what Goldberg calls the scripting of human, material being. After all, the nineteenth-century technologies of graphic reproduction are part of a longer history of writing: telegraphy, photography, and phonography are all graphic *techne* that create inscriptions or marks on a surface or in a medium. My attention to inscription in this book is

everywhere accompanied by an attention to the circuits of perception and performance that, for Derrida, accompany the scene of writing and that define what I call the theatricalization of writing. Consider that, just as the act of reading aloud transforms marks on parchment or paper into verbal, vocal performance, phonograph playback and film projection transform inscription (whether on wax, vinyl, or celluloid) into visible or audible performance. In this context broadcasting technologies such as radio and television, which do not initially appear to be inscriptive in the same sense as the earlier graphic technologies, similarly coordinate writing, reading, and performance: in broadcasting, writing (with camera or microphone) creates performances that can be seen and heard at a distance. To what degree can the large-scale changes that took place between the 1840s and the 1980s be understood as transformations in the technical and institutional means for reading, playing back, or theatricalizing writing? This is the largest historical-theoretical context for my book: the theatricalization of writing that takes place through technologies of graphic reproduction, and what follows, a new role for affect in the scene of writing.³²

Especially insofar as they reproduce the face and the voice, the graphic technologies and institutions that capture them are fundamentally theatricalizing: they offer new means for framing or foregrounding expressive bodies. Any analysis of the scripting of human, material being from the nineteenth century on, then, leads not only to the hand but to “an adventure of relationships between the face and the hand,” or otherwise put, to the relationships between motivation and thinking in the context of technological media. While I agree with Goldberg’s reading of “psychoanalytic graphology,” I would suggest that Derrida turns to Klein and her “genealogy of morals” because he is missing some (materialist) account of valuation or motivation in his general theory. I remarked earlier that affect inhabits the scene of writing as a system that motivates the relations between perception and memory/forgetting. Here I would add that the historical advent of graphic technology theatricalizes writing to reframe affect and motivation anew. Indeed there is a strange reciprocity between theatricality and affect, and this is the gist of the conceptual intimacy that I have been pursuing. Affect is theatricalized in (and by) writing at the same time that it serves as an agent of theatricality; to put this another way, affect is at once framed by technologies of graphic reproduction and frames verbal communications more generally.

The notion of theatricality that I have developed in this book is based not only on Derrida’s metaphor of the stage and its role in his general theory of writing but also on Gregory Bateson’s writing on play and the

role of metacommunicative frames in his essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy."³³ According to Bateson, play dynamics (as well as related phenomena, including psychoanalytic transference) rely on psychological or perceptual frames that function to delimit logical types. Such frames direct the recipient of a communication how to receive it or, more significantly, how not to receive it: "The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite."³⁴ Consider a couple of examples of metacommunicative frames. I may read something aloud (say, a set of instructions) or frown to communicate my distress, but once framed, this communication changes: if I frown excessively or ironically, this at once communicates and negates my distress, and if I read instructions in a funny voice, then I detract from their authority. Affect often serves to communicate about whatever verbal (or other) communication is happening concurrently; affect, I suggest, plays a primary role in meta-communication of all kinds.³⁵

Any medium of communication necessarily invokes metacommunicative frames. The page, stage, movie screen, and television are technologies that offer distinct frames for communication, including the communication and expression of affect. At the same time, the affects themselves serve to introduce labile frames that guide interpretation and response. The deconstructive and anthropological approach to theatricality that I take in this study defines it in terms of a reciprocal framing relation between affect and writing, one that transforms communication into more complex metacommunication. When I observe that the work of Poe, James, Stein, and Warhol are each peculiarly, if differently, theatricalizing, I mean the following: that their compositions and poetics pay careful attention to the metacommunicative force of affect in the historical context of the emergence and institutionalizing of those graphic technologies that form the basis of twentieth-century mass media in the United States. The trajectory from Poe to Warhol traced by this book offers a route that culminates in television, that technology and cultural form that most powerfully realizes a twentieth-century theatricalization of writing. In its various, insistent returns to television—as technology, as institution, as writing, as theater—this book seeks to discover a loose, integrated approach to criticism across mediums of composition and performance.

If my attention in this book has gone specifically to American writers and artists, it is because of the peculiar manner in which U.S. (democratic, market) culture took hold of, developed, and became identified with the technologies and institutions that created modern mass media and the spectacular, theatricalized, metacommunicative environment of

the twentieth century. An earlier title of my study, “American Telepoetics,” evoked the historical affinity between the ideas of “America” and “modern media” as these began reciprocally to define one another in the first half of the twentieth century, then to expand their domains during the years of the dissemination of U.S. political ideals after World War II. As a (Canadian) child who learned how to read by watching early 1970s American television (the PBS show *The Electric Company*, a product of Richard Nixon’s literacy campaigns), I was acutely aware of the educative role that television played as the primary sociopolitical affective guidance system in late twentieth-century North America (supplanting newspapers and Hollywood film in this role, as the Internet would seem to be supplanting television today). Raymond Williams has observed that cinema, radio, and television have created an astonishing quantitative difference in the sheer amount of drama we experience (“for the first time a majority of the population has regular and constant access to drama, beyond occasion or season”) and therefore a qualitative difference in what he calls “drama as habitual experience.”³⁶ A desire to understand the ubiquitous place and emotional roles of television in my lifetime has motivated the genealogical aspects of this project and has driven me to approach sociological questions from the unusual perspective of the theatricalization of writing.

The chapters that follow explore the theatricalization of writing in Poe, James, Stein, and Warhol, and unfold the roles for affect dynamics in fundamental experiences of composition, expression, group phenomena, thinking and learning, and self-care. I have discussed my method, which begins with the question of subjective, emotional response and moves to identify telling transference moments. I would now add that this method consists less of the application of affect theory to literary and other aesthetic work than of juxtaposition: I set a variety of theoretical, literary, filmic, and graphic works side by side to discover what kinds of readings and knowledges emerge. This choice of juxtaposition has been partly motivated by Sedgwick’s discussion in her introduction to *Touching Feeling* (2003) of a project “to explore some ways around the topos of depth or hiddenness, typically followed by the drama of exposure, that has been such a staple of critical work of the past four decades.”³⁷ Sedgwick’s writing is particularly concerned to avoid what Foucault called the ruses of the repressive hypothesis; she initially turned to Tomkins because his work offered tools for theorizing motivation in a manner that did not reintroduce the category of repression, which, in Foucault’s famous critique, leads to an inevitable focus on prohibition. Rather

than those critical practices that in attending to prohibition always look behind, beneath, or beyond a given text, Sedgwick proposes *beside* as a critical heuristic that steps away from the dualisms of binary opposition and toward the more complex spatialization of systems or ecologies.

I take up this heuristic in my first chapter, which reads Stein's poetics of mistake (as she elaborates them in *Lectures in America* [1935]) side by side with Tomkins's understanding of the role of affects in perception and Klein's notion of unconscious phantasy. These thinkers help me to describe what I call the compositional aspect of affect in perception, by which I mean the ways that affect and emotion help to compose psychic objects. Stein's writing invites (or demands) a reader's attention to the intricacies of grammar and to physiological response, that is, to the movements of feeling and thinking that take place here and now in the act of reading. I describe Stein's and Tomkins's shared intellectual and historical affiliation with William James, and their willingness to acknowledge the place of confusion in perception. In the second half of the chapter I read parts of *Tender Buttons* to show how Stein and Klein participated in similar modernist projects to become acquainted with and give verbal form to elements of experience that are difficult to access and entertain in consciousness. I unfold Klein's notion of phantasy and conclude by arguing that confusion is both an expression of what she called envy and a defense against it.

My next chapter reads those of Poe's short stories that offer careful, fragmented depictions of faces next to Tomkins's writing on what he calls the General Images of the affect system. Tomkins proposes a set of basic goals for the affects—maximize positive affect, minimize negative affect, minimize affect inhibition, and the goal of power—the conflicts between which generate much of the complexity of affective experience. I read these conflicts in Poe's stories in order to develop an account of expression that does not oppose repression and that does not rely on idealized self-presence and interiority. The peculiar shamelessness of Poe's writing grounds the notion of expression that I develop, and in the second half of the chapter I offer a reading of one of Poe's most shameless tales, "The Tell-Tale Heart." This reading, which uses Tomkins's understanding of the taboos on looking, leads me to speculate about one affective source for theater: the lifting of the taboos on looking in theatrical experience. I argue that Poe's writing conveys the shamelessness of looking in theatrical experience and that this forms the basis of the appeal of his writing to both high modernists and mass culture workers.

I return to fundamental questions about theatricality in my next chapter, "Maisie's Spasms," which offers a reading of Henry James's midcareer

novel *What Maisie Knew* as a study in group psychology. Maisie, James's child heroine, is at the center of an expanding and transforming family group that includes various governesses as well as her divorced parents' multiple new partners. I set James's novel beside Bion's *Experiences in Groups* (1961) and its Kleinian approach to the continuities and discontinuities between individual and group experience. Rather than insisting (as Freud tends to) only on a narrative of individuation and adaptation, Bion emphasizes the necessity and difficulty an individual inevitably experiences in making contact with the emotional life of the group in which she lives. James casts the frustrating necessity of group experience in entirely theatrical terms, figuring Maisie from the start as a spectator to, and eventually an active participant in, the affective circuits of those around her. In my reading the transferential poetics of James and Bion make available the affective, transindividual nature of knowing as a contingent activity that takes place between persons and other objects. I conclude the chapter by unfolding some of the surprising televisual aspects of James's late style.

My next chapter, "Loose Coordinations," returns to Bion and Stein in a new interpretation of Stein's lecture "Plays." The chapter begins by using William James's definition of emotion to analyze what Stein considers to be the main problem of theater: its triggering of audience "nervousness." I turn to Tomkins's writing on excitement to read Stein's meditation on varieties of excitement both in and out of the theater. I then make use of Bion's *Learning from Experience* (1962), in which he elaborates a theory of thinking as a reciprocal relation between container and contained, in order to understand Stein's landscape poetics, that is, her manner of writing plays, which aims for experiences of new knowledge. The chapter concludes by proposing that one crucial context for Stein's phenomenological investigation of plays is the technologies and institutions of mass media (film and broadcasting) that both helped to establish her fame and serve as technical models for her experimental methods. The problem of theater, I suggest, is the problem of how to make emotional contact with groups in the environment of such technologies of affective communication.

My final chapter takes up this problem in the work of Warhol. I argue that by identifying with television itself (as both technology and institution) Warhol finds a powerful solution to the problem of how to make emotional contact with the group. This chapter offers a way to move from a study of poetics to a study of therapeutics. The first half of the chapter brings the affect theories of Klein and Tomkins to readings of some of Warhol's early film and video work and argues that Warhol

takes a televisual perspective on emotion. I go on to show that he adopted a televisual perspective in developing his celebrated self, and turn to Foucault's late lectures on ancient therapeutics to read *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*. Here Warhol figures television as a therapeutic device that offers him the technical means to become himself, Andy Warhol, by regulating or tuning emotional perspective and distance. The chapter argues that both Foucault and Warhol share an underexamined set of relations to midcentury cybernetics: the ancient idea of "conversion to self" that Foucault discusses is a figure for cybernetic control central to his notion of governmentality. I read "from A to B and back again," the overarching thematic of Warhol's *Philosophy*, as a version of this ancient figure of conversion and control. I conclude by suggesting that Warhol may be read by way of Foucault's meditations on the Cynics, as an extension to an antitheoretical line of ancient ethics that persists in contemporary culture.

The book ends with a brief epilogue or "outro" that summarizes the central aspects of transferential poetics by meditating on the meanings of *out*, or *out there*, in the work of the American composer Morton Feldman.