Touching Feeling

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Chapter 4

PARANOID READING AND REPARATIVE READING,

OR, YOU'RE SO PARANOID, YOU PROBABLY THINK

THIS ESSAY IS ABOUT YOU

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

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

I suppose this ought to seem quite an unremarkable epiphany: that knowledge does rather than simply is it is by now very routine to discover. Yet it seems that a lot of the real force of such discoveries has been blunted through the habitual practices of the same forms of critical theory that have given such broad currency to the formulae themselves. In particular, it is possible that the very productive critical habits embodied in what Paul Ricoeur memorably called the “hermeneutics of suspicion” — widespread critical habits indeed, perhaps by now nearly synonymous with criticism itself — may have had an unintentionally stultifying side effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller.

Ricoeur introduced the category of the hermeneutics of suspicion to describe the position of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and their intellectual offspring in a context that also included such alternative disciplinary herme-
evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid
critical stance has come to seem naive, pious, or complaisant. I myself have
no wish to return to the use of “paranoid” as a pathologizing diagnosis,
but it seems to me a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem en-
tirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed
as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alterna-
tive kinds.

Even aside from the prestige that now attaches to a hermeneutics of
suspicion in critical theory as a whole, queer studies in particular has had
a distinctive history of intimacy with the paranoid imperative. Freud, of
course, traced every instance of paranoia to the repression of specifically
same-sex desire, whether in women or in men. The traditional, homoph-
bic psychoanalytic use that has generally been made of Freud’s association
has been to pathologize homosexuals as paranoid or to consider para-
noia a distinctly homosexual disease. In *Homosexual Desire*, however, a
1972 book translated into English in 1978, Guy Hocquenghem returned to
Freud’s formulations to draw from them a conclusion that would not repro-
duce this damaging non sequitur. If paranoia reflects the repression of same-
sex desire, Hocquenghem reasoned, then paranoia is a uniquely privileged
site for illuminating not homosexuality itself, as in the Freudian tradition,
but rather precisely the mechanisms of homophobic and heterosexist en-
forcement against it. What is illuminated by an understanding of paranoia
is not how homosexuality works, but how homophobia and heterosexism
work — in short, if one understands these oppressions to be systemic, how
the world works.

Paranoia thus became by the mid-1980s a privileged object of antihomo-
ophobic theory. How did it spread so quickly from that status to being its
uniquely sanctioned methodology? I have been looking back into my own
writing of the 1980s as well as that of some other critics, trying to retrace
that transition — one that seems worthy of remark now but seemed at the
time, I think, the most natural move in the world. Part of the explanation
lies in a property of paranoia itself. Simply put, paranoia tends to be con-
guous; more specifically, paranoia is drawn toward and tends to construct
symmetrical relations, in particular, symmetrical epistemologies. As Leo
Bersani writes, “To inspire interest is to be guaranteed a paranoid reading,
just as we must inevitably be suspicious of the interpretations we inspire.
Paranoia is an inescapable interpretive doubling of presence” (188). It sets

a thief (and, if necessary, becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile
against suspicion, suspicion against guile; “it takes one to know one.” A
paranoid friend, who believes I am reading her mind, knows this from read-
ing mine; also a suspicious writer, she is always turning up at crime scenes
of plagiarism, indifferently as perpetrator or as victim; a litigious colleague
as well, she not only imagines me to be as familiar with the laws of libel
as she is, but eventually makes me become so. (All these examples, by the
way, are fictitious.)

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

But the truth value of the original axiom, assuming it to be true, doesn’t
actually make a paranoid imperative self-evident. Learning that “just be-
cause you’re paranoid doesn’t mean you don’t have enemies,” somebody
might deduce that being paranoid is not an effective way to get rid of en-
emies. Rather than concluding “so you can never be paranoid enough,” this
person might instead be moved to reflect “but then, just because you have
enemies doesn’t mean you have to be paranoid.” That is to say, once again:
for someone to have an unmythified view of systemic oppressions does not
intrinsic or necessarily enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemo-
logical or narrative consequences. To be other than paranoid (and of course,
we’ll need to define this term much more carefully), to practice other than paranoid forms of knowing does not, in itself, entail a denial of the reality or gravity of enmity or oppression.

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

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

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

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

I would like to begin by setting outside the scope of this discussion any overlap between paranoia per se on the one hand, and on the other hand the states variously called dementia praecox (by Kraepelin), schizophrenia (by Bleuler), or, more generally, delusionality or psychosis. As Laplanche and Pontalis note, the history of psychiatry has attempted various mappings of this overlap: “Kraepelin differentiates clearly between paranoia on the one hand and the paranoid form of dementia praecox on the other; Bleuler treats paranoia as a sub-category of dementia praecox, or the group of schizophrenia; as for Freud, he is quite prepared to see certain so-called paranoid forms of dementia praecox brought under the head of paranoia. . . . [For example, Schreber’s] case of ‘paranoid dementia’ is essentially a paranoia proper [and therefore not a form of schizophrenia] in Freud’s eyes” (297). In Klein’s later writings, meanwhile, the occurrence of psychotic-like mental events is seen as universal in both children and adults, so that mechanisms such as paranoia have a clear ontological priority over diagnostic categories such as dementia. The reason I want to insist in advance on this move is, once again, to try to hypothetically disentangle the question of truth value from the question of performative effect.
I am saying that the main reasons for questioning paranoid practices are other than the possibility that their suspicions can be delusional or simply wrong. Concomitantly, some of the main reasons for practicing paranoid strategies may be other than the possibility that they offer unique access to true knowledge. They represent a way, among other ways, of seeking, finding, and organizing knowledge. Paranoia knows some things well and others poorly.

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

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

PARANOIA IS ANTICIPATORY

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

The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known. As Miller’s analysis also suggests, the temporal progress and regress of paranoia are, in principle, infinite. Hence perhaps, I suggest, Butler’s repeated and scourningly thorough demonstrations in Gender Trouble that there can have been no moment prior to the imposition of the totalizing Law of gender difference; hence her unresting vigilance for traces in other theorists’ writing of

nostalgia for such an impossible prior moment. No time could be too early for one’s having-already-known, for its having-already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen. And no loss could be too far in the future to need to be preemptively discounted.

PARANOIA IS REFLEXIVE AND MIMETIC

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

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

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

Seemingly, the reservoir of such thought and speculation could make an important resource for theorists committed to thinking about human lives otherwise than through the prejudicial gender reifications that are common in psychoanalysis as in other projects of modern philosophy and science. What has happened instead, I think, is something like the following. First, through what might be called a process of vigilant scanning, feminists and queers have rightly understood that no topic or area of psychoanalytic thought can be declared a priori immune to the influence of such gender reifications. Second, however—and, it seems to me, unnecessarily and often damagingly—the lack of such a priori immunity, the absence of any guaranteed nonprejudicial point of beginning for feminist thought within

psychoanalysis has led to the widespread adoption by some thinkers of an anticipatory mimetic strategy whereby a certain, stylized violence of sexual differentiation must always be presumed or self-assumed—even, where necessary, imposed—simply on the ground that it can never be finally ruled out. (I don’t want to suggest, in using the word “mimetic,” that these uses of psychoanalytic gender categories need be either uncritical or identical to the originals. Butler, among others, has taught us a much less deadening use of “mimetic.”) But, for example, in this post-Lacanian tradition, psychoanalytic thought that is not in the first place centrally organized around phallic “sexual difference” must seemingly be translated, with however distorting results, into that language before it can be put to any other theoretical use. The contingent possibilities of thinking otherwise than through “sexual difference” are subordinated to the paranoid imperative that, if the violence of such gender reification cannot be definitively halted in advance, it must at least never arrive on any conceptual scene as a surprise. In a paranoid view, it is more dangerous for such reification ever to be unanticipated than often to be unchallenged.

**PARANOIA IS A STRONG THEORY**

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

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sense of the largely tacit theorizing all people do in experiencing and trying to deal with their own and others' affects.

To call paranoia a strong theory is, then, at the same time to congratulate it as a big achievement (it's a strong theory rather as, for Harold Bloom, Milton is a strong poet) but also to classify it. It is one kind of affect theory among other possible kinds, and by Tomkins's account, a number of interrelated affect theories of different kinds and strengths are likely to constitute the mental life of any individual. Most pointedly, the contrast of strong theory in Tomkins is with weak theory, and the contrast is not in every respect to the advantage of the strong kind. The reach and reductiveness of strong theory—that is, its conceptual economy or elegance—involves not only assets and deficits. What characterizes strong theory in Tomkins is not, after all, how well it avoids negative affect or finds positive affect, but the size and topology of the domain that it organizes. "Any theory of wide generality," he writes,
is capable of accounting for a wide spectrum of phenomena which appear to be very remote, one from the other, and from a common source. This is a commonly accepted criterion by which the explanatory power of any scientific theory can be evaluated. To the extent to which the theory can account only for "near" phenomena, it is a weak theory, little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain. As it orders more and more remote phenomena to a single formulation, its power grows. . . . A humiliation theory is strong to the extent to which it enables more and more experiences to be accounted for as instances of humiliating experiences on the one hand, or to the extent to which it enables more and more anticipation of such contingencies before they actually happen. (Affect 2:433–34)

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

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

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

We have said that there is over-organization in monopolistic humiliation theory. By this we mean not only that there is excessive integration between sub-systems which are normally more independent, but also that each sub-system is over-specialized in the interests of minimizing the experience of humiliation. . . . The entire cognitive apparatus is in a constant state of alert for possibilities, imminent or remote, ambiguous or clear.

Like any highly organized effort at detection, as little as possible is left to chance. The radar antennae are placed wherever it seems possible the enemy may attack. Intelligence officers may monitor even unlikely conversations if there is an outside chance something relevant may be detected or if there is a chance that two independent bits of information taken together may give indication of the enemy's intentions. . . . But above all there is a highly organized way of interpreting information so that what is possibly relevant can be quickly abstracted and magnified, and the rest discarded. (Affect 2:433)

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

More usually, however, the roles in this drama are more mixed or more widely distributed. I don't suppose that too many readers—nor, for that matter, perhaps the author—would be too surprised to hear it noted that the main argument or strong theory of The Novel and the Police is entirely circular: everything can be understood as an aspect of the carceral, therefore the carceral is everywhere. But who reads The Novel and the Police to find out whether its main argument is true? In this case, as also frequently in the case of the tautologies of "sexual difference," the very breadth of reach that makes the theory strong also offers the space—of which Miller's book takes every advantage—for a wealth of tonal nuance, attitude, worldly observation, performative paradox, aggression, tenderness, wit, inventive reading,
obiter dicta, and writerly panache. These rewards are so local and frequent that one might want to say that a plethora of only loosely related weak theories has been invited to shelter in the hypertrophied embrace of the book's overarching strong theory. In many ways, such an arrangement is all to the good—suggestive, pleasurable, and highly productive; an insistence that everything means one thing somehow permits a sharpened sense of all the ways there are of meaning it. But one need not read an infinite number of students' and other critics' derivative rephrasings of the book's grimy strong theory to see, as well, some limitations of this unarticulated relation between strong and weak theories. As strong theory, and as a locus of reflexive mimeticism, paranoia is nothing if not teachable. The powerfully ranging and reductive force of strong theory can make tautological thinking hard to identify even as it makes it compelling and near inevitable; the result is that both writers and readers can damagingly misrecognize whether and where real conceptual work is getting done, and precisely what that work might be.

PARANOIA IS A THEORY OF NEGATIVE AFFECTS

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

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

Klein's and Tomkins's conceptual moves here are more sophisticated and, in an important way, less tendentious than the corresponding assumptions in Freud. To begin with, Freud subsumes pleasure seeking and pain avoidance together under the rubric of the supposedly primordial "pleasure principle," as though the two motives could not themselves radically differ. Second, it is the pain-forestalling strategy alone in Freud that (as anxiety) gets extended forward into the developmental achievement of the "reality principle." This leaves pleasure seeking as an always assumable, inexhaustible underground wellspring of supposedly "natural" motive, one that presents only the question of how to keep its irrepressible ebullitions under control. Perhaps even more problematically, this Freudian schema silently installs the anxious paranoid imperative, the impossibility but also the supposed necessity of forestalling pain and surprise, as "reality"—as the only and inevitable mode, motive, content, and proof of true knowledge.

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

**Paranoia Places Its Faith in Exposure**

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

It’s strange that a hermeneutics of suspicion would appear so trusting about the effects of exposure, but Nietzsche (through the genealogy of morals), Marx (through the theory of ideology), and Freud (through the theory of ideals and illusions) already represent, in Ricoeur’s phrase, “convergent procedures of demystification” (34) and therefore a seeming faith, inexplicable in their own terms, in the effects of such a proceeding. In the influential final pages of *Gender Trouble*, for example, Butler offers a programmatic argument in favor of demystification as “the normative focus for gay and lesbian practice” (124), with such claims as that “drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself” (137); “we see sex and gender *denaturalized* by means of a performance” (138); “gender parody reveals that the original identity . . . is an imitation” (138); “gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself” (139); “parodic repetition . . . exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity” (141); “the parodic repetition of gender exposes . . . the illusion of gender identity” (146); and “hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ . . . reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (147) as well as “exposing its fundamental unnaturalness” (149; all emphases added).

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

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

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

A further problem with these critical practices: What does a hermeneutics of suspicion and exposure have to say to social formations in which visibility itself constitutes much of the violence? The point of the reinstatement of chain gangs in several Southern states is less that convicts be required to perform hard labor than that they be required to do so under the gaze of the public, and the enthusiasm for Singapore-style justice that was popularly expressed in the United States around the caning of Michael Fay revealed a growing feeling that well-publicized shaming stigma is just what the doctor ordered for recalcitrant youth. Here is one remarkable index of historical change: it used to be opponents of capital punishment who argued that, if practiced at all, executions should be done in public so as to shame state and spectators by the airing of previously hidden judicial violence. Today it is no longer opponents but death penalty cheerleaders, flushed with triumphal ambitions, who consider that the proper place for executions is on television. What price now the cultural critics’ hard-won skill at making visible, behind permissive appearances, the hidden traces of oppression and persecution?

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

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

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

To look from a present day vantage at Richard Hofstadter’s immensely influential 1963 essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” is to see the extent of a powerful discursive change. Hofstadter’s essay is a prime expression of the complacent, coercive liberal consensus that practically begs for the kind of paranoid demystification in which, for example, D. A. Miller educates his readers. Its style is mechanically even-handed: Hofstadter finds paranoia on both left and right: among abolitionists, anti-Masons and anti-Catholics and anti-Mormons, nativists and populists and those who believe in conspiracies of bankers or munitions makers; in anyone who doubts that JFK was killed by a lone gunman, “in the popular left-wing press, in the contemporary American right wing, and on both sides of the race controversy today” (9). Although these categories seem to cover a lot of people, there remains nonetheless a presumptive “we”—apparently still practically everyone—who can agree to view such extremes from a calm, understanding, encompassing middle ground, where “we” can all agree that, for example, though “innumerable decisions of . . . the cold war can be faulted,” they represent “simply the mistakes of well-meaning men” (36). Hofstadter has no trouble admitting that paranoid people or movements can perceive true things, though “a distorted style is . . . a possible signal that may alert us to a distorted judgment, just as in art an ugly style is a cue to fundamental defects of taste” (6):

A few simple and relatively non-controversial examples may make [the distinction between content and style] wholly clear. Shortly after the assassination of President Kennedy, a great deal of publicity was given to a bill . . .

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We are all aware that the environment is crucial to our survival. The air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we stand on are all interconnected. The health of our planet affects every aspect of our lives, from our food supply to our climate. In this context, it is crucial to understand the importance of conservation efforts and sustainable practices.

One of the most significant challenges we face today is climate change. The increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is leading to a rise in global temperatures. This has far-reaching consequences, including more frequent and severe weather events, melting ice caps, and rising sea levels. These changes are threatening the viability of many ecosystems and posing significant risks to human health and safety.

It is crucial that we take action to address this issue. This means reducing our carbon footprint by adopting sustainable practices in our daily lives, such as using public transportation, conserving energy, and reducing waste. It also means supporting policies and initiatives that promote renewable energy and address climate change at the national and international levels.

Another major challenge we face is biodiversity loss. The rapid destruction of habitats and the illegal wildlife trade are threatening countless species with extinction. This loss of biodiversity has significant implications for human health, as many of the world's most important medicines are derived from natural sources. Protecting our planet's biodiversity is essential to ensuring the health and well-being of future generations.

In conclusion, we must work together to address the challenges we face and promote a more sustainable future. By taking action to protect our planet, we can ensure a better future for ourselves and future generations.
NOTES

Note to self: Remain calm, take deep breaths, and focus on the task at hand.