

TOUCHING FEELING

AFFECT, PEDAGOGY, PERFORMATIVITY



EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK

my Buddhist imagination, besides Hal and Michael and Mary C., includes Sharon Cameron, Don Lopez, Tina Meyerhoff, Nancy Waring, and, beaming her kindness, Mary Moon.

Touching Feeling is a palimpsest of previously published and unpublished material. Although I have felt free to revise, the essays appear in the order in which they were originally written. The main borrowings from published materials are as follows.

The interlude appeared as part of "Socratic Raptures, Socratic Raptures: Notes toward Queer Performativity," in *English Inside and Out*, ed. Jonathan Kamholtz and Susan Gubar (New York: Routledge, 1992).

A version of Chapter 1 was published as "Queer Performativity in the New York Edition Prefaces," in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*, ed. David McWhirter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), after appearing first in two parts: "Inside Henry James: Toward a Lexicon for *The Art of the Novel*," in *Negotiating Lesbian and Gay Subjects*, ed. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (New York: Routledge, 1995), and "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ* 1.1(1993).

Adam Frank and I first published a version of Chapter 3 in *Critical Inquiry* (winter 1995); it later appeared as the introduction to Frank and Sedgwick, eds., *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

A version of Chapter 4 appeared as part of the introduction to Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Chapter 5 was commissioned for Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed., *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

Some paragraphs on performativity from the introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 are borrowed from Andrew Parker's and my introduction to our coedited *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995). The discussion of Henry James's anal eroticism in Chapter 1 both continues and borrows from the discussion of *The Wings of the Dove* in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERFORMATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POSITIONS
BEYOND, BENEATH, AND BESIDE

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

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

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

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

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

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

RUSES OF THE REPRESSIVE HYPOTHESIS

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

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

A dam p hillips missing out

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

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

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

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

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

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

list

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

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

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

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

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

TEXTURE AND AFFECT

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

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

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

