



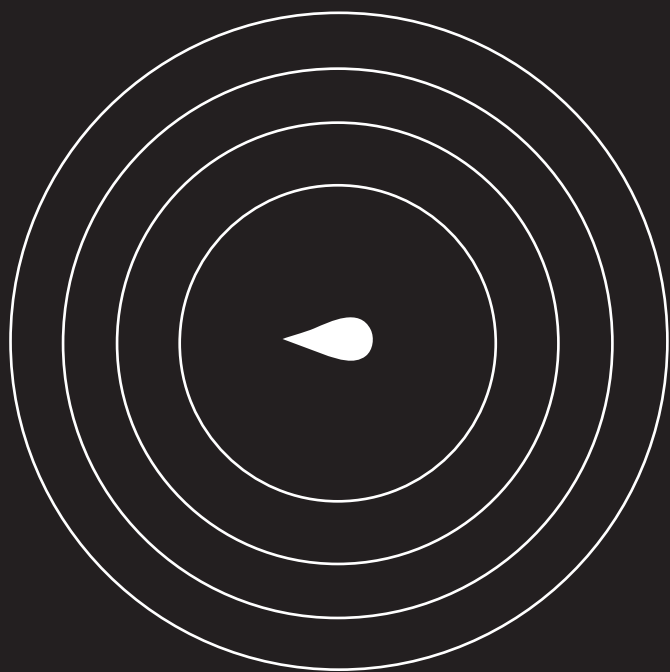
The Forms  
of the Affects



Eugenie Brinkema

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TO MY MOTHER, TO MY FATHER



I shall consider human actions and desires  
in exactly the same manner,  
as though I were concerned with lines, planes, and solids.

—BARUCH SPINOZA

It is the force, at once simple and unexpected,  
which consists in saying *cinema and . . .* :  
and thus accepting all the consequences.

—RAYMOND BELLOUR





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## PREFACE

### Ten Points to Begin

#### 1

Is there any remaining doubt that we are now fully within the Episteme of the Affect? Must one even begin an argument anymore by refuting Fredric Jameson's infamous description of the "waning of affect" in postmodernity? One need not linger in the humanities but might consider newly resurgent neuroscientific work on the emotions; one need not even concern oneself only with scholarship but note the untamed mobility of affects such as terror and disgust, anxiety and hope, in political and popular debates of the early twenty-first century. Indeed, the importance of affectivity has been so well documented in the disciplines of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, literary theory, critical theory, feminist and race studies, philosophy, and studies in representation, including film and new media, that several scholars have started asking broad questions about why it is that so many have turned to affect in the first place. Thus, the newest turn in the theoretical humanities would seem to be a meta-turn that turns toward the turning toward affect itself.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2

While an intellectual history of the turn to affect would take this book too far afield, I am comfortable joining those who speculate that the contemporary critical investment in affectivity across the humanities has to do with a post-structuralist response to perceived omissions in structuralism—or, indeed, may be part of a post-poststructuralist or anti-poststructuralist response to perceived omissions in poststructuralism. The turn to affect, thus, is part of a larger reawakening of interest in problematics of embodiment and materiality in the wake of twentieth-century Western theory that, for many, was all semiotics and no sense, all structure and no stuff.<sup>2</sup> Given that work on shame, guilt, compassion, and love has been crucial to the "turn to ethics"; scholarship on

shock, agitation, and surprise has been key to the “turn to modernity”; cultural studies has been taken over almost entirely by work on identity and emotion (queer rage, gay shame, feminist melancholia); and considerations of sensation, materiality, and distributed agency have been integral to the recent interest in the non-human (animal care, vital matter, the animated environment), we might be better off suggesting that the “turn to affect” in the humanities is and has always been plural, a set of many turnings that are problematically lumped together in a false unity that imagines that one singular intellectual arc could describe them all.

3

From this set of rotations, what has become visible, what is it that humanistic scholarship has newly encountered? Has this revolution revolutionized readings in the fields in which it is most vigorously represented: literary, film, and media studies? Insofar as affect has been positioned as what resists systematicity and structure, has it in fact been able to recover notions of contingency, possibility, and play? Has the turning toward affect in the theoretical humanities engendered a more complex understanding of texts? Have accounts of affects produced more nuanced, delightful interpretations of forms in texts—and have they recovered the dimension of being *surprised* by representation?

4

*“Affect,” as turned to, is said to: disrupt, interrupt, reinsert, demand, provoke, insist on, remind of, agitate for: the body, sensation, movement, flesh and skin and nerves, the visceral, stressing pains, feral frenzies, always rubbing against: what undoes, what unsettles, that thing I cannot name, what remains resistant, far away (haunting, and ever so beautiful); indefinable, it is said to be what cannot be written, what thaws the critical cold, messing all systems and subjects up. Thus, turning to affect has allowed the humanities to constantly possibly introject any seemingly absent or forgotten dimension of inquiry, to insist that play, the unexpected, and the unthought can always be brought back into the field. In this way, the affective turn in general is resonant with broader strains in what has been dubbed “metamodernism” as a “structure of feeling” that oscillates between modernist stabilities and postmodern relativisms.<sup>3</sup> One of the symptoms of appeals to affect in the negative theoretical sense—as signaling principally a rejection: *not* semiosis, *not* meaning, *not* structure, *not* apparatus,*

but the felt visceral, immediate, sensed, embodied, excessive—is that “affect” in the turn to affect has been deployed almost exclusively in the singular, as the capacity for movement or disturbance in general. (When Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie succinctly declare “affect is not form,” it is because they align affects with “*transitions* between states” and the very essence of what is dynamic and unstable, against an impoverished notion of form as inert, passive, inactive.<sup>4</sup>) Deleuzians, with their emphasis on affect as a pure state of potentiality, tend to be particularly guilty of the sin of generality. This terminological lump risks the vagueness of purely negative definitional endeavors and largely cedes specificity—generic, emotional, historical—to cognitivists in literary and media studies, who have taken Aristotelian taxonomizing to heart in their ever-narrowing treatment of, say, startle in horror films, or empathetic weeping in melodramas. There is a formula for work on affect, and it turns on a set of shared terms: speed, violence, agitation, pressures, forces, intensities. In other words, and against much of the spirit of Deleuze’s philosophy, which celebrated the minor, the changeable, and the multiple, Deleuzian theories of affect offer all repetition with no difference. When affect is taken as a synonym for violence or force (or intensity or sensation), one can only speak of its most abstract agitations instead of any particular textual workings. Thus, the turn to affect has tended to make the same argument time and again—each a version of, “We urgently have to attend to X!” where X stands for a member of the set {excess, affect, sensation, embodiment, intensity, resistance, whatever}. Each wild agitation for an attention to affection ultimately calls to mind Hermann Lotze’s insistence, put to use by Heidegger in his *Habilitationsschrift* in relation to the methodology of modern philosophy, “Das beständige Wetzen der Messer aber ist langweilig, wenn man nichts zu schneiden vorhat” (The constant sharpening of knives is boring if one never gets around to cutting).<sup>5</sup> Lotze does not imply that continual edge-refining is an unproductive or wasteful use of one’s time; he does not write *nutzlos* (useless) or *sinnlos* (pointless) but *langweilig* (boring), a bad state in place of merely bad function. To endlessly hone if one does not (perhaps ever) intend to incise is to block the affective possibility of pleasurable anticipation of action itself. The effect of repeatedly intoning a polemic for force is the deforcing and deflating of that very concept. The result is that the defenders of affect are left with only the mild rhetorical force of summary and paraphrase, intoned synonyms, and thematic generalizations. Repetition without difference can have the stultifying effect of invoking, in the end, only the affective modality of tedium.

Critical positions that align affect with what generally and amorphously resists (structure, form, textuality, signification, legibility) hold on to the notion of a transcendental signified, hold fast to the fantasy of something that predates the linguistic turn and that evades the slow, hard tussle of reading texts closely. What I claim in this book is not only that this desire is retrograde and reintroduces an untheorized notion of affect (specifically, one that is fundamentally *incapable* of dealing with textual particularities and formal matters), but that the return to affect on the part of critics from wildly divergent disciplinary backgrounds is, in most cases, a naïve move that leaves intact the very ideological, aesthetic, and theoretical problems it claimed to confront. Thus, even some of the most radical theory coming out of the humanities today begins with the premise that affects and feelings are the forgotten underside of the linguistic turn. Indeed, in some cases the affection for affect has itself been subsumed by a more powerful yearning for a standing before or outside of that very moment in theory that demanded the deep attention required for interminable difficult reading.

*The thing is: Affect is not the place where something immediate and automatic and resistant takes place outside of language. The turning to affect in the humanities does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is not where reading is no longer needed.*

This drive for some magical mysterious intensity X that escapes signification, while durable and even understandable, is a mode of thinking that only defers the more pressing matter: how is critique to keep grappling with affect and affectivity in texts if, indeed, one cannot read for affects to discover anything new about them? Divorcing affect from reading for form only puts off the moment at which the turning toward affect might be as notable for its critical revelations as for the novelty of its mere turning toward. This book is, among other things, an attempt to defer that problem no longer.

If affect is conceived of as synonymous with force, or as intensities, or as the capacity for stage changes or movement as such, then it opens up very few theoretical avenues—Why turn to affect at all? In the end, ethics, politics, aesthetics—indeed, lives—must be enacted in the definite particular. There is no reason to assume that affects are identical aesthetically, politically, ethically, experientially, and formally; but only reading specific affects as having and being bound up with specific forms gives us the vocabulary for articulating those many differences. Otherwise, “affect”—that thing so celebrated for its resistance to systematicity—becomes not only what does not resist, but in fact what confirms every time the same model of vague shuddering intensity. Why ask cinema *and* affect if the answer is to be the same every time and every time in the same way?<sup>6</sup>

The one way out for affect is via a way into its specificities. That approach will be called—unsurprisingly, for historically it was always the way to unlock potentialities—close reading. There is a perversity to this: if affect theory is what is utterly fashionable, it is answered here with the corrective of the utterly unfashionable, with what is, let us say, an *unzeitgemässe* call for the sustained interpretations of texts. This book’s insistence on the formal dimension of affect allows not only for specificity but for the wild and many fecundities of specificity: difference, change, the particular, the contingent (*and*) the essential, the definite, the distinct, all dense details, and—again, to return to the spirit of Deleuze—the minor, inconsequential, secret, atomic. Treating affect in such a way deforms any coherence to “affect” in the singular, general, universal and transforms it into something not given in advance, not apprehendable except through the thickets of formalist analysis.

A consequence of decoupling textuality and theory—which I will argue comes from the tradition of arguing *for* affect by arguing *against* reading for form—is a suffocating dearth of material with which a theorist can press on affect in a text and an almost nonexistent ability to let affect press back against theory. The loss works both ways, for not only do critics fail to find in the details the



workings of violence or intensity, but such a reading strategy closes down the paths by which textual specificity might speak back to, challenge, undermine—or perhaps radically revise—the very theory at stake in any argument. How much more arresting is an analysis that allows the particularities of any individual text to disrupt those terms known in advance, to challenge the forms of the affects one is claiming those very texts provoke? What lines of thought might be set loose by interrogating the relationship between a cinematic grid of color and the most visceral of the negative affects, disgust? How might the straits of anxiety be a matter of a broken horizontal line? What, in other words, would happen to the study of both affectivity and form if we were to reintroduce close reading to the study of sensation, not as felt by moved bodies, but as wildly composed in specific cinematic, literary, and critical texts? In this book, the specific structures of any affective form will be closely read *for*—and are not assumed to be an immediate or diffuse unmediated sensation. The turn to affect has corresponded with a disciplinary turn away from detail, from specificity and the local, from the very groundings for the persuasions germane to defending any theoretical movement. Treating affect as a problematic of structure, form, and aesthetics is an attempt to reintroduce particularity to any consideration of affects. It is also an attempt to seize the passions of affect studies for textual interpretation and close reading.

10

I do not merely mean that we need a return to reading for form in the midst of the ongoing turning toward affect;—I am claiming that we require a return to form precisely because of the turn to affect, to keep its wonderments in revolution, to keep going.

ONE

A Tear

That Does Not

Drop,

but Folds



Consider the shower scene in *Psycho*. It has all come and gone: the black-hole vacuum of the first scream; the striating diagonals of the shower spray; the cool white grid of the cold white tile against which Marion's hand, stretched out and spread, like a claw, grasps, scratches, in bent digitate branches that sink out of the bottom of the frame followed by sodden orthostatic threads of hair, erect at the back of the head as if from terror. And after that, so much water. It rushes, famously mixing with the darkened blood, filling the empty drain with torrents of a sad admixture. The liquid rush moves in a fast counterclockwise, delimiting the contours of the hungry aperture.

But then, at once, the tempo changes, and in place of the frenetic aural shrieks, rapid-fire cuts, and burning stream of wasted water, a slow, almost languid image appears superimposed underneath the churning metal void. It comes into relief first by its opposing orbit, a viscid twisting turn to the right. As the spin weakly makes its journey of sixty degrees, the extremely proximate image of one magnified eye emerges out of the muddy dissolve, its vertical oval centered in a frame in which the edges are the skin's negative space: a flat expanse of shadowy crepe on the left, and two well-etched lines cutting into the forehead on the right. At the very moment the eye stills in its rotation, revealed at the bottom center of the frame, at the darkened corner of the ten-

der inner duct, is one small, fat tear. As the camera pulls out from eye to face, more tears are revealed, first one under the eye, then more, on the bridge and side of the nose, on the upper lip, and all this at the same time as a droplet falls from a matted twist of hair to the bathroom floor. The effect is to retroactively place under suspicion the truth of that tear, that tear that may just be a drop, that tear that does not fall but sits thickly next to the eye without revealing its source or its embodied secret: whether it was secreted at all.

This tear that may not be a tear is an enigma, but historically it has not been treated as such. William Rothman's meticulously detailed close analysis of *Psycho*, for example, considers it an unambiguous emanation of the newly lifeless body. "When the camera spirals out clockwise as though unscrewing itself," he writes, "it is disclosed that the eye standing in for our gaze is, within the world of the film, Marion's, and that it is dead. It emerges stillborn from the drain. The camera keeps spiraling out until we have a full view of Marion's face. Death has frozen it in inexpressiveness, although there is a tear welled in the corner of her eye."<sup>1</sup> Although Rothman too quickly attributes teariness to this drop, he is nevertheless to be commended for noticing the clear bead at all; fifty years of criticism on *Psycho* has so roundly investigated vision, voyeurism, the gaze, the look, dead eyes, sockets, and stares that what it is to be an eye has been conflated entirely with structures of looking, seeing, and being seen.<sup>2</sup> This is a case in which criticism has forgotten all it is that eyes can do—or fail to do, for it is an open question whether the lubricatory productions of the eye are involved here at all. The little pendeloque commands a close examination of its ambiguity and its visual form, the way its shape constitutes one of many curving lines that bifurcate the face with the barely opened mouth, the pronounced nostril, the eyeball on its side, the high dark arch of the eyebrow . . .

Marion's tear that is not immediately legible as a tear poses the question of its being—asks: How is it with this tear that is not a tear? Small spherules demand to be read.

## CRYING IS STRUCTURED LIKE A LANGUAGE

In the long history of the philosophy of emotion, the tear has been the supreme metonym for the expressivity of interior states at least as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is fitting that the shortest verse in English translations of the New Testament is the Greek *Edakrysen ho Iesous*: at the death of Lazarus, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), and no more needed to be said. (Bas Jan Ader's film



FIG. 1.1. *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

*I'm Too Sad to Tell You* [1971] is likewise three minutes of a wrenching close-up of the man, at just a slight pitch, heaving in the difficulties of the arriving waters; these tears stand in for the entirety of impossible transmission and communion, what is foreclosed in the title. They do all that work.) That is not to say that views of what a tear is or what its attendant leaking forms are—weeping, howling, wailing, crying—have not changed historically or undergone dramatic shifts in meaning, particularly with the Darwinian and Freudian revolutions in the conception of the human. The tear has been a liquid volley in countless debates over whether emotion is an active production or a passive subjection; the relationship between interior states, judgments or beliefs, and exterior expressions; the possibility of the bodily legibility of the amorphous mind or soul; the causality and ordering of physical sensations with mental impressions; either the human's unique difference from the animal kingdom or material sameness to beasts; and the activity of bad faith and falsity (for Sartre) or the interpretable sign of the hysteric's truth (for Freud). That little lachrymal drop has been deployed to work through some of the most significant debates in philosophy about the relation between the body and mind, the interior and exterior, the will and that which overrides will.<sup>3</sup> Because of these theoretical negotiations, the trajectory of the tear in philosophical thought moves from clarity to cloud, from transparency to suspicion, from the sense that we know what a tear is to the sense that a tear is always anything but itself—even that the tear is a lie. In the nineteenth and twen-

tieth centuries, every tear becomes opaque. In turn, from a sense that tears express or convey something—crucial, private, essential—about the interiority of a weeping subject, by modernity the tear is regarded principally as an exteriority and as something that must be interpreted or read. This book will ultimately argue against claims for the immediacy or obviousness or corporeality of affects—specifically, grief, disgust, anxiety, and joy—and will do so by formulating a new approach to affectivity that regards its exteriority in textual form as something that commands a reading. In order to map the scope of the departure of this approach from traditional views of emotion, consider a brief chronicle of the tear.

A summary of the well-trodden differences between Plato and Aristotle on the value of mimesis points to their differing treatments of tears. As with the other arts of imitation, Plato is suspicious of the sopping productions, forbidding in Book III of *The Republic* the charges of the state “whom we expect to prove good men, being men, to play the parts of women.” Specifically prohibited is imitating a woman “involved in misfortune and possessed by grief and lamentation—still less a woman that is sick, in love, or in labor.”<sup>4</sup> Mourning, birth, sickness and love—all are potential sites for the occasioning of tears, and each is linked to the larger threat of imitation in relation to truth and the education of the young. Aristotle, in his famous definition of tragedy, not only defends the form against Plato’s concerns about emotionality but invokes them specifically in its defense: the imitation of “an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself” is to focus on “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”<sup>5</sup> This catharsis (from *kathairein* [to purify or purge]) is linked to both thematic and formal structures: “tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle; but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play.”<sup>6</sup> Pity, so crucial to the definition of catharsis in *Poetics*, is only briefly linked with tears in *Rhetoric*, but it is a telling aside. In the taxonomy of men to be pitied, Aristotle includes acquaintances only if they are not close enough to be kin, for “with the latter their attitude is as for their future selves; hence indeed Amasius did not weep when his son was taken off to be executed, as they say, but did when his friend was begging him—for the latter was pitiable, the former terrible.”<sup>7</sup> That is, the “painful and destructive things” that are the objects of pity apply to acquaintances when one is only proximate to suffering, but those very things are terrible when they happen to the self, the future self, or an avatar of the self. Terror, in this account of Aristotle’s, is linked to a stifling of tears (“men no longer pity when what is terrifying is near them”); thus, the “fear

and pity” of *Poetics* is at more of a remove than the immediacy of a terror that one imagines is around the bend for the thinker.<sup>8</sup> To be able to weep, whether Amasius at his friend’s begging or the audience at a tragedy, is a sign of some available distance, a non-coincidence with the feeling of the nearness of terror. All crying, then—even the cathartic kind—is crying at a remove.

These are not the only accounts of tears in early Greek philosophy: Homer’s epics are rife with weeping figures, and the Sophist Gorgias wrote in praise of Speech that “there come upon its hearers fearful shuddering (*phrikê periphobos*) and tearful pity (*eleos polydakrys*) and grievous longing (*pothos philopenthês*).”<sup>9</sup> But however brief, this sketch of some of the earliest appearances of the philosophical tear already displays some of the traits that will continue to haunt that drop’s future: shameful spilled admission of interior weakness, or instructive and pedagogically valuable purgation; performance of vulnerability, or studied stratagem of the persuading speaker; emotional production of a previously made judgment of distance from the self, or cathartic release that is beneficial to, if not formative of, the self. Crucially, as well, especially in Gorgias and Aristotle, tears are not a static or regulated state, but can be produced, elicited, made to increase, even copiously and strategically, through aesthetic works. These uses to which a tear may be put appear throughout the records of philosophy as stakes in discussions of aesthetics, ethics, cognition, judgment, embodiment, and knowledge—hence, the urgency and difficulty of Roland Barthes’s question in *A Lover’s Discourse*: “Who will write the history of tears?”<sup>10</sup>

It would be an error to assume transhistorically that tears have been linked only to the negative affects. Already with the Christian medieval tradition of *gratia lacrimarum*—the consoling “grace of tears” or “gift of tears” that accompanies the purest prayer—there is a history of tears that places them apart from matters of suffering, pity, lamentation, and loss.<sup>11</sup> Along with Darwin’s fascinating accounts of the tears of laughter or the tears of the mad, one can, as early as David Hume’s “Of Tragedy” (1757), find assertions of the intriguing *pleasures* of tearing. The essay is one of many in which Hume is interested in exploring conflicting emotions and mixtures of sentiments. The inquiry opens, as do so many contemporary accounts of the horror film, with the articulation of a seeming paradox: “it seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. The more they are touched and affected, the more are they delighted with the spectacle.” On the matter of tears and their pleasures or pains, the audiences of tragedies

are “pleased in proportion as they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swollen with the tenderest sympathy and compassion.”<sup>12</sup>

Hume’s account is similar to Aristotle’s psychological theory of catharsis but is not identical to it, as it places a greater emphasis on tragedy’s affective, as opposed to pedagogical, effects. Crucially—and this marks Hume’s general work on the passions—pleasure and pain are inextricable and muddled. Hume solves the dilemma whereby an object produces different, even opposing, passions by arguing that a subordinate passion can be converted into a dominant one.<sup>13</sup> In fact, not only is a distinction between pleasure and pain impossible to articulate or hold, but it is the ambivalent murkiness of the difference between sentiments that provides the meta-sentiment of pleasure: the mixture of passions “composes an agreeable sorrow, and tears that delight us.”<sup>14</sup> If tears can be converted into that which delights—and one is never so happy as when weeping and sobbing—then it becomes impossible to place the gesture of crying purely on the side of the negative emotions. This shift points to a historical undoing of the clear emotional legibility of the tear that will only amplify over the next two centuries—that is, if it is a mixture of sentiments that composes a pleasurable sorrow, a delightful sobbing, then the tear is not purely an immediate (or unmediated) sign testifying to interior pity or pain but a structural part of a composite sentiment that is not reducible to its physical manifestation.

Around the same time as Hume’s essay, Adam Smith was composing the lectures that constituted *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, his exploration of sympathy as a moral principle. Smith’s focus was not on an individual’s private feelings but on how the imagination of an “impartial spectator” forms a conception of the emotional experience of the other. He indicts previous philosophers for focusing too much on the tendency and nature of affections instead of considering them in relation to their cause and the context of their excitation. In an interesting anticipation of Levinas’s work on the incomprehensibility of the other, Smith poses the problematic of sentiment as part of the larger dilemma of existing in a world with different beings who, ultimately, are opaque to us. We lack the immediate experience of the feelings of others, and sense impressions convey only a representation that must be translated into an understanding. Smith’s solution is that through the faculty of judgment and imagination we can represent to the self what the self’s sensations would be “if we were” in a situation similar to that of the other.<sup>15</sup> We perceive the situation, conceive how we would feel in such a case, and form an idea or understanding

of how the other must be affected. All this is done not from the perspective of our idiosyncratic historical selves but as “impartial spectators” observing and judging the facts of any situation.

Because of the intervention of judgment about the exciting situation, sympathy for Smith does not require a one-to-one correspondence between the experience another is undergoing and our own impressions. We not only feel *with* the other (*sympathy*); we can feel *for* the other in the absence of their (appropriate) feeling (something more akin to *propathy*). In fact, even if the other is incapable of a particular sentiment despite the occasion’s warranting it, we can nevertheless imagine ourselves into the appropriate affect and out of emotional isolation. Smith’s three case studies of such a situation are encounters with the mad, with the suffering infant, and with the dead, each of which he links to “the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind.”<sup>16</sup> The “poor wretch” deprived of reason is “by far the most dreadful,” but despite the fact that he is insensible to his own distressing state, we, the well, do have an uncomfortable if not anguished response to the mad one, and that “cannot be the reflection of any sentiment of the sufferer.”<sup>17</sup> Rather, the response of the spectator is due to the horrible thought: What, then, if it were I? Likewise, the mother of the howling infant “joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder” and thus forms a sense of the infant’s distress.<sup>18</sup> In place of the foundational Western trope of the infant joined to the mother at the breast—the nurturing *Madonna del Latte*—Smith offers instead a howling infant joined in helplessness to the mother’s consciousness of that sensation, a conjunction based in horror rather than in love.

As for the dead, we sympathize even with them, sympathize through a negative meditation on the losses of finitude. In the philosophical equivalent to Carl Theodor Dreyer’s point-of-view shot from inside a coffin in *Vampyr* (1932), Smith’s thinker voices the corpse, ruminating, “It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections, and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relations.”<sup>19</sup> This call for memorializing the dead as an answer to the imagined suffering at realizing one will be “no more thought of in this world” does not mean that this is an abstract process of judgment only. For Smith’s wonderfully hedged account of our sympathy with the dead is that it arises “from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to



say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies, and thence conceiving what would be our emotions in this case.”<sup>20</sup> The hesitant plea for permission in this account is for a necrophilic blending of living soul or imagination with lifeless body. Throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith will continue to use this highly physical, even erotic, language to describe the operations of sympathy. (And Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein will make a monstrous experiment of just this kind of embodied sympathy in 1818, only sixty years after Smith’s treatise.)

Smith’s intersubjective account of emotion demands attention to the root *sym-* of sympathy (together or with *pathos* [suffering or feeling]) and does so in a way that explicitly invokes imaginary embodiment, even entry and bodily boundary dissolution. At his theory’s most dramatic moment, even the distinction between self and other is obliterated, producing a sympathetic spectator by devastating the difference between that spectator and some other: “by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, *we enter as it were into his body*, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”<sup>21</sup> Feeling is not only communicable or translatable in this account, it is also the means by which a subject can become in some way the same person as another. At stake in Smith’s theory of sentiments, then, is a theory of the self as a potentially expanded and composite feeling being. In a lovely metaphor that both aestheticizes and rhythmicizes the experience of being-with, Smith writes, “The man whose sympathy keeps time to my grief, cannot but admit the reasonableness of my sorrow.”<sup>22</sup> Although Smith is analytically clear that the imagination forms an impression of the sensations of the other, it is also the case that his language everywhere suggests that sympathy involves the material commingling of affects, keeping time to each other in a slow, locked embrace.

Smith, like Hume, lets the tear waver tremulously at the boundary between pleasure and pain, grief and satisfaction. When the unfortunate speak of their sorrows to another, they are relieved to no longer endure agony in solitude; however, “by relating their misfortunes, they in some measure renew their grief.” Tonguing their grief to another awakens the memory of the cause of the calamity: “their tears accordingly flow faster than before, and they are apt to abandon themselves to all the weakness of sorrow. They take pleasure, however, in all this, and it is evident are sensibly relieved by it.”<sup>23</sup> The profusion of fast-flowing tears here is both symptom of grief and sign of its alleviation.

Again, as with Hume's paradox by which spectators experience amplified pleasure the more they are made to weep, Smith's treatment of the tear figures it as a highly ambivalent site, linked to grief's presence, amplification, diminishment, and obliteration all at once.

Smith's theory of the transmissibility and translatability of affect (and the moral necessity of both) is a striking departure from the Western tradition that privileges tears as outward signs of an internal, incommunicable experience. In his account of the intersubjectivity of emotional communication, Smith rejects any solipsistic take that treats emotion as something that cannot be shared or that forms barriers between subjects. Furthermore, in suggesting that the judgment of an impartial spectator will produce an understanding of the affections in each case, regardless of what the other is actually feeling, Smith comes very close to suggesting that exciting situations have essential formal analogues in the appropriate affection to each cause. The tradition that this opposes—which emphasizes shaming, catharsis, revelation, and private, even unique, interior experience—cuts across multiple theological and philosophical texts, perhaps the most famous of which is Augustine's account in *Confessions*: "I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrung its pitiful secrets from it, and when I mustered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears. I stood up and left Alypius so that I might weep and cry to my heart's content, for it occurred to me that tears were best shed in solitude."<sup>24</sup> This pitiful privacy of tears stands in marked contrast to Smith's theory of entering the other's body and experiencing emotion in his place. Nevertheless, what Smith's intersubjective tradition and Augustine's antisocial tradition (to frame that difference in a crude shorthand) have in common is a belief that tears express something. Although the two perspectives imagine differently how that expression is read, how legible or illegible it may be to a witness, how private or shared it must be morally, they nevertheless assume that something temporally and causally predates the productive wetness. In this take, tears come *after*.

There is, however, an opposing camp, less well represented in the history of sentiment but still significant, for whom tears are not linked to the release or expression of emotion, or to the purgation of sorrow, or to a legibility of the heart. This other history of the tear locates it far from the soul in the physicality of sensations that precede interior state changes of sadness, sorrow, or pity. Foremost among the thinkers in this other tradition is William James. His argument of 1884 that emotions are physiological states radically revised the causality of emotion, turning the temporal trajectory of sensation

to expression on its head. In “What Is an Emotion?” that titular question is answered with a turn to the visceral, the physical, the observable, and the exterior. Indeed, James limits his inquiry to the emotions that lend themselves to that focus, considering only “those that have a distinct bodily expression.”<sup>25</sup> This narrowed focus represents a methodological, analytic, and disciplinary shift: James represents the young nineteenth-century discipline of psychology, and with that new field came a very different take on the affections.

James’s cause-upending theory of emotion focuses on bodily disruption; his target was previous theories that suggested that one first perceived a fact (Lion!), which then excited an emotion (Fear!), which finally led to a bodily affection (Fight!—or, perhaps, flight). His famous thesis reverses course, stating that

*the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.* Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be.<sup>26</sup>

The little tear undergoes a marked change in James’s reversal of viscera and passion. The tear is neither the physical, external manifestation of the emotional, interior change of state nor the posterior expression of some anterior cause; rather, it is the bodily manifestation whose perception produces a subsequent feeling of sadness. Consequently, the tear is no longer a privileged sign of emotionality, but an energetic corporeal state rather like running or striking an opponent, trembling skin or quivering viscera. The tear is external and observable, and because it is not an after-action of some prior cause, it is legible as the motor provocation of “the mental affection called the emotion.” This is a significant change, for if the tear is a bodily change whose perception is the emotion itself, then the tear is a haecceity—it is its thisness. While James’s account has some conceptual problems—as Jerome Neu argues, it requires that we ignore the fact that “we can be sad without crying”—his dramatic reorientation of causality in emotion is an important moment in the uses of the tear in philosophical and, now, psychological thought.<sup>27</sup>

Our brief history of the tear is now firmly in modernity, and with the shift to the nineteenth century come revolutionary redescrptions of the human, which in turn generate new theories of the tear. The major intervention that marked the changing episteme in which James participated was the treatment of emotions not as true internal states but as external and observable—and, increasingly, as ambiguous, even deceptive. While James's contribution to this shift is the reversal of the order of elements, so that it is not we-feel-we-cry but we-cry-we-feel, Charles Darwin, writing a few years before James, would suggest that crying and feeling, in fact, do not necessarily have anything to do with each other at all. Darwin, like James, focuses on the physiology of crying in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), but, as suggested in his title, he had different aims from the psychological inquiry. While his interest is in explaining questions such as the perennial “Why do we cry?” in evolutionary terms, he is also engaged in a process of distinguishing the two subjects of his title—hence “Special Expressions of Man: Suffering and Weeping,” the particularizing title of the chapter that holds our interest. Darwin's hyper-externalized view of the tear finds its visual equivalent in the photographs by Oscar Rejlander that appear throughout his text, detailing in facial close-ups the grimaces and comportment appropriate to each expressed emotion.<sup>28</sup>

Darwin begins his discussion of “low spirits, grief, dejection, and despair” by speaking of *none* of those things. Instead, his inquiry opens by considering the crying of babes:

Infants, when suffering even slight pain, moderate hunger, or discomfort, utter violent and prolonged screams. Whilst thus screaming their eyes are firmly closed, so that the skin round them is wrinkled, and the forehead contracted into a frown. The mouth is widely opened with the lips retracted in a peculiar manner, which causes it to assume a squarish form; the gums or teeth being more or less exposed. The breath is inhaled almost spasmodically.<sup>29</sup>

The most remarkable aspect of this description for Darwin—and the universal trait of criers of all ages (save, however, our Marion)—is the tight closing of the eyes. His explanation for this shuttering is that the compression of the eyeball protects the eye “from becoming too much gorged with blood.”<sup>30</sup> (Beckett's version of this law: “the human eyelid is not teartight [happily for the human eye].”<sup>31</sup>) The protective mechanism unlinks crying from the various motivators for the excitation that has led to a profusion of blood flowing into the eyeball; the cause of the excitation is less important than the resulting evo-

lutionary compensation to protect the vulnerable orb. Indeed, Darwin notes that very young infants do not shed tears at all; like the acquisition of a wet vocabulary, tears need a dry run or two. "It would appear as if the lachrymal glands required some practice in the individual before they are easily excited into action," he supposes, "in somewhat the same manner as various inherited consensual movements and tastes require some exercise before they are fixed and perfected."<sup>32</sup> Thus, weeping, that most basic and common of emotional expressions, that essential testing ground for philosophical theories of sentiment, is for Darwin a habit that must be acquired, that must be rehearsed and developed.

Darwin rightly notes the strangeness of this developmental necessity precisely because of the assumed legibility and immediacy of the tear: "the fact of tears not being shed at a very early age from pain or any mental emotion is remarkable, as, later in life, no expression is more general or more strongly marked than weeping."<sup>33</sup> Despite the evolutionary protective quality of tears—lubricating the eyes, flushing out irritating particles, keeping nostrils damp—Darwin is also highly aware of the habitual and social dimensions of their expression.<sup>34</sup> He differentiates, for example, the "passionate cry" of the child from wailings of grief; argues that men in Western cultures soon lose tears as an expression of bodily pain; describes the insane as notorious for giving way to their tears at the slightest whim, and so forth. To weep requires practice; tearing must be perfected or its skill can be lost. Thus, despite its evolutionary value, the tear comes, over the course of Darwin's analysis, to seem increasingly unnatural, habitual, cultural, even contingent. Crying is structured, we might say, like a language.

When Darwin attempts to explain why an evolutionarily motivated defense can come to be associated with the abstract movements of emotional thought, he brings together his emphasis on habituation with a meditation on will: "when complex actions or movements have long been performed in strict association together, and these are from any cause at first voluntarily and afterwards habitually checked," then proper conditions can produce an involuntary performance of the complex actions.<sup>35</sup> Thus, tears may be secreted despite age, culture, gender, habit, or any other attempt to fight or avoid that secretion. For an example with the additional utility of invoking the aesthetic, someone who reads "a pathetic story" may twitch or tremble imperceptibly and may not show any outward movements associated with tearing, but "it is almost certain that there would have been some tendency to transmit nerve-force in these same directions; and as the lachrymal glands are remarkably free from

the control of the will, they would be eminently liable still to act, thus betraying, though there were no other outward signs, the pathetic thoughts which were passing through the person's mind."<sup>36</sup> The tear, then, is ambiguous for Darwin: habitual and developmentally mutable, yet sufficiently independent of the will that it can betray the thoughts of the moved reader to an outside, scrutinizing world.

What makes Darwin's treatment of the tear quite remarkable, in addition to the emphasis on its cultural variability and its learned practice, is the way in which he wrenches the tear away from the affects altogether. The origin of the tear is muscular, not emotional: "it is an important fact which must be considered in any theory of the secretion of tears from the mind being affected, that whenever the muscles round the eyes are strongly and involuntarily contracted in order to compress the blood-vessels and thus to protect the eyes, tears are secreted, often in sufficient abundance to roll down the cheeks. This occurs under the most opposite emotions, and under no emotion at all."<sup>37</sup> Darwin's account takes the affective ambivalence of the eighteenth-century philosophical tear to an extreme. While the first half of his conclusion is striking and Humean—that tears of joy and despair are equally possible—it is that second "and under no emotion at all" that wrests the tear away from its philosophical lineage altogether. Indeed, despite the suggestion in the title of Darwin's chapter that weeping is a special expression of the human, a long aside on the tears of the Indian elephant makes it clear that the tear can no longer even stand in for the judgment or emotional raptures of man as distinct from beast. This de-emotionalization of the tear reduces it to its brute physical necessity and evolutionary function. That spasms of the musculature in wild laughter or wild grief, heaving vomit or violent coughing, a painful strike or bracing cold equally require protecting the ocular organ through tightly closed eyes and lachrymal flow suggests that it is no longer possible to regard the tear as an unmediated production of interiority, an expression of the secrets of the soul, or even a sign of emotion's presence (either prior or imminent) in the subject. The tear at this point in its narrative, in fact, can signify nothing more than that it cannot signify anything essential or obvious at all. It is its wet appearance and reveals nothing more.

With this voiding, we arrive in the twentieth century, armed to approach a paradoxical set of treatments of tears. What the next two accounts share is a demand that tears be read and interpreted, for not only are they not pure expressions of the feeling self, they are fundamentally not to be trusted. What these thinkers differ on, however, is the very nature of the tear. For Jean-Paul

Sartre, emotion will now be described as an action on the world; for Sigmund Freud, it will be a symptom, a sign of nonaction and a displacement or repression of energies. The utility of reading Freud and Sartre together, despite a span of forty years between their accounts, is that both discuss the tear in relation to the analytic encounter, which is marked from Freud's earliest writings—indeed, is cause for and result of the psychoanalytic injunction to speak all—as one involving deception, partial truths, and necessary falsities. No longer merely linked to paradoxical states of feeling, the tear is now a performance; it is now essentially *suspect*.

As if invoking the psychological version of Darwin's lachrymal cleansings, Freud treats tears as defenses. In "Hysterical Phantasies and Their Relation to Bisexuality" (1908), Freud writes of a patient plagued with tears that offer no immediate clue to their origin or relation to emotion but that must be interpreted to produce meaning:

She told me that on one occasion she had suddenly found herself in tears in the street and that, rapidly considering what it was she was actually crying about, she had got hold of a phantasy to the following effect. In her imagination she had formed a tender attachment to a pianist who was well known in the town (though she was not personally acquainted with him); she had had a child by him (she was in fact childless); and he had deserted her and her child and left them in poverty. It was at this point in her romance that she had burst into tears.<sup>38</sup>

The significance of this anecdote is twofold. First, the unconscious fantasy produces abundant tears that are sudden and seemingly without cause; thus, tears no longer require the mediation of judgment or conscious processes. And second, the context for the motivation of these tears is shrouded in mystery until it is hermeneutically apprehended through analytical archeology. The tear functions as a semiotic block, what must be read and cannot be understood immediately or without interpretation; tears, that is, do not mean by or in themselves. The tear, rather, testifies to a lost sincerity, announces that nothing is what it initially seems to be; revolting against notions of easy bodily legibility, these drops impel a mazy process of unearthing and wonderment. And when interpretation finally takes place, the tear does not signal a deep longing or private expression of the heart, but an unconscious fantasy ambivalently expressed as a symptom.

If Freud's treatment of the tear as a defense that must be read is striking, it is nevertheless of a piece with earlier accounts in that he continues to locate

tearfulness in matters of the body (while adding to that body the domain of unconscious fantasies). But Sartre, forty years later, treats the tear and emotion in general as a largely non-material matter. His argument in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory* is that all emotion is action in and on the world. Thus, against Darwin's insistence that the tear can function against the will, betraying the unwitting feeler, and against Freud's emphasis on the wash of tears that catches his patient by surprise in the street, Sartre de-passifies the passions, refiguring them as active, chosen attempts to transform and act on the world in which the subject finds herself. In this way, he starkly rejects James's version of emotions as instinctual, visceral reactions over which one has no control. The dilemma of the free subject thrown into the world ("left alone, without excuse," as he often puts it) is that that world is a fiercely thorny place in which to live. Emotions offer what Sartre describes as a magical way to attempt to transform that world: "when the paths traced out become too difficult, or when we see no path, we can no longer live in so urgent and difficult a world. All the ways are barred. However, we must act. So we try to change the world, that is, to live as if the connection between things and their potentialities were not ruled by deterministic processes, but by magic."<sup>39</sup> Such voluntary transformations of the world (or attempts at transformation) are strategic efforts at evading the consequences of the existential subject's freedom. But if emotion is "the seizure of new connections and new exigencies," which Sartre does admit, it is also a practice of regarding the world that is imbued with bad faith and an evasion of will.<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that emotion is action, it is not like other actions in that "it is not *effective*"; the emotive behavior attempts less to exercise agency than to confer on the acted-on object "another quality, a lesser existence, or a lesser presence."<sup>41</sup> Contra the Freudian reading of emotion as bound up with repressed desires and the unconscious, Sartre posits that "in emotion it is the body which, directed by consciousness, changes its relations with the world in order that the world may change its qualities. If emotion is a joke, it is a joke we believe in."<sup>42</sup>

Sartre's examples are telling partly for their repetition of scenarios also found in James and Darwin. However, his reading of physiological responses is markedly different, as a behavior of escape not from the object of fear but from responsibility for the frightening world:

For example, take passive fear. I see a wild animal coming toward me. My legs give way, my heart beats more feebly, I turn pale, I fall and faint. Nothing seems less adapted than this behavior which hands me over de-



fenseless to the danger. And yet it is a behavior of *escape*. Here the fainting is a refuge. Let it not be thought that this is a refuge *for me*, that I am trying to *save myself* in order not to *see* the wild animal *any more*. I did not leave the unreflective level, but, lacking power to avoid the danger by the normal methods and the deterministic links, I denied it. . . . And, by virtue of this fact, I did annihilate it as far as was in my power. These are the limits of my magical action upon the world; I can eliminate it as an object of consciousness, but I can do so only by eliminating consciousness itself.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike James's reading of an almost identical scenario, in which the physiological experience of swooning produces the emotion of fear, for Sartre such a faint is a feint, an attempt to magically transform the world into one that does not pose a threat. Likewise, Sartre reads melancholy's "behavior of oppression" (turning away, tucking into oneself in the darkness of a quiet, empty room) *not* as the profundity of one meditating on sorrow or grief, but as an evasion of the world's insistence that we act in it and engage the potentialities of life ("tasks *to do*, people *to see*, acts of daily life *to carry out*").<sup>44</sup> The conscription of the depressive's physical space mirrors the truncation of her hodological space, and the ethical consequences of this affective abdication are absolute: "sadness aims at eliminating the obligation to seek new ways, to transform the structure of the world by a totally undifferentiated structure. . . . In other words, lacking the power and will to accomplish the acts which we had been planning, we behave in such a way that the universe no longer requires anything of us."<sup>45</sup> The emotions under consideration here are ways of "setting up a magical world by using the body as a means of incantation" (with echoes of Freud), and for that reason they are aligned with a retreat from the world, its potentialities, and our freedom to act in and on it.<sup>46</sup> Emotions, for Sartre, involve deploying the body in the evasive action of dodging the proper use of will.

When Sartre turns to the tear, he does so in the context of a patient of Freud's contemporary (and fellow student of Charcot), Pierre Janet: "a sick girl comes to Janet; she wants to confide the secret of her turmoil, to describe her obsession minutely. But she is unable to; such social behavior is too hard for her. *Then* she sobs. But does she sob *because* she cannot say anything? Are her sobs vain attempts to act, a diffuse upheaval which represents the decomposition of too difficult behavior? Or does she sob precisely *in order not to say anything*?"<sup>47</sup> The "abyss" between those two possible interpretations of the girl's tears is the difference, for Sartre, between his new account of the emotions and all prior ones. Unlike the first, mechanistic view, the second

reading—that the girl sobs not as a loud profession but in order to remain silent—theorizes emotion as organized behavior, means aiming at an end. But what that emotion-behavior aims at is precisely deception, delay, and an evasion of difficulty. Emotions, then, are not windows into the soul; rather, they are “a particular subterfuge, a special trick, each one of them being a different means of eluding a difficulty.”<sup>48</sup> The truth of emotions, for a Sartre who sounds here like Nietzsche, is that they are masks—not of some other or prior truth, but evasions through and through, active deceptions in their essence, masks all the way down. While Darwin’s tear is a defense, and Freud’s tear is a symptomatic eruption, Sartre’s tear is a refusal. The lubricatory effusions involve a use of the body to carry out a substitution: Janet is to be affectively moved by this display in a displacement of affect that distracts and detracts from the original stakes of the intimate conversation. Sartre concludes this reading of Janet’s patient by figuring the tear as an agent of motor purgation, though not in the sense of Aristotelian catharsis: “by putting herself into a state which made confession impossible, she cast the act to be performed out of her range. Thus, as long as she was shaken with tears and hiccups, any possibility of talking was removed.”<sup>49</sup> While psychoanalysis will increasingly listen to the body in the interpretation of symptoms, Sartre figures this deception less as a truth that must be analytically mined than as a successful circumvention of confession altogether.

The advantage of reading Freud and Sartre at the end of this record of the tear—or, there is no “the” tear, but this record of many tears—is that a noticeable shift occurs between the earliest and latest stages of theorization: where a tear’s legibility or artlessness was unquestioned in earlier accounts, here the tear is unquestionably deceitful, suspect for its illegibility. As opposed to standing in for the immediacy of interiority, the tear by the twentieth century solicits probing, if not outright hostility, suspicion, and doubt. The Romantic insistence that the moved, sentimental body is the site of a privileged truth—as in the commonplace that tears say more than words, avowed equally across the centuries by both poetry and pop (e.g., A. W. Schlegel’s “In Praise of Tears” and Radney Foster’s “Never Say Die”)—is replaced with the sense that the body is imbricated in beguilement, refusal, hedgy falsehoods. The tear is now indeterminate and indeterminable, exterior and observable—but observable in a way that does not reveal its truths or its emotional cause or judgment thereof. The tear demands interpretation, but that reading does not point inward toward the depths of the soul—it remains a surface reading always, a tracing of the bodily production of the sign that signifies only its refusal to reveal itself.

In other words, the tear is no longer regarded as purely expressive, purely mimetic, purely osmotic, purely emissive. It is something else altogether. No longer the spontaneous expression of, or physiological anticipation of, any determinate, determinable emotion, the tear is physicalized and materialized with increased indifference to interior states; it is but an opaque rendering (even a dismantling) of those interior states. The tear has lost its obviousness, is bad evidence. Finally, as opposed to the true solitude brought about by tears in Augustine's *Confessions*, tears by the twentieth century have traversed a line ending in lies, untrustworthiness, and doubt *in their address to an other*. Instead of Adam Smith's fantasy of a world in which sentiment enables inter-subjective moral sympathy, the tear now stands for the unbridgeable break between self and other, that what it is to encounter an other is to deploy the body to lie about or through sentiment itself.

It has been said that tears are universally viewed as the sole bodily excretion that is pure and clean, but this idiosyncratic history has demonstrated that tears can take on the qualities so long endured by shit, urine, vomit, blood, and pus. They can be made filthy, put in the service of deception, Baudelaire's "*vils pleurs*"—all of them tears that are not legible as tears.

#### TEARS WITHOUT BODIES

Consider, then, the shower scene in *Psycho*, after it has all come and gone. What is the status of that drop welled in the corner of Marion's magnified duct; what is one to do with that tear that is not necessarily a tear, that craves a reading, that may deceive, and that refuses all obviousness? In many ways, Hitchcock's 1960 film is theorizing the tear after modernity, after the tear has been placed under suspicion, for if *Psycho* could be redescribed as a treatise on the oils orbs can spill, then Marion's limpid droplet is the recto of a verso evoked earlier in the film by Norman Bates. As the doomed figures take dinner in the motel's study minutes before the shower scene's burst, Norman violently rejects Marion's suggestion that he put Mother Bates "someplace." He spits, "People always call a madhouse 'someplace,' don't they?" and continues, despite her protesting apologies, to storm, "What do you know about caring? Have you ever seen the inside of one of those places? The laughing and the tears, and the cruel eyes studying you? My mother, there?" Norman's passionate appeal to the passions offers a strikingly different account of wild tears from the opaque, illegible drop glimpsed later on the bridge of the nose of the carcass on the floor. His accusation is most striking for its reflexive evocation

of the inside of a movie theater—another “someplace” marked by laughing, tears, and cruel eyes that study. The institution at stake in Norman’s horrified description slides: from madhouse to art house, from mental institution to cinematic institution. The cruel eyes studying “you” become the eyes studying the very figure speaking these lines; thus, even before the shower curtain is ripped through, infamously puncturing the safety of the fabled fourth wall, Norman’s accusation strikes at the heart of representational security, calling on the audience of *Psycho* to attend to its own affective work during the film—to ask what sort of tears it sheds or fails to shed. These tears he evokes (eye-water) are also tears (cleaves), rends in representation, pointing reflexively to the jolted, affective audience to Hitchcock’s text. However, in addition to this reflexive disclosure, the evocation of the tears of the mad pluralizes *les pleurs*, introduces into the text the possibility of different modalities of tears: the tears of the mad and the tears of the dead.

Marion’s tear is the inverse of all that Norman’s tears stand for. It figures, instead, after the possibility of laughter is annihilated, as a lifeless or stillborn tear or a tear that in fact may not be a tear at all. Instead of being linked to cruelly studying orbs, it is sworn and bound to a lifeless eye, as though trapped for eternity in a Cartesian optical experiment: *And if, taking the eye of a woman recently dead . . .*<sup>50</sup> Its photographic equivalent is Man Ray’s 1932 *Larmes (Tears)*, sometimes called *Glass Tears* in honor of the visual pun of the piece: five tiny transparent beads set precisely on a fragmented section of a woman’s face, perfect, cold and still, unmoved, unmoving. Hers is emphatically not the tear of the affective film audience, not jerked out of the productive, expressive body as at a melodrama. Marion’s tear is marked by *what it is not*. It is not expressive of the emotions of a subject, not an external production of an internal state; it does not speak to either its emissive past or to its judged emotional future, and it is ripped from, and sits only ever so gently on the surface of, the body. The clear leak neglects to reveal its embodied history and must be read for the potentialities it may or may not offer to the world. It comes from nowhere and advances nothing. Silent tear, it rejects Barthes’s claim: “if I have so many ways of crying, it may be because, when I cry, I always address myself to someone. . . . By weeping, I want to impress someone, to bring pressure to bear upon someone.”<sup>51</sup> This is a bead that brings pressure to bear on nothing, rests lightly. If one striking example of the tear that addresses in an emotional pedagogy is Heather’s famous and oft-mocked close-up implorations of dripping tears and snot in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), or any number of weeping heroines in classical cinematic melodramas, jerking out of the spectator’s responsive body

a pathetic movement in kind, this tear by contrast does not solicit or instruct an audience to mirror, mime, or repeat it. In short, this tear is neither *from* Marion nor *for* us.

These negative accounts still have not answered the question of how to grapple with this tear that is not immediately and vividly legible as a tear. The most striking aspect is this drop's insistent exteriority. It is so much a figure of the outside that its historical relation to an inside (the secret of its secretion) is refused entirely. (Is there such a thing as a tear that appears without ever having been wept?) Moving further, even still, from theories that emphasize the visceral physiology of the tear, Marion's tear is indifferent to perceived or judged emotion altogether, linked as it is to the lifeless finite post-conscious subject. But importantly, it is nevertheless the case that this tear exists: although it is ambiguously a tear, it falsely answers the dilemma posed by the tear simply to assert that it is *not* one. In an otherwise exemplary essay on *Psycho*, George Toles, for example, does away with the tear in his effort to trace the evacuating metaphors of the eye across Hitchcock's film (infecting, rather than amplifying, connections in what he describes as a dead metaphoricity). Toles writes of the shower scene, after it has all come and gone, "In a culminating extreme close-up, this eye contemplates us with the alert fixity of death while a false tear, formed by a drop of water on Marion's face, announces that emotion (of any kind) has no further part to play here. The tear might as well be a fly: nothing is but what is."<sup>52</sup> Toles's dismissal is not quite right, either, for it is the nature of the ambiguous drop that it refuses to disclose its relation to truth. In fact, the drip discloses a non-relation to truth: it cannot be said to be a "false tear," for there is no true tear preserved elsewhere on some other plane of metaphysical verifiability. Toles can no more know the falseness of this tear than Rothman can aver its truth, for this drop is not not a tear, but neither is it a tear. It remains, even in attempts at definition, a tear that is not a tear.

Let us recover a history of the tear as strange.

The tear by modernity, I have claimed, forms a hermeneutic demand. That interpretive imperative, however, should not be limited to semiotics, as in so many accounts of melodrama (trickles of pity, of pathos, of loss, of satisfaction), but should be pressed to deliver an account of the tear that takes the full measure of its wet pulse. In other words, if the tear is an action on the world, or habitual or ambivalent; if the tear is defense, symptom or lie—if, in fact, we do not know what a tear is without engaging in the difficult, slow process of interpreting each individual tear—why limit ourselves to the narrow portion of reading that asks what any given textual tear *represents*? The tear is an