

## LORRAINE SIM AND ANN VICKERY

### *New Feelings: Modernism, Intimacy, and Emotion*

Since the special *Critical Inquiry* issue on “Intimacy” edited by Lauren Berlant in 1998, there has been increasing interest in the relationship between feelings, attachment, and the aesthetic. Berlant sees intimacy as associated with “zones of familiarity and comfort,” as well as particular forms of relationship: “friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipating kinds of love.”<sup>1</sup> In the “modern, mass-mediated sense of intimacy,”

intimacy builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress “a life” seem in a state of constant if latent vulnerability.<sup>2</sup>

So for Berlant, intimacy is aspirational, the desire for something shared and fulfilling a promise of happiness. Yet while fantasies associated with intimacy underpin convention, it is not organized in any discernible way. It generates “an aesthetic of attachment, but no inevitable forms or feelings are attached to it.”<sup>3</sup> Contradictory desires that typically mark intimacy in daily life are also a danger to it. Accordingly, intimacy is highly unstable, relying “heavily on the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence,” a range of “tacit rules [...] and tacit obligations.”<sup>4</sup> Then there is the question of scale. Berlant notes that those intimacies that bypass “the couple or the life narrative” “have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces of culture in which to clarify and to cultivate them.” Such intimacies, which she terms “minor intimacies,” have

---

<sup>1</sup> Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” in Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 1-8 (1).

<sup>2</sup> Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 2.

<sup>3</sup> Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 5.

<sup>4</sup> Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 7.

needed the development of an aesthetics which can “push these spaces into being.”<sup>5</sup> She asserts:

Rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects while, at the same time, attachments are developing that might redirect the different routes taken by history and biography. To rethink intimacy is to appraise how we have been and how we live and how we might imagine lives that make more sense than the ones so many are living.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between intimacy, emotion, and affect has always been a highly contested area, drawing scholarship from across disciplines. While there is a long history of the emotions and sentiment in philosophy, the contemporary category of affect is seen increasingly as a related yet distinct one which defies fixed definitions and critical orthodoxies. According to Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), there is “no single, generalizable theory of affect.”<sup>7</sup> They approach affect theory as characteristically excessive, exceeding strict disciplinary, methodological, and discursive boundaries, always in process and never static. This follows Brian Massumi’s definition of affect. For him, emotion is affect “owned and recognized.” Emotion transforms affects into a “conventional, consensual” form where it can be given “function and meaning.” On the other hand, affect is “resistant to critique.”<sup>8</sup> Phoebe Ellsworth also supports this view: “The realization of the name [of the emotion] undoubtedly changes the feeling, simplifying and clarifying.”<sup>9</sup> Martha Nussbaum adds that emotions are “social

---

<sup>5</sup> Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 5.

<sup>6</sup> Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” 6.

<sup>7</sup> Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-25 (3).

<sup>8</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Phoebe Ellsworth, “Levels of Thought and Levels of Emotion,” in Paul Elkman and Richard J. Davidson, eds, *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 192-96 (193).

constructs” that are “taught [...] through stories,” but can [also] be “dismantled.”<sup>10</sup>

A key difference between emotion and affect, then, is their relation to cognition, with emotion overlapping cognition. Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulias identify affect as pre-cognitive, “an amorphous, diffuse, and bodily ‘experience’ of stimulation impinging upon and altering the body’s physiology, whereas emotions are the various structured [...] and recognizable experiential states.”<sup>11</sup> This agrees with William James’s understanding of emotion as far back as 1890: “the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and [...] our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.”<sup>12</sup> Silvan S. Tomkins sees affect as biologically based, evinced through sites of “opacity” or intensity.<sup>13</sup> He identifies a range of discrete, primary affects, including contempt-disgust, enjoyment-joy, fear-terror, gratitude, interest-excitement, shame-humiliation, and surprise-startle. In their introduction to *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank suggest that it is precisely the poor fit between the affect system and the cognitive system that “enables learning, development, continuity, differentiation.”<sup>14</sup> Tomkins further argues that affects are contagious such that an affect like shame can be passed on to another. Teresa Brennan uses the term “transmission,” viewing affect as a “process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect.”<sup>15</sup> She adds that affects have an “energetic dimension,” which is why they can “enhance or deplete” when they are transferred: “Simply put, you become energized when you are with some loves or some friends. With others you are bored or drained,

---

<sup>10</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 287-8.

<sup>11</sup> Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulias, “Affect and Embodiment,” in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, eds, *Memory: Histories, Theories and Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 246-62 (247).

<sup>12</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), 2 vols (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 2.449.

<sup>13</sup> Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (New York: Springer, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins,” in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham: Duke University, 1995), 1-28 (14).

<sup>15</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

tired or depressed.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Berlant talks of how “affective atmospheres are *shared*,” citing Gilles Deleuze’s conceptualization of affects as acting “in the nervous system not of persons, but of worlds.” For Berlant, tracking affect is a way to understand the “body’s active presence to the intensities of the present.”<sup>17</sup>

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed points out that emotion has traditionally “been viewed as ‘beneath’ the faculties of thought and reason.” “To be emotional is to have one’s judgement affected,” she elaborates; “it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous.”<sup>18</sup> While emotions and cognition may be thought to be on a continuum, as Jesse J. Prinz contends, feelings can also “obviate the need for cognition.”<sup>19</sup> He gives two examples of what we might call bodily apprehensions of emotion: “When we react emotionally to a snake or an exam, it is not by act of will. [...] In fact, we often explicitly try not to be afraid [...] But fear takes over.”<sup>20</sup> Ahmed suggests that emotions involve “a way of apprehending the world.”<sup>21</sup> They “are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects.”<sup>22</sup> Emotions, then, are relational. They are about movement as well as “about attachments or about what connects us to this or that.”<sup>23</sup> Whereas Tomkins foregrounds a “freedom” of emotion from objects, Ahmed is more focused on the “stickiness” between emotions and objects, associations that might be constraining.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, emotions not only heighten tension but they are also in tension.<sup>25</sup> While good emotions have socially been cultivated, unruly emotions

---

<sup>16</sup> Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Berlant, “Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event,” *American Literary History* 20.4 (2008): 845-60 (845-6).

<sup>18</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 2004), 78.

<sup>20</sup> Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 18, 91.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.

which “frustrate the formation of the competent self” are not.<sup>26</sup> Scholars like Ahmed, Berlant, and Heather Love use studies of emotion and affect to explain how “oppression registers at small scales—in everyday interactions in gesture, tone of voice, etc.”<sup>27</sup> They provide a means to develop accounts of what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling.”<sup>28</sup> Erica Johnson notes that an affect like shame “exists at the site of changing social relations and subjectivity, and it bears a transformative influence on the ways in which we understand the workings of cultural mores, power relations, and identity alike” (24).

Modernists were certainly engaging with new feelings, brought about by the trauma of World War I, depersonalization through industrialization and urbanization, and a loss of authenticity through emergent mass culture. Indeed, Ezra Pound wrote in 1913, that “if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, though different nuances, by different intellectual traditions.”<sup>29</sup> Pound describes how he generated the Imagist poem, “In a Station of the Metro,” through his experience of the subway and the inability to capture its affect:

Three years ago in Paris I got out of a “metro” train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child’s face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Heather Love in Sarah E. Chinn, “Queer Feelings/Feeling Queer: A Conversation with Heather Love about Politics, Teaching, and the ‘Dark, Tender Thrills’ of Affect,” *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 22.2 (2011): 124-31 (126).

<sup>28</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

<sup>29</sup> Ezra Pound, “A Retrospect,” in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 86-7. Pound would argue that poetry should be “free from emotional slither” although, as a value, “Only emotion endures” (“A Retrospect,” 12, 14).

In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai identifies less glamorous feelings that she sees as ubiquitous to, and products of, modern capitalist society: paranoia, anxiety, stuplimity, and irritation among others. She argues that “the nature of the sociopolitical itself has changed in a manner that both calls forth and calls upon a new set of feelings—ones less powerful than the classical political passions.”<sup>31</sup> Her study examines “affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity” in cultural production, as well as the “ambivalent situations of suspended agency” they collectively depict.<sup>32</sup> In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love considers the “dark side” of queer modernism, arguing that “Even when modernist authors are making it new, they are inevitably grappling with the old.”<sup>33</sup> Finding historical ambivalence to be particularly charged for modernity’s others, Love analyses how Walter Pater, Willa Cather, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Radclyffe Hall represent aspects of “nostalgia, regret, shame, despair, *ressentiment*, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness.”<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Goodstein contends that boredom is a pervasive affective state peculiar to the twentieth century. And in *Prosaic Desires*, Sara Crangle looks at how modernists were foregrounding and celebrating “human passions that are emphatically banal, nebulous, and ephemeral, but nevertheless fundamental.”<sup>35</sup>

Often, there was a significant degree of anxiety surrounding the authenticity and veracity of new feelings. The legacy of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud added to this with their hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>36</sup> Michael Bell suggests that “The growing

---

<sup>31</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5. Stuplimity is an amalgamation of shock and boredom, which Ngai views as a twentieth-century mutation of the sublime (2, 5).

<sup>32</sup> Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 1. Other studies which focus on less glamorous aesthetic emotions and their effects include Sara Crangle and Peter Nicholls, eds, *On Bathos: Literature, Art, Music* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Love, *Feeling Backward*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Sara Crangle, *Prosaic Desires: Modernist Knowledge, Boredom, Laughter, and Anticipation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 33.

recognition that emotional life may run underground, and may even present overt manifestations directly counter to its true meaning, added a whole new dimension to its unreliability.”<sup>37</sup> One response was to gain a critical distance. In his psychoanalytic framework, Freud maps a system of drives, viewing emotions as the result of a splitting of experience between a singular “conscious” and a singular “unconscious.” In their 1949 essay, “The Affective Fallacy,” W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley saw the need for “translatable emotive formulas” rather than “physiological and psychologically vague ones” to be of the “greatest import.”<sup>38</sup> An increasing need to be objective about feeling is perhaps evidenced most famously in modernism by T. S. Eliot’s objective correlative where he says that the “only way of expressing emotion in the form of art” is to find “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”<sup>39</sup> Alternatively, Walter Benjamin argues that the revolutionary distancing brought about by new technologies and media could generate a form of political affect: “In the cinema, people whom nothing moves or touches any longer, learn to cry again.”<sup>40</sup>

Eliot’s theorization of emotion was focused on an innovation of form. Form, for modernists, was both a means of controlling emotion while at the same time a vehicle for exploring new feelings and the transmission of affect. Jonathan Flatley remarks that, “behind the extraordinary level of aesthetic experimentation that we sometimes call ‘modernism’ we can see the desire to find a way to map out and get a grasp on the affective terrain of modernity.”<sup>41</sup> Departing from traditional, Romantic approaches which viewed the dancer’s body as the

---

<sup>37</sup> Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 148.

<sup>38</sup> W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M. C. Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 57.1 (1949): 31-55 (47).

<sup>39</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems,” in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One Way Street,” in *Benjamin’s Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 41-73 (43).

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4.

articulation and expression of interior states, in their essay in this volume, Duffy and Atkinson explore the “desubjectified emotion” at work in modern ballet (a phrase coined by Jacques Rivière) (105). They suggest that Nijinsky’s choreography in the 1913 premier of *Le sacre du printemps* ushered in a new approach to movement as a thing in itself, in much the same way that colour became a thing in and of itself (though not in the Kantian sense) for avant-garde movements in painting such as Fauvism. In Nijinsky’s realization of the ballet, with its analytic, raw, and precise vocabulary of movement, “there is an affective relationship in the movement of bodies that exceeds the representational and programmatic structure of the work as well as the assumed boundaries of the dancers’ bodies” (95). The body becomes a nodal point “in the circulation of affective energy rather than a vehicle for the expression of emotion” (111).

Eric Sandberg also considers the relationship between emotion and modernist form in “‘To want and not to have’: Desire and Form in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*.” As a number of scholars have suggested, Woolf was interested in the structural properties of the novel and the arrangement of emotions. Sandberg argues that Percy Lubbock’s analytic approach in *The Craft of Fiction* intrigued Woolf, although she took issue with his presumption that the book was an interference with emotions that “we feel naturally, and name simply, and range in final order by feeling their right relations to each other.”<sup>42</sup> Rather than viewing the dominance of form over emotion or vice versa, Sandberg believes that, for Woolf, one lead to the other and that they become, in a sense, the realization of each other. Certainly, Woolf saw the novel as “a structure leaving a shape on the mind’s eye” which causes in the reader “the kind of emotion that is appropriate to it,”<sup>43</sup> and yet, at the same time, “The novelist’s method is simply his device for expressing his emotion.”<sup>44</sup>

Sandberg argues that unsatisfied desire is not only the “foundational emotion” of *To the Lighthouse* but one that shapes and is expressed via the novel’s form (64). His analysis provides an illuminating contrast to previous critiques that interpret

---

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Woolf, “On Re-Reading Novels,” in Joseph Black, ed., *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Twentieth Century and Beyond: From 1900 to World War II*, Vol. 6a (Peterborough: Broadview, 2008), 243-7 (245).

<sup>43</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1989), 71.

<sup>44</sup> Woolf, “On Re-Reading Novels,” 246.



the novel's structure in relation to temporality, instead showing how the text's tripartite structure and other formal features—such as the (in)famous square brackets—can be understood in terms of the novel's broader preoccupation with “unfulfilled and unfulfillable desire” (68). Some of Sandberg's concluding observations about the novel resonate with Sara Crangle's and Liesl Olson's recent arguments that in Woolf we often witness the drama of the unknowability of the other (particularly their elusive interior life) transform into a kind of acceptance of the unfulfillable nature of that desire, “an acceptance of the fact that longing remains unfulfilled,” as Sandberg expresses it, and a recognition that the little, prosaic things we do know the other by—mundane shared moments, a gesture, a habit, the things left unsaid—might be in some sense sufficient.<sup>45</sup>

Erica Johnson also explores how bracketing and other formal strategies like chapter division, ellipsis, and stream of consciousness narration contribute to the conveying of affect. In “Haunted: Affective Memory in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*,” she argues that “haunting is itself an affect [...] you can be haunted by things you do not remember and, equally, by things you never knew in the first place” (34). Moreover, haunting “is the affect through which the past—social as well as personal—registers most powerfully in our psyches.” Johnson notes how Rhys's novel is structured to mirror her protagonist Sasha's state of mind where the past and present blur into one another. A hotel room at the end of the second section becomes particularly haunted:

This damned room—it's saturated with the past... It's all the rooms I've ever slept in, all the streets I've ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms....<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> See Olson's analysis of the importance of habit to our knowledge of the other in her discussion of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* in *Modernism and the Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). It is worth pointing out that at the end of his essay, Sandberg suggests that *To the Lighthouse* rejects unfulfillable longing in favour of an acceptance of the limits of knowledge. While this contrasts with Crangle's claim that a recognition of the “endlessly unknowable” (*Prosaic Desires*, 6) other is maintained in the work of modernist writers such as Woolf and remains productive from an ethical standpoint, there are nevertheless some suggestive correspondences at work here in terms of thinking about the ways in which that defining affect of modernism—longing—might be understood.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (New York: Norton, 1992), 109.

The room triggers a decontextualized memory that takes up the whole third section of *Good Morning, Midnight*, which is written in the present tense, and is the most fragmented and broken section of a highly fragmented novel. Johnson argues that such bracketing of the past “indicates that Sasha’s memories are like dreams, flashbacks, and other pre-cognitive forms of psychic material that become manifest through affect” (35). She suggests that in placing elements beside one another, in seemingly random association, Rhys provides a space of affectivity. As Callard and Papoulias discern, affect is “resistant to representation,” certainly in language.<sup>47</sup> Rhys’s use of ellipsis and parenthesis provides tools to suggest how pleasant memories (such as a sunny street) are filtered to the margins of consciousness, “as an afterthought or daydream” (32), by the affect of shame. Her depiction of memory undoes a linear or meaningful sense of both time and narrative.

Taking up Jonathan Flatley’s concept of affective mapping, Johnson considers how the affective mapping of space (geographic and textual) emphasizes Sasha’s self-estrangement. Johnson draws attention to Massumi’s contention that careful readings of affect might “introduce new subjectivities that exceed plotted positions or assigned categories of identity” (37). She suggests that Sasha’s subjectivity is “structured upon the intensities of shame [...] about her age, class, and indecipherable ethnicity and nationality” rather than any one category of identity (38). Yet certainly much of Sasha’s sense of shame in regards to her ageing and poverty is aligned to her “restricted agency” as a woman, whose cultural capital still predominantly resides in her perceived value by men.<sup>48</sup>

In “Death, Fashion, and Feeling: Reading around The Suicide of Dorothy Hale,” Fiona Gregory investigates the nuanced “network of emotion” surrounding Frida Kahlo’s 1938 portrait of the death of failed actress and celebrated beauty, Dorothy Hale (40). Believing (mistakenly, as it would turn out) that Hale had spent a gift of five hundred dollars on a new dress rather than paying her rent, Clara Boothe declined to attend the party prior to Hale’s death. When Boothe’s fury turned to guilt and remorse upon being reprimanded of the actual state of affairs, she commissioned Kahlo to paint a portrait of Hale but was subsequently

---

<sup>47</sup> Callard and Papoulias, “Affect and Embodiment,” 251.

<sup>48</sup> Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 2.

shocked and “physically *sick*”<sup>49</sup> by its seemingly gruesome “unfeelingness” (55). She was also angered by the inscription that connected her to the artwork. This sense of physical sickness is the moment Silvan Tomkins identifies as one of shame. Fiona Gregory argues that shame motivates both Boothe’s commission of the portrait and her subsequent attempts to make it, and her connection to it, disappear. In *Blush*, Elspeth Probyn argues that shame is “the most intimate of feelings; it makes our selves intimate to our selves.”<sup>50</sup> Boothe’s relationship of “vicarious thrill” to her friend Hale is emblemized by her suggestion that Hale wear the infamous eroticizing dress that would both clothe and condemn Hale’s fallenness in death. Once the provenance of the portrait is made public, Boothe claimed control over the narrative of Hale’s death, casting Hale as victim and failure and herself as best friend. Boothe’s actions demonstrate the complexity of “ugly feelings,” particularly the mix of envy, anger, and shame. While Gregory points out that Kahlo painted the portrait at a time of personal turmoil, she is less interested in speculating on an alignment of a feeling of distress and failure between Kahlo and her subject. Rather, she focuses on Kahlo’s representation of Hale’s agency, particularly on the falling woman as an image that frightens and disturbs the viewing public. Indeed, Hale’s decision to make of herself a spectacle reveals not shame but a final performance of, and also transgression of, femininity.

To be emotional has traditionally been gendered. Ahmed notes that, “Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement.”<sup>51</sup> Scholars such as Suzanne Clark have pointed out that feeling was often dismissed by modernists in relation to its association with sentimentality.<sup>52</sup> Such a view is articulated by D. H. Lawrence, who suggested that the

---

<sup>49</sup> Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 292.

<sup>50</sup> Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

sentimental was “the garment of our vice.”<sup>53</sup> Following Clark, Bell says of modernism that “the vehemence of the hostility to sentiment, often tinged with snobbery and implicitly gendered, tended to throw the baby of feeling out with the bathwater of sentimentality.”<sup>54</sup>

A suspicion of excessive feeling or, alternatively, viewing sentimentality as a kind of emotional laziness or inauthenticity might be said to have led to a new sensibility emblemized by the satiric mode of late modernism. Mocking “authentic emotion” in *Vile Bodies*, Evelyn Waugh declared that “Satire [...] exposes polite cruelty and folly by exaggerating them. It seeks to produce shame. All this has no place in the Century of the Common Man where vice no longer pays lip service to virtue.”<sup>55</sup> In “‘Too, too shaming’: Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies*,” Naomi Milthorpe argues that satire rejects sentimentality and instead tends to map “the nastiest of human emotions and motivations” such as contempt, hatred, snobbery, and a desire for violence (77). She suggests that satirists like Waugh have tended to be positioned at modernism’s margins when satire is, as Tyrus Miller persuasively contends in *Late Modernism*, a most fitting vehicle for modernity’s affects.<sup>56</sup> Satire, as Milthorpe goes on to analyse, often works through a doubled perspective, whereby the “‘sick-making’ movement” of the world of “the Bright Young People, the gossip column, and the race track” is brought up against the world of “the footnote, the parenthetical remark, and the battlefield” (83). A moralistic undercurrent offsets the flattening of characters who are empty and soulless, and themselves incapable of shame.

Satire brings to the fore the role of laughter, and Justus Nieland remarks that laughter is “essential to any complete story of modernism’s affective energies, and to any full account of how the moderns actually experienced modernity.”<sup>57</sup> Writing contemporaneously to Waugh’s penning of *Vile Bodies*, Benjamin

---

<sup>53</sup> D. H. Lawrence, “The Crown,” *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 60.

<sup>54</sup> Bell, *Sentimentalism*, 160.

<sup>55</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1980), 304.

<sup>56</sup> Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Justus Nieland, “Modernism’s Laughter,” *Modernist Cultures* 2.2 (2006): 80-86 (84).

explored the possibilities of laughter in a poetic rather than satiric mode. One of the protocols for his first experiment into the effects of hashish is that “One *seeks* occasions for laughter.” He also suggests that the comic has “Boundless goodwill” and that smiling gives a sense of fluttering or moving “on the threshold. A sort of toe dance of reason.”<sup>58</sup> In “‘Growing small wings’: Walter Benjamin, Lola Ridge, and the Political Affect of Modernism,” Gail Jones focuses on Benjamin’s prose in light of these experiments, particularly on the political possibility to be found in their “dopey lyricism” (122). Jones sees their intoxicating whimsy as enabling a profane illumination that might be revolutionary in its affect. Profane illumination is at the heart of transformation, a moment of perceiving “the density of experience.”<sup>59</sup> Through narcotic perception, Benjamin views historical materialism more intensely, his work focusing on a “*political aesthetics of redemption and optimism*” (125). Profane illumination might then underlie “an *innervated* political and civic life” (124). Certainly, his hashish experiments lead Benjamin to laterally and creatively link text, affect, and the relations of body, space, and time in modern life:

One is very much struck by how long one’s sentences are. This, too, connected with horizontal extension and (probably) with laughter. The arcade is also a phenomenon of long horizontal extension, perhaps combined with vistas receding into distant, fleeting, tiny perspectives. The element of the diminutive would serve to link the idea of the arcade to laughter.<sup>60</sup>

As Jones notes, Benjamin would also go on to develop his theory of the arcade soon after his writings under the influence of hashish.

Jones reflects something of Benjamin’s poetic elegance and experimentation in her own essay, juxtaposing the “revolutionary sentiment and its poeticized expression” (139) in Benjamin with the little-discussed transnational, anarchist poet Lola Ridge. Centrally involved in New York’s avant-garde literary and artistic circles from the late 1910s through to the 1930s, Ridge’s poetry was

---

<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, Howard Eiland trans. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 19-20.

<sup>59</sup> Jones argues that this is central to Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (122).

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin, *On Hashish*, 20.

largely forgotten following her death in 1941. In a perceptive reading of two of Ridge's poems, Jones shows how in her radical politics, which broached major issues of the day including anti-Semitism, capital punishment, and racial violence, Ridge's appeal was to "the body, to sensation, and to an affective politics" (133). Furthermore, the revolutionary politics that Jones traces in the work of Benjamin and Ridge is not "loud" or "rhetorically forceful," but often modest, intimate, grounded in the specificity of things, events, and the particularity of one's affective response to them (135). The very style of Jones's essay serves as a timely (and optimistic) reminder of the possibilities that a modernist sensibility and approach offer us to the process of intellectual enquiry and critique today.

It is perhaps fitting to conclude with Benjamin's "dopey smile" (139). The "wonderful beatific humour," "incomprehensible gaiety," and "amorous joy" that overwhelms Benjamin during his hashish visions outweigh their "dark side."<sup>61</sup> Such visions tend to focus on "the odd radiance of ordinary objects," (120) where even a walking stick can give "special pleasure."<sup>62</sup> Jones's attention to the positive "minor" affects is a promising direction in modernist studies. While Jones recuperates the concept of the "dopey," scholars like Daniel Kane are investigating the aesthetics of whimsy in the New York School.<sup>63</sup> The "small wings" of the dopey or the whimsical are simultaneously fickle, comic, and political in their flight; perhaps, after all, optimism can be both cruel and intoxicating.<sup>64</sup>

*The University of Western Sydney  
Deakin University*

---

<sup>61</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Hashish in Marseilles," in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 138, 141, 144, 142.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin, "Hashish in Marseilles," 138.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel Kane, "Whimsy, the Avant-Garde, and *The Apple*," *World Picture* (forthcoming 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, *On Hashish*, 20. See also Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).