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The body of shame in affect theory and deconstruction

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Accounts of affect usually distinguish between two theoretical focal points for affect theory or the affective turn: one working within the legacy of Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi, and the other being the way Silvan Tomkins' work was read by Eve Sedgwick. Their contemporaneous appearance in the mid-90s and relative theoretical difference helped to cohere the turn, which otherwise yielded a considerable amount of work that does not necessarily align itself with either of these legacies. Despite their differences, both legacies rely on the idea of a live, organic body as their foundation as well as perhaps their telos; and both use in part the authority of biology as a science to ground their claims about the affective body.¹ Bodies in such a theory of affect are conceived as live sites of affect where aliveness is either the property of the body or of the material that constitutes the body. A good example of such genealogy of affect is 'An Inventory of Shimmers', Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth's introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*. The text first provides a brief summary of what we could call the cohering thematics of affect.² In these pages, affect is inextricably bound with an interest in the idea of the living body, conceived of as a bundle of undetermined capacities, always part of an 'emergent futurity' involving an impersonal flux of 'impinging/extruding belonging to worlds'.³ In a subsequent list delineating eight domains of theoretical inquiry feeding affect theory, we see an amalgam connecting a Spinozist commitment to the not-yetness of embodied capacities conceived as part of a 'processual materialism'; a keen attraction to 'life technologies' blurring the distinction between life and non-life, and to science and science studies in general as a source for the dreads and wonders of 'mutable matter'; a treatment of psychoanalytic and psychological inquiry as a reservoir for discussing feeling from the point of view of the non-personal; and, importantly, a turn away from poststructuralism and from the linguistic turn.⁴

In this text, I argue that despite their similarities, the difference between the two legacies that make up the affective turn are such that Sedgwick's Tomkins, read primarily as a particularly inspiring theorist of performative queer shame, deconstructively troubles the aura of vitalist immediacy that animates the Deleuzean-Massumean tradition within affect theory. After providing a brief exposition of Tomkins' theory of shame, I provide a brief background to de Man's notion of nonphenomenal materiality before turning to Derrida's 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) (within such limits)', where he connects de Man's argument on performativity and shame to de Man's subsequent texts on materiality.⁵ My aim is to show an affinity between

Derrida's reading of de Man and Sedgwick's reading of Tomkins. Finally, I will suggest that Tomkins' work opens the door for de Man's nonphenomenal materiality to critique the recourse to an extra-linguistic materiality within affect theory.⁶

First, let me explain that I consider the discourse of affect as vitalist to the extent that it is animated by a general tendency to assert affect above all as some sort of privileged concept of the throbbing vitality of material immanence. To be sure, tropes of death as non-life such as haunting, inertia and machinic or artifice do feature in this discourse, which means that this sense of vital force is not strictly speaking simply vitalist: since the texts within affect theory have a strong posthumanist commitment, this agentic force extends to characterize inorganic as well as organic matter and the vitality of life will be considered as a machinic operation of sorts, so that the boundary between the living and non-living will be troubled and perhaps eliminated. However, the sense in which all matter will be thought of will be inscribed in a discourse in which life figures as that which repels death and survives its attacks until it is not strong enough to do so. By 'immediacy' I am referring to the effect of affirming such a discourse of life and materiality in part via the gesture of turning away from deconstruction, poststructuralism or language. Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard emphasize this link in their 'Biology's Gift', and note that '[affect] comes to name the inherent dynamism and mutability of matter' as a result of placing theoretical value on 'the production of an afoundational biology capable of destabilizing the pull of language and subjectivation upon our bodies'.⁷ Thus, affect will come to mean something material and extra-linguistic at the same time – and a certain turn to science also amplifies this emphasis on immediacy.

Let me give two examples of this discourse of live embodiment with two quotes from Lisa Blackman and Patricia Clough, two influential thinkers of affect whose scholarship is characterized by a consistent overview of affect theory as a field and whose texts demonstrate a careful and generous treatment of ideas associated with deconstruction: in the case of Blackman, her work has for a long time featured an affinity with hauntology (even if not always in reference to Derrida); and the extremely influential, field defining text of Clough demonstrates, following the work of Rei Terada, a generous and attentive understanding of the relationship between what she calls 'poststructuralism' and the affective turn. The first combination of quotes is from Blackman's *Immaterial Bodies*:

Rather than considering bodies as closed physiological and biological systems, bodies are open, participating in the flow or passage of affect, characterized more by reciprocity and co-participation than boundary and constraint. [The] singular body is displaced within affect theory with its resounding focus on multiplicity and movement.⁸

However, she argues that 'bodies cannot be reduced to materiality and that the body's potential for psychic or psychological attunement – what I am

terming “immateriality” – is one that the turn to affect must adequately theorize’.⁹ Let me follow this one immediately with a combination of quotes from Clough which produce a similar connection between bodies and affect: ‘the biomediated body challenges the autopoietic character of the body-as-organism that, by the late nineteenth century, had become a model of what a body is’;¹⁰ ‘[t]he turn to affect points instead to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter generally – matter’s capacity for self-organization in being informational ...’¹¹

In these accounts, the affective body either is in part immaterial, or is beyond the threshold of ‘life itself’ (what Clough refers to as the postbiological body): if Blackman’s body cannot be contained within materiality, Clough’s body is so material that it cannot be contained within biology. It seems that both accounts intend to rely on affect in order to undermine some conventional theoretical containment of live, and therefore affective, bodies. In doing so, both accounts stress the key theoretical potential of affect to undo the restriction of subjective emotion, and both accounts also struggle in different ways to loosen the discursive hold of live organicity on the question of material bodies. For instance, they both draw on work that insists on the machinic conceptualization of biology.¹² But as is perhaps especially clear from Clough’s quotation, the threshold of the postbiological (but also the immaterial in the case of Blackman) still relies on a conventional discourse of life, or what Derrida following de Man consistently referred to as ‘organicist totalisation’: accounting for the immaterial aspect of porous, plural bodies in movement yields a fuller understanding of their life in one case, while in the other, it is matter that is animated via dynamic and informational self-organization.¹³ While the accounts differ in how they conceive of matter in relation to the affectively material body – one posits it as a constraint in understanding the affective capacities of bodies, while according to the other, it is matter that facilitates those capacities – in both cases the affective body is seen to be alive and active and is conceived under the auspices of self-organization, either through the trope of autopoiesis, displaced onto matter, or through figures of thriving democratic action: reciprocity and co-participation. In what follows, I will first turn to Tomkins’ notion of shame as it is read by Sedgwick in order to prepare my argument that this queer shame and the way it resonates with Derrida’s reading of de Man on nonphenomenal materiality opens up an avenue of deconstruction of this vitalist tendency in the figure of the affective body.

Silvan Tomkins’ *oeuvre* on affect entered the world of theory through Eve Sedgwick’s sustained engagement with it. While her appreciation spanned for the work as a whole, her focus immediately zoomed in on the affect of shame in which she saw an inherent performativity related to identity. Sedgwick intuited a constitutive association between shame and queerness.¹⁴ This gave Tomkins a canonical significance for queer theory interested in affect and the political vision loosely associated with Sedgwick’s call to develop a critical relationship to what she calls paranoid reading. As a result, Tomkins, or

Sedgwick's reading of him, is habitually mentioned in accounts of affect theory. However, the theoretical specificities of his work are seldom interrogated, as Adam Frank and Elizabeth Wilson point out in response to Ruth Leys in a debate on affect.¹⁵ What I am suggesting here is that through the work of Sedgwick, who keeps in mind the legacy of deconstruction (including de Man's work) when working with the idea of performativity, some of this specificity offers the possibility of a deconstructive critique of what affect has come to stand for.¹⁶

In accounting for shame as a response wired in the constitution of the human body, Tomkins gives a schematic description of shame as one of the nine affects he conceives of as the starting kit of subsequently emergent emotional life. Within this framework, shame is an auxiliary affect whose function is to inhibit enjoyment, interest or both. The first of these is that it allows for stopping an activity without the activation of other negative affects such as anger or disgust. In shame, we inhibit ourselves in acting on our positive affect. The primary example of shame for Tomkins is its first incident of appearance. Estimated to manifest at seven months of age, shame is thought to first appear at the moment when the infant is able to distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar faces for the first time.¹⁷ Unaccustomed to this distinction, the child experiences and communicates positive affect, interest and enjoyment, which is then inhibited in the realization that it had been activated by an unfamiliar face. The automatic expression of this realization is the child's hiding their face while trying to keep looking at the same time or after a short interval. The example illustrates the most important aspect of this affect: as an auxiliary affect inhibiting positive affect, it is attached to positive affects without eliminating them completely and so there is always some pleasure in the pain of shame. Shame, as affects are in general, is essentially communicative and the communicative force of shame concerns the social bond: the disruption of the eye-face connection between the one in shame and their other communicates the break of this bond. The aim of the primarily facial performance of this affect is to re-establish connection.

It is important to note that Tomkins conceives of the mechanism of shame as primarily taking place between the interocular relationship of two faces; it is in the breaking of the glance (often accompanied by blushing, whose external visibility is also felt internally) that this unifying shame produces the effect of this totally absorbing feeling of the self. Coupled with its other constitutive feature, i.e. being conceived of as a feeling of radical alienation or excommunication whose aim is the restoration of belonging, Tomkins' shame enacts what following Sedgwick we may call a double performativity: the inward feeling of the whole self and the external communication of the excommunication of this self. This double performativity is the basis for the calcifying identity (as separable and separate) out of the identificatory aspect of the attachment to and dependency on the other. As Sedgwick puts it: 'Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity

and – performativity’.¹⁸ This double performativity, according to Sedgwick, is felt as a specific ‘sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable’.¹⁹ Here the performance of shame, ‘burning brightest in the eyes’ seems to yield, as its effect, a feeling of a monistic, separable and objectified embodied self that is felt in a self-annihilating mortification of excommunicability. Therefore, the performance of shame supposes the submission to a decree of social death in the hopes of overcoming it. Shame is thus the affect of self-individuated social life that relies on the idea of social death. I suggest that we read shame in Sedgwick’s Tomkins as an ideal of the auto-affectation of the embodied self with no internal alterity, in isolation, as such, and also, in limbo, suspended between life and death. Indeed, Tomkins starts his preliminary, general discussion of shame as a universal human affect with the question: ‘How can loss of face be more intolerable than loss of life?’²⁰

Tomkins discusses shame in the same chapter he discusses contempt, and this allows him to underscore the significance of the association between shame and this monistic sense of embodied self. The two affects are conceived of as polar opposites that at the same time, according to Tomkins, cannot always be differentiated from each other when it comes to what he calls internalized contempt. While shame and internalized contempt both affect the same external performance of shame (breaking eye-contact, turning the face downward, blushing), they involve completely different internal theatres. While internalized contempt transforms the psychic interior into a stage populated with several affectively different characters (the internalized version of the contemptuous authority figure that scolds the accused aspect of the self), in what Tomkins calls unified shame, there is no ‘endopsychic’ division:

At that moment when the self feels ashamed, it is felt as a sickness within the self. Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost. Why is shame so close to the experienced self? It is because the self lives in the face, and within the face the self burns brightest in the eyes. Shame turns the attention of the self and others away from other objects to this most visible residence of self, increases its visibility and thereby generates the torment of self-consciousness.²¹

In shame, we don’t simply direct the other’s attention to our humiliation. In turning attention to our face in hiding, we also guide our attention to our self as severed off from the communicative bond: ‘[shame] forces consciousness back to the face and the self’.²² Shame, more than any other affect, is the affect of self, where the self is conceived of as a psychic space of identification. In the case of ‘unified shame’, it is a space free from internal division. The stronger the intensity, the stronger the sense of the self as self, self as bounded affect, alienable from and re-attachable to others (in this regard,

shame is also the affect of the social). In the case of internalized contempt, however, ‘the self is split in two, with one part of the self a judge, and the other the offender, this same drama may be played out as an endopsychic conflict’.²³

Shame, therefore, is intrinsically theatrical and features splits which are irreducible to some overarching higher sense of organic unity: the distinction between ‘unified shame’ and internalized contempt lies in where we place the decisive split, where the stage of theatricality is posited. In ‘unified shame’ the theatricality yields the sense of the unified self as an embodied one, always severable in its whole being from the other vitally necessary for survival. In addition, and this is what makes Sedwick’s reading of Tomkins such a great resource for readers interested in deconstruction, Tomkins’ text is quite explicit about its own failure to guarantee the distinction between, on the one hand, the pure shame that can yield and amplify the affective sense of one’s unified embodied self (in other words the coincidence of one’s material embodiment and sense of self) and, on the other, contempt where the inner self is divided. There is an inherent deconstructive tendency concerning an organicist, construction of materiality in this account which I hope to make clear in my discussion of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’.

Perhaps the most apparent reason why Derrida’s ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ is a useful companion to the founding terms of both lineages within affect theory, i.e. a sense of vital embodiment and the performativity of shame, is that it calls for the combined thinking of the event and the machine. In this combined reading, the terms of the question of life, such as organic and inorganic, feature constitutively throughout and much of it is devoted to ‘Excuses (*Confessions*)’, a text where de Man reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the performance of shame. The text first appeared in translation in a volume devoted to de Man’s texts concerning materiality in *Aesthetic Ideology*. Before I go on discussing the significance of ‘Typewriter Ribbon’ in showing an affinity between de Man and Tomkins, let me provide a brief account of de Man’s notion of materiality in order to highlight a tension between what I called the vitalist immediacy of affect theory and his nonphenomenal materiality.

In ‘Paul de Man as Allergen’, J. Hillis Miller provides a pristine summary of why de Man’s work tends to repel readers; much of the explanation hinges on de Man’s counterintuitive arguments on materiality based on his deconstructive reading of Immanuel Kant’s theory of the sublime.²⁴ As he explains, while Kant is conventionally thought of as an idealist and de Man is considered focusing on rhetoricity and performativity, in *Aesthetic Ideology* de Man reads Kant as saliently insightful on materiality, a materiality which is, however, nonphenomenal. The nonphenomenality of materiality follows from Kant’s illustration of the dynamic sublime by the example of looking at the ocean: for us to revel in the sight of the ocean as sublime, we have to resort to a ‘an activity of the eye operating by itself, enclosed in itself, wholly detached, disarticulated, from thinking and interpreting’.²⁵ De Man calls this

material vision. As Miller repeatedly reminds us, de Man's deconstruction of the sublime detects in Kant 'the material disarticulation not only of nature but of the body' that performatively inaugurated a certain materialism which, as de Man famously proclaims, 'Kant's posterity has not yet begun to face up to'.²⁶

The resistance to such a reading of Kant is rooted, according to Miller, in the fact that we are all supposed to know what materiality is and this conventional understanding rests on the compatibility of phenomenality and materiality (materiality is supposed to be accessible through a phenomenal openness to the senses). In this conventional sense, materiality 'is the property possessed by these hard objects right in front of me now, impassive, impassible, resistant, not dependent on my perception for their continued existence'.²⁷

In this view, conventional materiality is the stuff of inorganic, inanimate being that seems to possess a radical autonomy or independence. It is not difficult to see how this understanding serves the kernel of what affect theory, as I summarized it at the beginning, seems to depart from either through the representation of bodies that exceed this image, or through the idea of a matter that is imbued with the vitality of self-organization. Tomkins' shame also seeks to understand the affective human as both not this and also this (in the endopsychic *rigor mortis* of shame that outlines the individual as a self-identical member of the social). In other words, the conventional understanding of matter seems to be what the theory of embodied affect intends to leave behind. The tropes of dynamism and movement, the political figures of action such as reciprocity and self-organization and folding tropes of machinic, informational mediation into a discourse of vitalism not exclusive to the living all seem to suscite this conventional matter out of its inertia. However, conceiving of materiality as processual in its immediate affectivity does not seem to change its phenomenality in de Man's terms.

De Man's invaluable contribution, according to Miller, is that in his outrageous readings of the texts on aesthetics (Kant's and Hegel's) against the grain of evaluating these texts' success in providing a seamless theory of matter and phenomenality, he wants to make us feel the performative work of language and the materiality of inscription. For this, de Man looks for nonserious aspects in these texts that allow him to suggest their power to desensitize the urge to read them for intelligibility, or to spark undignified puns so that 'he can say that everyone falls into "the trap of an aesthetic education which inevitably confuses dismemberment of language by the power of the letter with the gracefulness of a dance"'.²⁸

Following Miller, it seems to be the primacy of a radical performativity that allows de Man to read Kant in a way that allows him to forge a theory of immaterial materiality according to which materiality is nonphenomenal because it is 'not open to the senses'.²⁹ In this perspective, materiality must be understood as a performative effect of aesthetic ideology. This point is

delineated in Andrzej Warminski's reading of the passages from 'Resistance to Theory' discussing the relationship between the divisions of the liberal arts somewhat corresponding to our conventional distinction between the science of language and the science of the world: the trivium and the quadrivium. At stake is our conventional guarantee of extra-linguistic reference, and according to de Man, this guarantee depends on a set hierarchy within the trivium, the priority of logic. Reading the sentence 'What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenality', and carefully objecting the interpretation in which de Man's emphasis on rhetoric would arrogantly assume a position in which this confusion could become obsolete, Warminski makes the following statement:

[T]his articulation of the sciences of language with the mathematical sciences represents a particularly compelling version of a continuity between a theory of language, as logic, and the knowledge of the phenomenal world [...], provided the priority of logic, in the model of the *trivium*, is not being questioned.³⁰

It is this priority that de Man's early work deconstructs through the contrast between the tropological and rhetorical aspects of language within the trivium. But once this priority is questioned, what we mean by materiality cannot simply coincide with its conventional meaning: this nonphenomenal materiality is, according to Derrida, a 'materiality without matter'.³¹

Just as Miller and Warminski strive to show a counterintuitive consistency between de Man's early works on poetic language and the later texts on aesthetic ideology, Derrida's 'Typewriter Ribbon' also calls attention to the significance of rhetoricity and language in de Man's thought on materiality and it does so by providing a reading of 'Excuses (*Confessions*)' tracing the figures of life, bodily mutilation and machinicity. In a text devoted to 'Typewriter Ribbon', Warminski points out two peculiarities in Derrida's essay: first, that in responding to a call to discuss de Man's notion of materiality, Derrida devotes most of this text to 'Excuses', and second, that Derrida displays an uncharacteristic pettiness toward the de Man of 'Excuses', instead of his usual generosity. Indeed, Derrida finds de Man at fault a lot.³² Out of these faults, I would like to discuss two in the light of Sedgwick's reading of Tomkins' shame. The first of these is his critical remarks on de Man's discussion on the distinction between confession and excuse. The second is his suggestion that our reading of the parts of *Confessions* where Rousseau discusses the well-known stolen ribbon episode ought to include a passage de Man explicitly wishes to exclude from consideration. My hope is that instead of strengthening Warminski's impression of a pesky and frustrated Derrida, my reading of what Derrida is doing in this text offers a way to imagine him as putting de Man in conversation with theoretical developments that may customarily acknowledge Derridean deconstruction but never mention de Man.³³

De Man's 'Excuses (*Confessions*)' reads Rousseau's accounts of his stealing a ribbon in the household he worked in at the age of sixteen, first in his

Confessions, then again in *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. In these accounts Rousseau discloses the double crime of stealing and lying: after the ribbon is found in his possession, he publicly blames the theft on the object of his infatuation, Marion, a young girl working at the same household. From a problematization of the relationship between confession (verifiable referentially) and apologetic excuse ('itself an "inner" process to which only words can bear witness'³⁴), de Man offers a reading which suggests that in these accounts the thread of signification that he sees in the trope of the ribbon explicitly shows a shift in figuring the text from the metaphor of the body to the metaphor of the machine via the trope of bodily mutilation effecting a 'systematic undoing ... of understanding'.³⁵ The first point of Derrida's critical reading of 'Excuses' concerns the differentiation between cognitive confession and performative excuse. De Man does indeed refer to the performativity of the excuse as a 'ruse'.³⁶ As Warminski puts it this 'happens when shame – an interior disposition, feeling, or affect – is "used as excuse", i.e., performatively, that the pain of the guilt for the crime of exposure (and its revelation) and the pleasure of the satisfaction of the desire for exposure (and its repression) become interchangeable' [original emphasis].³⁷ Derrida admits that he is confused by de Man's wish for such a clear differentiation:

For what de Man calls 'the distinction between the confession stated in the mode of revealed truth and the confession stated in the mode of excuse' (280) organizes, it seems to me, his whole demonstration, whereas I find this distinction impossible, in truth undecidable. This undecidability, moreover, is what would make for all the interest, the obscurity, the nondecomposable specificity of what is called a confession, an avowal, an excuse, or an asked-for forgiveness ...³⁸

I suggest we can read Derrida here in a way that inscribes this undecidability into Tomkins' model of shame (in which shame delineates and amplifies the sense of the body proper through a double performance) while still preserving the de Manian deconstruction of it. Confession/excuse is a self-administered performance that makes the feeling of shame public. It is all the more interesting that what de Man detects as the necessary problem of the confession turns out to also orchestrate the manifestation of Tomkins' shame: the exposure is not simply the property of the confession of the excuse, nor is the mixture of pleasure and pain; these are in fact constitutive of shame 'worthy of its name'. The difference between Tomkins and de Man is that in the former, there is no distinction between using or not using the internal for the performance – the two aspects implying each other – whereas de Man seems to imply in 'Excuses' that it is possible to refrain from using shame performatively.³⁹

This resonance here between Tomkins and Derrida suggests that the performativity of shame, or the association between them, is significant for thinking about the question of de Man's nonphenomenal materiality. For Derrida adds with almost the same breath:

[W]e are touching here on the equivocation of an originary or pre-originary synthesis without which there would be neither trace nor inscription, neither experience of the body nor materiality. It would be a question of the equivocation between, *on the one hand*, the truth to be known, revealed, or asserted, the truth that, according to de Man, concerns the order of the pure and simple confessional, and, *on the other*, the truth of the pure performative of the excuse, to which de Man gives the name of the apologetic, two orders that are analogous, in sum to the constative and the performative.⁴⁰ [original emphasis]

Then, in his characteristic way of discussing terms conventionally involved in acts of naturalization (such as 'body') both in a 'literal' and 'figural' way, Derrida links the discourse of performative shame in 'Excuses' to the readings in *Aesthetic Ideology* I discussed above relying on J. Hillis Miller's essay:

Whether one is talking about the body in general, the body proper, or [...] the linguistic body of phrases and words in syllables and letters [...], these figures of dismemberment, fragmentation, mutilation, and 'material disarticulation' play an essential role in a certain 'materialist' signature [...] that insists in the last texts of de Man.⁴¹

However:

The materiality in question [...] is not a thing; it is not something (sensible or intelligible); it is not even the matter of a body. As it is not something, as it is nothing and yet it works, *cela oeuvre*, this nothing therefore operates, it forces, but as a force of resistance. It resists [...] matter as substantial and organic totality. This is one of the reasons that de Man never says [...] *matter*, but *materiality*.⁴²

There is another instance where Tomkins' performative shame, this time concerning the question of life and death, resonates with Derrida's reading of de Man. The second of Derrida's critical remarks I am calling attention to is the inclusion of the scene of Mme de Vercellis' passing in Rousseau's *Confessions*. This scene intervened in the course of Derrida's analysis of the questions of performativity around the excuse: confession, shame, desire and the question of forgiveness. Derrida suggests that if we are to read the text of Marion within Rousseau's work, our selection should commence at an earlier point so as to trace the ribbon to Rousseau's relationship with Mme de Vercellis and to the scene of her passing in order to take account of the significance of inheritance in the story. Indeed, the ribbon (an old one besides being pink and silver, Derrida also emphasizes) belonged to Mme de Vercellis. Derrida here on the one hand is responding to de Man's explicit refusal to raise the question of oedipality in the relationship between Rousseau and

Mme de Vercellis and, on the other hand, highlights the machinic elements that make up Rousseau's characterization of Mme de Vercellis: she is described as cold, always inclined to act in an ethically commendable manner, not because she has a warm heart but mechanistically, automatically; she is insensitive and lacks mercy.⁴³ The passages leading up to her death report Rousseau's intense attachment and frustrated affection for a maternal figure whose cold demeanour induces both disappointment and fixation. Let me tangentially digress a bit from Derrida's analysis of the passage. Rousseau prefaces the scene of death by implying that in her dying days, Mme de Vercellis gained 'a claim to philosophy' through displaying fortitude and gaiety. Her conduct touched him deeply: 'Indeed I was more attentive to her than anyone else, for the poor woman's suffering tore my heart, and the fortitude with which she bore it inspired me with the greatest respect and affection for her. Many were the genuine tears I shed in her room without her or anyone else noticing it'.⁴⁴ Here we are summoned to notice Rousseau crying unnoticed, presumably because everyone else notices only the dying diva. Indeed, Rousseau's prose here creates a stark contrast between his eminent recognition of the philosophical heights of his mistress' endurance of the burden of illness and impending death and his complaining that he doesn't receive an inheritance subsequently as the other members of the household do. While Derrida emphasizes indeed the possibility to read this relationship in an oedipal-cathartic way that connects Mme de Vercellis to Rousseau's other objects of desire, it is important for my purposes here to note that, in these passages, Rousseau is giving an account of a staged philosophical death. Death comes subsequently and not without irony:

Finally when she could no longer talk and was already in her death agony, she broke wind loudly. 'Good', she said, turning over, 'a woman who can fart is not dead'. Those were the last words she spoke.⁴⁵

Derrida comments on this series of emissions as follows:

Here now the second and last last word. After this fart, this last breath, this agony, and these 'last words she spoke' like a double expiration, a fart and a testamentary metalanguage on a next-to-the-last breath, here is the last last word, right at the end of the account of the ribbon that itself follows without transition the double expiration of Mme de Vercellis. After it was said of her 'Finally... she could no longer talk,' she still farts and adds a living, surviving gloss [*une glose vivante, survivante*], the fart, to this after-the-last word.⁴⁶

The fart as a crude punchline, at the same time spoiling but also proving beyond any remaining doubt the philosophical greatness of the moribund suffering woman, this basest comedic device appears like fireworks erupting in contradictory tropes: as a spark of life which, coming after the last words,

survives and haunts at the same time, as overly garrulous speech, an act of parrhesiastic ‘oversharing’ bursting out after its due time but also as humiliating and mortifying decay and putrescence. In this erupting multiplicity of speech as bodily act, the fart renders the anus a mouth, dis-organizes the body as Mme de Vercellis is suspended between life and death. To be clear, Derrida cites this passage in order to connect the fart as not yet the last last word which is then also followed by another last word, announcing life, to the chain of the last words on the stolen ribbon and the defamation of Marion.⁴⁷ The scene will then be another instance of a machinic repetition compelled by the figure of the ribbon. In Derrida’s discussion of Mme de Vercellis’s illness, breast cancer, we can also detect the key figure linking for him ‘Excuses’ to *Aesthetic Ideology*: bodily mutilation. I would like to propose that at the heart of this scene, what makes it philosophical, is shame: the last breath/word uttered by the other mouth of Mme de Vercellis’ not yet quite dead body is also a joke on her part, another kind of affective meta-language invoking shame, where public farts and sexual difference meet. While it is only this joke that suggests obliquely and ironically that Mme de Vercellis may feel ashamed of farting in public, the joke wouldn’t be a joke, it would not work as a joke, it therefore could not illustrate the philosophical gaiety of the dying woman, if it were not at the same time deflecting and referencing the shame of farting in public, perhaps especially for a woman, on the stage of her deathbed. This is not simply any fart joke: the theatricality of the scene evokes Sedgwick’s reading of Tomkins on shame, and if we recall Tomkins’ formulation of shame as always referencing social death, Mme De Vercellis’ joke turns the shame of the public fart into an ironic proclamation both on the limited powers of death and on the limited powers of a woman’s mangled body in the face of death.⁴⁸ Her ‘last last words’, that she speaks because of her fart, her surviving gloss, mortifies her back into life and makes her burn up in shame. Having the constitution that makes her eligible for claiming the status of a philosopher woman, she is composed enough in her decomposition to make a joke about the staged death of the speaking body of shame as it defers one death with another, thereby providing the comedic relief her audience badly needs after the fart while also allowing her to finally slip away.

In this second example illustrating the resonance between Sedgwick’s reading of Tomkins and Derrida’s reading of de Man, conventional distinctions of life and death are rendered unstable in at least two ways: the loss of the guarantee positing the hierarchy of priority between the literal and metaphorical use of life and death (the notion that a ‘biological’ sense is somehow prior to ‘social’ or ‘psychic’ senses) permeates the loss of the guarantee of distinguishing once and for all between life and death. We may recall that for Tomkins the significance of the affect of shame is articulated precisely along the same distinction between biological and social life: shame is an affect of both biological and social survival whose double performativity amplifies the sense of one’s own body proper in a crisis of this survival.

I am not suggesting that Sedgwick's reading of Tomkins, when combined with Derrida's reading of de Man, performs the deconstruction of materiality we find in the wake of de Man's work. What Derrida called de Man's 'material' signature hinging on 'figures of dismemberment, fragmentation, mutilation, and "material disarticulation"' in fact 'resists ... matter as substantial and organic totality'.⁴⁹ De Man's consistent attention to the irreducible tension between the cognitive-figural and the performative aspects of language (I am here referring to the points summarized by Miller and Warminski) I think animates as well as deconstructs (or resists) Tomkins' conception of shame. It animates it to the extent that even in the ideal case of unifying shame, the feeling of a monistic body is produced only through the disarticulation between external performance and internal performativity. And it resists this conception of shame to the extent that Tomkins grounded his philosophical system of affects in the vision of a scientifically realist biological human essence. What I hope to have shown is that the resonances between performative shame in Sedgwick's Tomkins and the embodied figures of mutilation in Derrida's de Man, as they share a textual attention to undermining the discourse of organicist totalization via tropes of survival, death and theatricality, open a door to invite the reading of Paul de Man's work in our discussions of embodied affectivity. It is precisely because Derrida's 'Typewriter Ribbon' provides a reading of de Man's work that features the same lexicon of affect, the body, life and machinic as my opening quotes from affect theory that it is relevant for the thought of affect. The relevance seems to be this: resisting what I conceived of as the vitalist rhetoric of affect (using the vocabulary of thriving life, biology and matter, even when referencing the postbiological and the immaterial), deconstructive readings in the wake of de Man's work towards discussions of materiality that can never take 'matter' for granted, especially not as an extra-linguistic phenomenon, or even as a composite name for extra-linguistic phenomena.

Notes

¹ In his inaugural "The Autonomy of Affect," Massumi cites a series of experiments on children's autonomic nervous responses to various films. Silvan Tomkins considers affect as part of our biological constitution and similarly invokes neurology as justification.

² Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers."

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7–8. For an influential example of feminist new materialism, see the work of Karen Barad, for instance her "Posthumanist Performativity." For a specific discussion on the role of deconstruction in affect theory, see Leys, *The Ascent to Affect*, 312, n.11.

⁵ Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon."

⁶ I am thankful for the careful comments from Thomas Clément Mercier and Adam R. Rosenthal on drafts of this article.

⁷ Papoulias and Callard, "Biology's Gift," 46–47.

⁸ Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁰ Clough, "The Affective Turn," 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹² For instance they both cite Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan's work on machinic evolution and Eugene Thacker's work on biology as technology. See Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies*, 6, Clough, "The Affective Turn," 10, 11.

¹³ See Derrida, "Biodegradables."

¹⁴ Sedgwick discussed Tomkins' work in several of her texts from the beginning of the 1990s. See for instance "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity."

¹⁵ Frank and Wilson, "Like-Minded," 870–877.

¹⁶ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 7.

¹⁷ Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 363.

¹⁸ Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity," 38.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7.
²⁰ Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, 359.
²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid., 361.
²³ Ibid., 369.
²⁴ Miller, "Paul de Man as Allergen."
²⁵ Ibid., 192.
²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid., 186.
²⁸ Ibid., 195.
²⁹ Ibid., 188.
³⁰ Warminski, "Allegories of Reference," 23.
³¹ Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon," 281; 350.
³² Warminski, "Machinal Effects."
³³ It is of course not that the work of Derrida and de Man has never been read with an eye for affect. See Terada, *Feeling in Theory*, especially chapters 2 and 4. In Terada's discussions of de Man's texts, de Man is emphasized as a thinker of affect and emotion for whom emotions are rhetorical structures.
³⁴ de Man, "Excuses (*Confessions*)," 281.
³⁵ Ibid., 301.
³⁶ Ibid., 286.
³⁷ Warminski, "Machinal Effects," 194–5.
³⁸ Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon," 312.
³⁹ I'm afraid this brief passage does not really do justice to the detailed affinities between de Man's attentiveness to Rousseau's shame and Tomkins' account of shame. Let me offer here one quote from "Excuses" to illustrate these rich connections: 'Rousseau excuses himself from

his gratuitous viciousness by identifying his inner feeling as shame about himself rather than any hostility towards his victim: "... the presence of so many people was stronger than my repentance. I hardly feared punishment, my only fear was shame; but I feared shame more than death, more than the crime, more than anything in the world. I wished I could have sunk and stifled myself in the center of the earth: unconquerable shame was stronger than anything else, shame alone caused my impudence and the more guilty I became, the more the terror of admitting my guilt made me fearless.'" 283.

⁴⁰ Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon," 312.

⁴¹ Ibid., 319.

⁴² Ibid., 350.

⁴³ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 299.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ As is well known, Rousseau ends his account in the *Confessions* with the firm resolution or wish to never discuss this disgraceful story again, only to discuss it again in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. De Man argues that this compulsion to never end the confession is not merely psychological but is a symptom of the machinic rhetoricity of language.

⁴⁸ I am grateful to Thomas Clément Mercier for the formulation of part of this irony.

⁴⁹ Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon," 312 and 319, respectively.

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