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Feeling the archives: Domestic queer space and the vitality affects

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ABSTRACT

This essay is concerned with the archived correspondence between two gay men, Jack Strouss and Bill Wilson, in Atlanta, Georgia (southeastern U.S.) in the 1950s. Its focus is mostly on one letter that describes a social triad in a domestic space and the author's enthusiasm about it. The attunement of vitality affects creates a sense of belonging for Bill, and this particular domestic space enables a present moment of queer intersubjectivity. Archival practices are informed by such moments, and, in fact, practice might aim at affect attunement across spheres of human activity. If the past holds untapped potential for the present, our practices might seek to dwell on some of these past moments. This is the work of the everyday, low-level affects, and weak theory.

1. Practices, forms, approaches

In 2005, the Atlanta History Center mounted the historical exhibit *The Unspoken Past*: *Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History*, *1940-1970*. The exhibit was the culmination and presentation of an archival social history project concerned with lesbian and gay history and culture in and around Atlanta, Georgia, which had some specific aims. As lesbian and gay archives are generally more robust after the New York City Stonewall riots in 1969—often referred to as a marker of gay civil rights in the U.S.—the project focused specifically on life before the civil rights movement proper. Additionally, while there were obvious markers of injustice and discrimination, the exhibit presented a larger story in which oral histories and visual culture artifacts gave witness to hardy social networks around the city and region. This meant creating a record of publications, as well as a history of bars and clubs that ranged from accommodating gays and lesbians along with other populations to lounges with socialized mechanisms meant to hide drag performers from law enforcement officials. Finally, and importantly, domestic spaces were explored as accommodating well-known parties and long-standing social clubs. In sum, the exhibit was less concerned with monolithic statements about the populations in question and more invested in places and social networks that spoke to lived experience in all of its complications and contradictions.

My original work with the collection began as one of several curators of oral histories for the 2005 project. Over the past six years, however, my archival work has shifted from the collection of oral histories to interest in my own relationship with the archives and how such collections can be put to public work. The scope of my research has been narrow, initially focusing almost exclusively on one relationship from the Jack Strouss collection, that between Jack Strouss and Bill Wilson in the 1950s. In relation to some of the image files from other collections in the archive on clubs and drag performers, it is, in all, a quiet collection. The Jack Strouss collection documents the life of one gay man over several decades of immense social change, and since he is not a famous man, his story is not yet fixed or overly determined. Jack and Bill's correspondence and Jack's stories of Bill from his oral history caught my attention in particular because they are about negotiating a gay relationship in a particular time and the kinds of spaces that made this possible—mostly, Jack's domestic space.

Theories of affect and emotion have become an important part of this work, not only because there is feeling expressed between my archival subjects. It also applies to my own relation to the oral histories and the various forms my archival practice has begun to take. Psychologist Silvan Tomkins, who made the radical case that the affect system is the primary motivational system in human beings, believed the affects co-assemble in the very process of cognition itself (Tomkins, 1995:34). He describes:

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> There is a real question whether anyone may fully grasp the nature of any object when that object has not been perceived, wished for, missed, and thought about in love and in hate, in excitement and in apathy, in distress and in joy. This is as true of our relationship of nature, as with the artifacts created by man, as with other human beings and with the collectivities which he both inherits and transforms. There are many ways of "knowing" anything (Tomkins, 1995:55).

Affect and emotion, then, might have legitimate bearing on modes of knowing. Further, we can also be critical about methods that claim objectivity. In their book *Objectivity*, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison explore scientific atlas images as a way of historicizing objectivity through particular epistemological shifts. Early in the work, they state: "To be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower—knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving. Objectivity is blind sight, seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence" (Daston and Galison, 2007:17). The project of description, historicization, and critique of dominant modes of establishing knowledge might be furthered by making use of less traditional academic practices, practices that have more productive links to the modes of knowledge under investigation. If I am interested in how domestic space inflected particular, historically located relations, for example, instead of revealing some kind of new evidence about the time, place, or subject, I might coordinate my activity with the past and future as simultaneous spheres of activity (Schatzki, 2009:37). In this case, it makes sense to pay particular attention to the dynamics of interaffectivity and intersubjectivity—processes involved in my relation to the archives that enable me to leverage the lived experience of gay men in domestic space in the 1950s. Or in Walter Benjamin's words: "to ignite the explosive potential of the past" (Benjamin, 2002:392). We can also follow Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank in their Silvan Tomkins reader, *Shame and Its Sisters*:

> What was it possible to think or do at a certain moment of the past, that it no longer is? And how are those possibilities to be found, unfolded, allowed to move and draw air and seek new voices and uses, in the very different disciplinary ecology of even a few decades' distance (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995:23)?

2. The literature: Tomkins and Stern

When discussing affect, especially in interdisciplinary contexts, it always seems helpful to point to some of the theoretical origins of our thinking. My basic understanding of the affects and the affect system is derived from Silvan Tomkins. In establishing his theory of the affect system, his first order of business is a corrective that tends to moments where affects are undifferentiated and collapsed into the drives. This is an important and radical departure, since Tomkins states that the affect system, not the drive system, is the primary system of motivation. According to his theory, the human affect system has a high degree of freedom. This freedom he establishes as a kind of "combinatorial capacity," or the ability of the affects to attach to a variety of components at different times and to different degrees (Tomkins, 1995:45). The independence of the affect system from other systems and assemblies is paramount to humans' ability to respond with less immediacy and more complexity.

Tomkins creates a list of eight primary, innate affects (what Stern will call "categorical affects," interest-excitement or distress-anguish, for example). Importantly, the components of his system are neither binary (determined) nor infinite (utopian) (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 15). His list also names the affects twice: in their mildest and most extreme forms, with addenda of their accompanying facial instantiations. This will have purchase in Stern's concept of cross-modal "affect attunement" and its involvement in ideas of intersubjectivity and interaffectivity—relevant to this discussion of both theory and praxis. Tomkins' own writing, in fact, is often quite evocative of the respective affect under discussion, an example of putting the affects to critical work. There is, then, at times a real affect exchange between Tomkins's text and its readers. In *Shame and Its Sisters*, Sedgwick and Frank ask: "What does it mean to fall in love with a writer?" And they become interested "to show how perfectly Tomkins understands *us*," a signal of not only interaffectivity, but a kind of textual intersubjectivity (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995:23—original emphasis).

Affect in writing is an important dimension of documents under investigation, whether in the archives or in other realms of research. And this kind of trafficking has particular relevance in establishing relation. In *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, Daniel Stern addresses the intersubjective process between mother and infant, as well as the translation of perceptual qualities into vitality affects. When discussing intersubjectivity, he addresses the issue of "perceptual unity—how we come to know that something seen, heard, and touched may in fact be the same thing" (Stern, 2000:47). The idea of cross-modality means that something touched can be recognized later when only visually perceived. This is an important concept in affect attunement. Repeating a facial gesture you have seen, or reproducing a sound you have heard is only a matter of mimicry. Reflecting things across modes—for example making a face or visual expression that correlates to a sound or verbal statement—communicates the comprehension of affect and replies with an expression of a shared or corresponding internal state (Stern, 2000:47–49). This communication becomes more complex when intensity, time, and shape of expression depart from the initial behavior in ways that further form the collaborative meaning at hand (Stern, 2000:153). Because cross-modal communication involves a kind of progression from imitation to metaphor, it is essential to the eventual use of symbol and language.

Stern differentiates between intersubjectivity and interaffectivity. The former is concerned with intention and categorically includes the latter. Interaffectivity, however, is concerned with processes that tend to the qualities of feeling. Affect attunement is generally felt as an unbroken flow, and, therefore, categorical affects such as joy or anger take part in attunement when they occur, but in their absence, the vitality affects sustain an ongoing sense of interaffectivity. Affect attunement can then build intersubjectivity.

In Stern's more recent work, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*, he addresses the present moment, an aspect of time that is generally overlooked in the psychoanalytic process. The problems of dealing with the *now* include its ubiquity and how it is defined (in chunks of three to 5 s, on average). In the end, Stern calls it a *process unit*, comparing it to a musical phrase with temporal and intensity characteristics that can be mapped on two axes, respectively. Stern states: "These temporal contours of stimulations [everything we do, see, feel, and hear] play upon and within our nervous system and are transposed into contours of feeling in us" (64). These are the vitality affects, and they help structure these process units that together constitute our lived experience.

The point of the literature review is, of course, to be explicit about my references and how I am using vocabularies from particular theories of affect. But the systems themselves have more to offer than rubrics through which we might read particular kinds of affect and emotion. More to the point, if we can rationally describe affect, for example, as legitimately co-assembled with knowledge production, we might then also engage in hybrid forms

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of scholarship that take seriously a kind of critical interaffectivity in our practices with our subjects and our texts. I suggest, then, that a productive interaffective relationship can exist through archival practices when we conceive of the past, present, and future as co-terminal periods of time or simultaneous features of human activity (Schatzki, 2009:37).

3. In the archives

Jack Strouss and Bill Wilson's affair lasted for nearly three years in Atlanta in the early 1950s. Bill would let himself in to Jack's terrace apartment around the back of 539 Elmwood Drive in Midtown during late nights and very early hours of the morning. As he had little independence from his family and since he kept this relationship a secret from them, he was rarely able to negotiate significant amounts of time with Jack, a fact that seems to have instigated wide ranging emotions in his correspondence, from ecstasy to anguish.

In a letter from July 30, 1952, Bill describes his encounter with a different kind of affect. He reflects on surprising Jack one morning over breakfast:

> My dearest Jackie-
> I have thought so much about this morning's visit to your oasis of calm and culture that I can do nothing else but take pen in hand and describe my innate feelings. You know how sensitive I am—or perhaps a false and deceptive veneer hides that at times. Nonetheless I am extremely sensitive and so the tranquil domesticity of yours and Roy's cozy little apartment struck a very sensitive spot—in my heart, I suppose. Here seemed presented idyllic happiness and peace of mind. I believe the early morning is perhaps the best possible time to judge a person's character. Of course, a mission of curiosity or nosiness was furthest from my mind this a.m. when I called on you, but nevertheless I felt the impact of your existence….
> …as I ascended the little wooden stairs to your apartment, almost at once I was transformed into another being in a far different more wonderful environment. The tasty aroma of fresh and delicious coffee permeated the very air, and for the first time in my life I passionately hungered for its fragrant bouquet. And then I heard the glorious music, rolling, pealing out from the recesses of the sweet, new little world into which I was venturing, meeting me—beckoning me inward. I tapped lightly and almost instantly Puddy sprang through the doorway as if to herald my arrival with a darling bit of feline pomp. It was too cute for words. And then, soon on Puddy's heels came—love. Love in a tall, mature, sensitive form looking with inquisitive puzzlement at such an early caller. But the easy grin came and with it a feeling for me of—well, "belonging." And I feel I did belong. From the first moment I entered and was clasped into the eager warmth of this love I felt safe and secure and ridiculously happy. I wanted to sing. It is fortunate for all concerned I do not so easily give vent to momentary impulse.
> The warmth of your embrace and your kiss were, as ever, undenying, fulfilling.
> The rhythmic ease of the room and the pleasant air of happiness intoxicated me I believe.
> It made me want to toss off my shoes and sox [sic] and patter about barefoot as Roy was doing. It made me want to help to be domestic, to be included in the warm atmosphere. The food was marvelous. It was cooked well, but most of all those who served it imparted a flavor, a "touch," that cannot be ascertained in a recipe book. I was almost too excited to eat… (Wilson July 30, 1952:1–3).

What do we make of Bill's excitement over the discovery of such things as "pattering about barefoot" and making breakfast? For both Tomkins and Stern, our experiences are saturated with affect. The affects are central to motivation and perception. They enable our social relations, as well as our relations to the everyday world and the spaces we inhabit. As stimulus is translated into feeling, these contours, or forms of feeling, bracket our present moments into segments of consciousness. The everyday and ongoing contours of feeling described in the letter are the vitality affects.

Stern describes his focus on vitality affects and the present moment as "microanalytic" (Stern, 2004:21). Coincidentally, he uses case studies in which his subjects describe their memory of breakfast earlier that morning, a common, even mundane, routine. The analysis of these unfolding narratives, nevertheless, reveals individual techniques and styles for building meaning by way of what comes into consciousness. These everyday dramas are generally sparked by a small problem or unexpected challenge and evoke responses that reveal personal styles and coping mechanisms. In the context of microanalysis, it is amazing what happens to us in short periods of time (Stern, 2004:11).

Microdramas can refer to such things as being out of butter or not spilling orange juice, as in some of Stern's case studies. While these things can reveal ongoing personal conflicts, intersubjectivity specifically refers to these mechanisms at work when trafficking such affects with other subjects. The translation of the everyday behavior of others into feelings in ourselves is precisely the trafficking of vitality affects. Such affect exchange is a vital part of knowing anything: objects, individuals, or collectivities.

There are many details in Bill's letter that provide multiple opportunities for perceptual unity. "The tasty aroma of fresh and delicious coffee…the glorious music…a darling bit of feline pomp…the easy grin": all of these things result in a feeling of belonging for Bill (Wilson, 1952). He felt "safe and secure and ridiculously happy" so that he "wanted to sing" (Wilson, 1952). Recently in the pages of this journal, Carey-Ann Morrison discussed touch in the context of heterosexual domesticity. She expanded the definition of touch from strictly cutaneous (skin touch) to multisensory, including touch, sight, smell, sound, and taste. This kind of touch is being described here as an interaffective activity that creates emotional relationships and can build knowledge. Morrison notes this interpersonal dynamic "plays an under-recognized role in sexuality and space scholarship" (Morrison, in press at this writing).

Space is an important feature of interaffectivity since the dynamics of different spheres and subjectivities inform one another. While Jack's terrace apartment on Elmwood Drive is certainly a domestic space, we might be more specific, for domestic spaces are constituted by any number of familial and ideological structures. In his 2005 oral history, Jack Strouss describes an aunt moving into the house on Elmwood: "…she was on the third floor. And the family was in the middle, and I was on the bottom. We had a layer cake house" (Strouss, 2005:59). When Jack returned from World War II, he had to wait for a young soldier who had returned before him to move out before occupying the terrace apartment. Various aunts at different times during the depression also occupied the two apartments when Jack was younger. While Jack's parents occupied the main floor that fronted the street, the third floor and terrace apartments on the rear of the house accommodated the many other domestic configurations influenced by economies, warfare, gender, sexualities, age, and various marital and familial bonds. At any rate, the layer cake together apparently accommodated both normative and fringe domesticities.

The space of Jack's garden apartment specifically played a role in their relations. In his oral history, Jack describes:

> …most of the visits he would be on the way back from Augusta and it would be 2 or 3 in the morning and I would awaken hearing the key, cause I could, living down by myself like that I

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> was aware of any unusual noises and he would turn the key and slip in, and I would pretend to be asleep, he'd stand by the bed, you know, for a minute, then he'd lean over and kiss me. And I would wake up, and I was just so pleased, it was just like something out of a novel… (Strouss, 2005:46–47).

Jack enjoys Bill's stealing in at such hours through his performance of being woken up. The repetition of this scene creates a persistent memory for Jack, as he refers to it a few times in the course of his oral history. And Bill builds impressions around the space, as well. One afternoon, in a mad dash, Bill drops off a portrait of himself for Jack. In a letter of that evening, he comments on the piano he loves, the portrait of Jack, and petting Puddy, all ways of touching the place in Morrison's expanded sense. He describes: "My heart ached for you as I stepped into your sweet, cool room…" (Wilson August 8, 1952:1). It strikes me that Bill's arrival and entrance into Jack's apartment—his literal crossing of the threshold—is a point of return for both of them. Writing to Jack after his move to California, Bill describes walking home from work in the evenings:

> It is very quiet, the moon is up, no traffic, and I can think. Think especially of that same moon over a certain house in Atlanta, bathing the bedroom of a sweet doll whom I love so much. May be he's asleep, but I can imagine creeping into the place I know so well and love so well and slipping over to the bed and putting my cold nose against the warmth of his neck, and nuzzling him (Wilson January 24, 1955:1).

The garden apartment in Atlanta functions in many ways as a locus of memory by way of its emotional markings (Yates, 1966:10). In fact, Ann Cvetkovich has posited memory as historical resource in the absence of more official forms of documentation (Cvetkovich, 2003:8). Whereas Jack has access to his correspondence with Bill, in a letter from 1952, Bill writes: "I know I will receive another letter from you tomorrow and I will cherish it. Of course, I really must confess I am going to destroy your letters after they have become firmly fixed in my mind for obvious reasons. Traveling so much I could have an accident and then the letters would be found. Don't you agree" (Wilson June 11, 1952:3)? For Cvetkovich, cultural spaces can be built around such things as sex and feeling. Indeed, the garden apartment on Elmwood Drive becomes a kind of cultural space to which they both can return, re-imagining Bill's discreet arrivals in the middle of the night.

Bill has an idea of place making with Jack that is clearly distinct from the "home" he shares with his family. After shopping for a house with his parents one day, Bill writes to Jack: "Oh, it would be sweet enough if you and I were living there, cause we would make it a doll house, and redecorate it with much originality—and fill it with our tender love. But they have some wacky ideas about fixing it up and I hate them and the place" (Wilson August 21, 1952:1–2). In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sarah Ahmed examines the spatial dimensions of orientation. Ahmed also deals with displacement and coming to "feel at home," or how we negotiate the familiar and unfamiliar (Ahmed, 2006:7). She states: "After all, homes are the effects of the histories of arrival" (Ahmed, 2006:9). The series of Bill's arrivals to Jack's apartment certainly seem to emerge as an organizing principle for the afterlives of this relationship. In the letter describing Bill's arrival during breakfast, the whole scene borders on becoming almost melodic—an interesting effect in light of Stern's description of the present moment as musical phrases with temporal and intensity characteristics.

Instead of singing, as Bill threatens at the end of the letter, he wrote the description of his experience, cross-modally inscribing for Jack, and now us, evidence of his attunement with Roy and Jack. He closes the letter thus:

> Ah, what a wonderful time I had this morning, Jackie, and how I longed to have you with me on the trip—and long for you tonight. But I shall return about Friday if all is well. Of course, you'll know at once when I have arrived.
> Puddy-cat is so sweet—takes after his (her-its!!) master, I'm sure.
> My warmest regards to Roy and Puddy and a goodnight kiss of my own—
> Love,
> B. (Wilson July 30, 1952:6)

In his oral history, Jack describes his relationships with Bill and later Roy as exclusive and sequential, and yet the two appear in this scene together. Bill's letter, however, registers no conflict nor gives any sign that the breakfast with Jack and Roy disrupted Jack's relationship with either of them, at least from Bill's perspective. He sends Roy his "warmest regards" just after telling Jack to expect him again on Friday. There were either no hard feelings, or Bill's response was meant to contain them. In any case, the overlapping relationships create a triad, however briefly, and while Jack's relationship with each of these men are presented independently in the space of the archival collection and its oral history, the domestic space certainly accommodated the social dynamics of this scene.

Jack describes his relationship with Roy as "a very nice relationship, but it was not one of those things that I was thinking about making a life time sort of commitment about, 'cause he was still so young" (Strouss, 2005:54–55). They were friends until Roy's death, but the relationship lasted for only two years, overlapping the time of Bill's letter to Jack in 1952. Jack was in his early thirties at the time and while Bill Wilson holds a special place in Jack's memories, Bill was closer to Roy's age, that is, around 20 years old. There is no evidence to suggest that this domestic sphere pursued the same imperatives that structured, say, the main level of the layer cake. The fluidity of relations seems to suggest that matters of sex and partnership were related, though non-exclusive.

The queerness of this domestic scene is not simply that it is homosexual, nor even that it is a triad. I refer to David Halperin's statement of the queer as "an empty placeholder for an identity that is still in progress and has as yet to be fully realized" (Halperin, 1995:112–113). The affects being trafficked here were about queer belonging, an attachment not bracketed by lines of progress (marriage, then children). Neither the time of this breakfast, a mid-week morning, nor the times Bill snuck into the terrace apartment during the late night or early morning hours, reflect social relations that were specifically synchronized with a productive capitalist time. It may be that the space of the terrace apartment for this trio was for the processes of affect, attachment, and intersubjectivities simply, with no prescribed goal or distant horizon.

The memory of breakfast is emblematic of his other letters at this time. His memories of Jack, and here his memory of his breakfast with Jack and Roy, enable him access to the feelings on which these attachments are based. And this attachment may have had wide ranging implication. Or as Stern puts it, "The moment enters a special form of consciousness and is encoded in memory. And importantly, it rewrites the past. Changes in psychotherapy (or any relationship) occur by way of these nonlinear leaps in the ways-of-being-with-another" (Stern, 2004:22). Similarly, textual encounters can enable researchers to see past sweeping historical generalizations by way of the dynamics that structure social feeling. The trafficking of positive emotions with this archival moment conflict in important ways to flat historical narratives of oppression that tend to ensure proceeding narratives about heady days of liberation. When these social spaces can be shared across time as brackets of human activity, our practices in the present expose these important conflicts in interpretation. Ted Schatzki even

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suggests that "interowoven timespaces are fundamental to human society" (Schatzki, 2009:36).

I take Schatzki's idea of interweaving timespaces as a way of inhabiting 539 Elmwood Drive as a cultural space and placeholder. If Bill and Jack have constructed the threshold of the apartment as a functioning imaginary, it is this threshold that the letter about breakfast enables me to cross. In discussing infant-peer trios in early childhood development, Ben S. Bradley posits: "Thirdness, the capacity to see a relationship between two other entities…is the capacity which is necessary for participation in culture (Bradley, 2010: 205). The Jack-Bill-Roy triad creates a third subjective position in the space that breaks the dyad and mobilizes the history of Bill and Jack toward an actual sociality. Seeing the relation between others and having a kind of relation with them, as well, is precisely the kind of shared social space of temporal weaving.

It is not until I cross the threshold that Bill and Jack's desire, being together, and absence become a matter of feeling and touching that can create a kind of non-objective knowledge production about the possibilities for past social relations in the present moment. This is, of course, a return to Walter Benjamin's notion of exploding past potential. Benjamin's resistance to a progressive history is a crucial point. Progressive history actually represses past potential. Why should we excavate a time when Bill hid his love for Jack in a garden apartment in Midtown Atlanta when we now have Pride festivals and gays and lesbians serving openly in the military? I would suggest that while public and private spaces of the 1950s are different in many ways from those of the early twenty first century, their treatment in the past might yet hold useful strategies, attitudes, and feelings for us. If the moment of microhistory here centers around a kind of queer homecoming, how do our own historically situated affects turn on this very domestic threshold? On the other side of a vast campaign of visibility, I am still taken with pattering about sock-footed—a politics of filling our spaces with the trafficking of vitality affects that does little more than maintain connection and achieve nuance.

4. Warm atmospheres and innate feelings

Ben Anderson's recent work on affective atmospheres in this journal sheds some productive light on the cumulative vitality affects that emerge from the everyday. He describes atmosphere in everyday speech and esthetic discourse as the "transpersonal or prepersonal intensities that emerge as bodies affect one another" (Anderson, 2009:78). There is an uncertainty surrounding affective atmospheres since they belong to both the subject and object. Atmospheres are thus in a state of constant negotiation, not unlike the continual trafficking of vitality affects that can give rise to various intersubjectivities. As Stern suggests that cross-modal communication involves a movement from imitation to metaphor, Anderson's citation of Dufrenne eloquently brackets such moments as "qualities of an expressed world which is a prelude to knowledge" (Anderson, 2009:79). If we take Bill Wilson's "warm atmosphere" as a subject of our research, our practices become less concerned with pinning down historical evidence, per se, and more invested in negotiating the qualities of this expressed world ourselves, a world in which affects belong to both the subjects and objects of our research.

In looking at this moment of breakfast and some of its immediate contexts, my goal is not simply to make claims about gay men in the southeastern U.S. in the 1950s. I also do not aim to make statements on historically located domestic space in general or to interpret an entire place or time based on one moment. The goal of the work is not to collect enough moments to make some case, though this is also a worthy project. Micronarratives and localized spaces may simply be the proper subjects of a non-totalizing project, a space for nothing more than textual intersubjectivity, a placeholder for a practice as yet to be fully realized, though inhabited nonetheless.

Art historian David Deitcher, who has done extensive work with found photographs of mostly unidentified men (collected in *Dear Friends*: *American Photographs of Men Together*, *1840–1918*), has factored in his emotional reactions to such visual culture artifacts as an important and critical aspect to his methodology. In his essay "Looking for a Photograph, Looking for a History," he makes a case for his own feelings within his archival practice, writing: "Audre Lorde once wrote, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' Similarly, queer men and women are justified in maintaining a certain skepticism regarding the historian's positivistic and empirical method, and may therefore be inclined to attend to the quirks of individual and collective appetites and enthusiasms, permitting them to guide archival research" (Deitcher, 1998, 34). According to Deitcher, uncertainty is no reason to take evidence lightly.

A friend and archivist was responsible for much of the work for *The Unspoken Past* project at the Atlanta History Center. He often referred to the archival collections as "hot." When accommodating my own work in the archives, we met each other's enthusiasm and excitement about the material. He told me a story one day of a dream Jack Strouss had about Bill after their correspondence had ceased. It was a visitation of sorts, an imagined moment of Bill's arrival. I spent the better part of an afternoon combing through the Strouss collection, which was not as large as it is now. I found an unpublished, melodramatic manuscript titled *September Venus* written by Bill and dedicated to Jack. I quickly learned that when dealing with the kind of volume of materials archivists are entrusted with, they often do not have the luxury of dwelling among all of the specific objects, papers, and pictures that researches can sometimes manage.

I have pointed out that Jack and Bill's correspondence dwelled on his arrival to the garden apartment. What I have not explicitly disclosed is that I have also dwelled on these homecomings for over six years now. There may have been more productive uses of my time, and I have been instructed on many occasions to expand my archival reach or to at least put some of these stories into larger contexts. Some of my work does this, of course, but my research methods have included dwelling in the past with these two men and trying to understand how they missed each other and what it was like for each of them to experience Bill's infrequent, but meaningful visits. By lingering on this threshold with the subjects of my research, I have multiplied the positions Bill, Jack, and I hold in relation to one another. I can still have an occasional lunch with Jack, but Bill I had to seek out, finding a script of his in the Agnes Moorehead Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society and finally his panel on the AIDS Memorial Quilt along with a letter about his life from the man who became his life partner. Some of us have been more elusive than others—Jack's confused chronology concerning Bill and Roy, for instance, or my unsettling (for me) entry into the archives by way of Jack's addendum to his original story. As with all good paths of research, the closer I look, the more complicated and textured it always becomes. But the effort has not exactly been to straighten out the wrinkles, though a certain amount of detective work was required, but rather to tend to the moments when our positions changed in relation to one another. In this way, I was never trying to pin down Jack or Bill, but rather to stay curious about how knowledge changes with our changing relationships to one another.

In Silvan Tomkins's work he refers to strong theory and to weak theory. A strong affect theory is one that dominates a personal script, whereas a weak affect theory is effective precisely because it does not dominate a person's strategies. Quoting Tyler Curtain, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has defined weak theory as "little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain" (Sedgwick, 2003:145). That is, weak theories are local, even

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theories of the everyday. Dealing with oral histories that document ordinary lives, there is a sense in which trafficking low-level affect over things like breakfast is weak theory, indeed. If the intimate range of weak theory prevents its wide scale application, it at least avoids obtuse and sometimes harmful generalizations. Further, if we can indeed understand the past, present, and future as simultaneous spheres of human activity, localizing these moments means we can make gestures of attunement (or disruption, as the case may be) rather than historical sweeps.

While the source material is historical, in many ways the project is not. We only know the past by way of confronting its residue in the present—a kind of affect trafficking with fragments of history. Archived letters may be taken as inscribed behavior, then translated into vitality affects in the researcher, and for Tomkins this would be a kind of knowing. These affects obviously cannot be attuned with their author except in imagination—also a worthy project—since the historical subject no longer has access to the contingencies of the present moment. The affective attunement, therefore, takes place in contemporary spaces with others in the present, even in textual spaces with one's readers. It is, after all, the present moment in which we continually do the work of the past and the future. Stern says, "All recontextualizations change the phenomena, but they do not create them. And that is the essential point. A coherent experience was grasped during the present moment, even though that experience might have multiple fates" (Stern, 2004:30). And so like Bill, I would say: "I have thought so much about this morning's visit to your oasis of calm and culture that I can do nothing else but take pen in hand and describe my innate feelings" (Wilson, 1952).

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