



DEPRESSION

a public feeling

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For Gretchen

Twenty years isn't much, you know I want
two hundred more . . .

Introduction

PUBLIC FEELINGS: A COLLECTIVE PROJECT

A key inspiration for this book's desire to think about depression as a cultural and social phenomenon rather than a medical disease has been my collaborative engagement with other scholars under the rubric of Public Feelings. Begun in 2001 both nationally and at the University of Texas, our investigation has coincided with and operated in the shadow of September 11 and its ongoing consequences—a sentimental takeover of 9/11 to underwrite militarism, war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush's reelection, and the list goes on. Rather than analyzing the geopolitical underpinnings of these developments, we've been more interested in their emotional dynamics. What makes it possible for people to vote for Bush or to assent to war, and how do these political decisions operate within the context of daily lives that are pervaded by a combination of anxiety and numbness? How can we, as intellectuals and activists, acknowledge our own political disappointments and failures in a way that can be enabling? Where might hope be possible? Those questions stem from the experience of what one of our cells, Feel Tank Chicago, has called "political depression," the sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better.

Our meetings, whether public or among ourselves, are as likely to start with a mood as an idea; at one of our national gatherings, for example, many of us admitted to feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by our professional obligations, and we considered what kinds of projects might emerge out of those conditions and how to produce scholarship not timed to the rhythms and genres of conferences, edited collections, and books.¹ In a public event at the University of Texas shortly after the U.S. invaded Iraq, the dominant response was one of incredulity, a seemingly low-grade or normalized version of the epistemic shock that is said to accompany trauma. At another public UT event to dis-

cuss reactions to Hurricane Katrina's devastations, many participants described a sense of divided attention as the movement back and forth between the everyday business of the semester's beginning and the urgency of the disaster created a split focus that also constitutes the lived experience of race and class divisions. Although *Public Feelings* was forged out of the crucible of the long Bush years, its style and substance are no less relevant to the uncertain record of the Obama presidency. Hope and despair remain entwined as we track the ongoing rhythms of war (in and out of Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan), financial meltdown, Arab springs, Occupy movements, and assaults on the university. A political analysis of depression might advocate revolution and regime change over pills, but in the world of *Public Feelings* there are no magic bullet solutions, whether medical or political, just the slow steady work of resilient survival, utopian dreaming, and other affective tools for transformation.

In finding public forums for everyday feelings, including negative feelings that can seem so debilitating, so far from hopefulness about the future or activism, the aim is to generate new ways of thinking about agency. The concept of political depression is not, it should be emphasized, meant to be wholly depressing; indeed, *Feel Tank* has operated with the camp humor one might expect from a group of seasoned queer activists, organizing an International Day of the Politically Depressed in which participants were invited to show up in their bathrobes to indicate their fatigue with traditional forms of protest and distributing T-shirts and refrigerator magnets carrying the slogan "Depressed? It Might Be Political!"² The goal is to depathologize negative feelings so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis. This is not, however, to suggest that depression is thereby converted into a positive experience; it retains its associations with inertia and despair, if not apathy and indifference, but these feelings, moods, and sensibilities become sites of publicity and community formation. One of the larger goals for *Public Feelings* is to generate the affective foundation of hope that is necessary for political action; hence the turn to utopia in much recent work related to its projects, but a utopia, borrowing from Avery Gordon's analysis of Toni Cade Bambara, for example, that is grounded in the here and now, in the recognition of the possibilities and powers that we have at our immediate disposal.³ It's a search for utopia that doesn't make a simple distinction between

good and bad feelings or assume that good politics can only emerge from good feelings; feeling bad might, in fact, be the ground for transformation. Thus, although this book is about depression, it's also about hope and even happiness, about how to live a better life by embracing rather than glossing over bad feelings. (In addition to drawing inspiration from the memoir, it also borrows from other manuals for better living, ranging from the philosophical treatise to the self-help book.) It asks how it might be possible to tarry with the negative as part of daily practice, cultural production, and political activism.

The Affective Turn

Public Feelings projects can be seen as one form of what is being called the affective turn in cultural criticism, which has not only made emotion, feeling, and affect (and their differences) the object of scholarly inquiry but has also inspired new ways of doing criticism.⁴ The affective turn is evident in many different areas of inquiry: cultural memory and public cultures that emerge in response to histories of trauma; the role of emotions such as fear and sentimentality in American political life and nationalist politics; the production of compassion and sympathy in human rights discourses and other forms of liberal representation of social issues and problems; discussions of the politics of negative affects, such as melancholy and shame, inspired in particular by queer theory's critique of the normal; new forms of historical inquiry, such as queer temporalities, that emphasize the affective relations between past and present; the turn to memoir and the personal in criticism as a sign of either the exhaustion of theory or its renewed life; the ongoing legacy of identity politics as another inspiration for the turn to the personal; continuing efforts to rethink psychoanalytic paradigms and the relation between the psychic and the social; the persistent influence of Foucauldian notions of biopower to explain the politics of subject formation and new forms of governmentality; histories of intimacy, domesticity, and private life; the cultural politics of everyday life; histories and theories of sensation and touch informed by phenomenology and cultural geography.⁵ Although each of these projects has its own specificities and reference points, their collective critical mass is considerable.

I have to confess that I am somewhat reluctant to use the term *af-*

tive turn because it implies that there is something new about the study of affect when in fact, as the list above suggests, this work has been going on for quite some time. In a narrower sense, the affective turn has been signifying a body of scholarship inspired by Deleuzian theories of affect as force, intensity, or the capacity to move and be moved.⁶ Crucial to such inquiry is the distinction between affect and emotion, where the former signals precognitive sensory experience and relations to surroundings, and the latter cultural constructs and conscious processes that emerge from them, such as anger, fear, or joy.⁷ This terminology has helped to loosen the hegemony of psychoanalysis as the way to describe emotional experience, although Freud has his own version of *affect* as undifferentiated energy or feeling, especially in his early writings on the hydraulic model of psychic energy.⁸ Deleuzian projects have also enabled a fuller vocabulary for accounts of sensory experience that have emerged from cultural studies of embodiment and the turn away from Cartesian splits between body and mind. But this larger project extends well beyond the rubric of one theoretical source.

Thus, although the Deleuzians are intimates and fellow travelers of the Public Feelings interest in sensory experience and feeling, my own project has not been shaped by that tradition.⁹ I tend to use *affect* in a generic sense, rather than in the more specific Deleuzian sense, as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason)—but with a wary recognition that this is like trying to talk about *sex* before *sexuality*. I also like to use *feeling* as a generic term that does some of the same work: naming the undifferentiated “stuff” of feeling; spanning the distinctions between emotion and affect central to some theories; acknowledging the somatic or sensory nature of feelings as experiences that aren’t just cognitive concepts or constructions. I favor *feeling* in part because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences. It also has a vernacular quality that lends itself to exploring feelings as something we come to know through experience and popular usage and that indicates, perhaps only intuitively but nonetheless significantly, a conception of mind and body as integrated. Public Feelings takes seri-

ously questions like “How do I feel?” and “How does capitalism feel?” as starting points for something that might be a theory but could also be a description, an investigation, or a process. Terms such as *affect*, *emotion*, and *feeling* are more like keywords, points of departure for discussion rather than definition. We have used the term *project*, as in “Public Feelings project,” to signify an open-ended and speculative inquiry that fans out in multiple directions, including new forms of writing that are “essays” in the literal sense of an experiment.¹⁰

In a more general way, though, the term *affective turn* does signal the cumulative force of Public Feelings projects and their commitment to new forms of cultural studies, especially those that are not just confined to ideology critique, as important as that remains. For some time now, there have been calls to think beyond the well-worn grooves of the search for forms of cultural management and hegemony, on the one hand, and modes of resistance and subversion, on the other. One of our most crucial touchstones has been Eve Sedgwick’s articulation of a reparative rather than paranoid critical approach.¹¹ Drawing on the theoretical resources of Melanie Klein and Sylvan Tompkins, but also the model of queer aesthetic practices, Sedgwick works creatively from an eclectic range of materials, including accounts of her own feelings. We have also been influenced by the critical sensibility of our Public Feelings colleague Kathleen Stewart, who for many years has been talking about following the surfaces and textures of everyday life rather than exposing the putative realities of underlying structures.¹² The practice of criticism has not always caught up with these important invocations to alternative modes of criticism, but Public Feelings has sought to craft new critical practices through attention to feelings as both subject and method.

With its emphasis on identities and public cultures that cultivate non-normative affects, queer theory has also been a crucial resource for Public Feelings and its version of the affective turn. Especially important have been models for the depathologization of negative feelings such as shame, failure, melancholy, and depression, and the resulting rethinking of categories such as utopia, hope, and happiness as entwined with and even enhanced by forms of negative feeling.¹³ The Public Feelings project resists pastoralizing or redemptive accounts of negative feeling that seek to convert it into something useful or posi-

tive, but it also embraces categories such as utopia and hope. In this respect, its work contributes to debates on the antisocial thesis that have dominated queer theory over the past decade, but it ultimately resists reductive binarisms between the social and the antisocial and between positive and negative affect, as well as paranoid critical tendencies that are on the lookout for premature forms of utopia or futurity or that presume the superiority of negative affect.¹⁴ It rethinks distinctions between positive and negative feelings so as not to presume that they are separate from one another or that happiness or pleasure constitutes the absence or elimination of negative feeling. Depression, for example, can take antisocial forms such as withdrawal or inertia, but it can also create new forms of sociality, whether in public cultures that give it expression or because, as has been suggested about melancholy, it serves as the foundation for new kinds of attachment or affiliation. Binary divisions between positive and negative affects don't do justice to the qualitative nuances of feeling that are only crudely captured by such designations. Queer theory's focus on negative affect has created some of the same kind of sparring generated by the antisocial thesis, although such criticism sometimes seems to miss the persistently reparative and dialectical dimensions of much of this work.¹⁵

The queer predilection for negative affect and the virulence of debates about the antisocial owe something to the turn that mainstream lesbian and gay politics has taken toward homonormativity and queer neoliberalisms.¹⁶ Like the social movements of the 1970s, the queer activism of the 1990s has had its own share of political disappointments, as radical potential has mutated into assimilationist agenda and left some of us wondering how domestic partner benefits and marriage equality became the movement's rallying cry. As a queer project, *Public Feelings* tries to reimagine a liberatory version of social and affective relations beyond the liberal versions that have come to dominate the public sphere of gay politics. Discussions of political depression emerge from the necessity of finding ways to survive disappointment and to remind ourselves of the persistence of radical visions and ways of living. Rather than a paranoid watch for how forms of resistance are ultimately co-opted, it's more about noticing and describing the places where it feels like there is something else happening, and passing on strategies for survival. Survival also involves developing a higher tol-

erance for the conflicts that political life invariably produces—such as those between lesbian separatist and trans communities, gay marriage and antimarriage camps, or antisocial and utopian tendencies—so that groups don't implode or splinter into factions. (But tolerance not in the liberal sense of putting up with conflict or difference, but in the sense of being receptive to them and being willing to risk vulnerability.)

The linkage between depression and political failure is relevant not just to queer politics; it also pertains to the politics of race in the wake of the incomplete projects of civil rights and decolonization. The limits of political representation and legal recognition in eliminating racism require not only new visions for the future but the affective energy to sustain disappointment. The turn to public cultures of memory that address transnational histories of genocide, colonization, slavery, and diaspora stems from the need to connect with histories of trauma that have not yet been overcome.¹⁷ Epidemics of depression can be related (both as symptom and as obfuscation) to long-term histories of violence that have ongoing impacts at the level of everyday emotional experience. A depressive antisociality can accompany an insistence that the past is not over yet, as well as efforts to address some of the murkier dimensions of everyday racial experience for which identity politics is not always an adequate container. The *Public Feelings* project intersects with studies of race and ethnicity that consider how to think psychic and social life together, the use of melancholy as a historical and racialized category, and the production of hope in the face of long histories of oppression.¹⁸ *Public Feelings* participates in the ongoing impact of identity politics, as well as efforts to build intersectional and comparative forms of analysis that do justice to the grief, rage, hope, and patience that attend these projects both scholarly and political. Political depression is pervasive within recent histories of decolonization, civil rights, socialism, and labor politics, and attention to affective politics is a way of trying to come to terms with disappointment, failure, and the slowness of change; it is a politics that comes from remaining patient with the moments before and after so-called revolution, even as it also looks for the utopian uprising and outburst. *Public Feelings* is about rethinking activism in ways that attend to its emotional registers, including the frustrations that come from trying to keep activism and scholarship together.

Feminism as Affective Turn

The affective turn also doesn't seem particularly new to me because the Public Feelings project represents the outcome of many years of engagement with the shifting fortunes of the feminist mantra that "the personal is the political" as it has shaped theoretical and political practice and their relation to everyday life. Many of our members are part of a generation that was schooled in the feminist theory of the 1980s, which emerged in universities that were no longer connected to a strong movement-based feminism and hence was more focused on specifically academic questions and institutional change. We were taught to be suspicious of essentialisms, including those associated with affect, such as the idea that women are naturally more emotional than men or that emotional expression is inevitably liberatory. Feelings were nevertheless at the heart of this theoretically informed scholarship, including projects on emotional genres, such as the gothic, the sentimental, the sensational, and the melodramatic, and sophisticated accounts of the history of emotions, the relation between private and public spheres, and the construction of interiority, subjectivity, embodiment, and intimate life.¹⁹ To put it in shorthand, the feminism of Virginia Woolf and "a room of one's own" was joined by the feminism of Harriet Beecher Stowe and domestic economy; feminists turned their attention from Mary Wollstonecraft and the political treatise to Jane Austen and a more covert politics of drawing-room manners and the intimate public sphere documented in the novel. Rather than feeling drawn to search for and recover neglected feminist heroines, my generation of feminist scholars emphasized the social power of popular and denigrated cultural genres ranging from the conduct book to the novel. Influenced by poststructuralist theory, especially Foucault, and focusing on gender more than on women, we emphasized that the social power of women's genres, which frequently trafficked in powerful emotional experiences both in the text and for their readers, was not always feminist and could be attached to consolidating and sustaining middle-class power and promoting imperialist, nationalist, and racist agendas.

An important agenda for Public Feelings, then, has been what Lauren Berlant calls the "unfinished business of sentimentality," which can refer not only to the persistence of sentimental culture itself but also to the way that feminist critiques of sentimentality have not yet fully been

taken up in the public sphere.²⁰ For example, the models of sentimental representation that pervade eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses of abolition are relevant for understanding contemporary human rights discourses that still traffic in the generation of affect through representations that aim to touch their audiences.²¹ While abolition is sometimes acknowledged to be an early discourse of human rights, the history of human rights is frequently told as though it begins with the Universal Declaration as a response to the Second World War. Moreover, the popular origins of this highly sanctioned form of emotional politics need to be more fully acknowledged so as to better explain its tensions and failures. In contexts ranging from the testimony of truth and reconciliation commissions, to Amnesty International reports, to documentary films that explore human rights abuses, liberal models by which the representation of suffering is presumed to have a salutary effect on an audience that is removed culturally and geographically (but connected by representation and global economies) are pervasive. There are many different variations on these strategies, but they rarely include a critical perspective on the presumed transparency of representation that is commonly found in feminist scholarship on affect. In continuing to explore the connections between emotion and politics that have been a long-standing concern for feminism, Public Feelings seeks to craft new forms of feminist intellectual politics that are still lacking in the public sphere.²²

Feminist cultural critique has also been careful to scrutinize overly simplistic models of gender identity and the way that the privileges of class, race, or other categories complicate personalist stories of oppression and require that they be carefully situated. Alongside such critiques, the personal voice has persisted as an important part of feminist scholarship, enabled, if not also encouraged, by theory's demand that intellectual claims be grounded in necessarily partial and local positionality. The Public Feelings project builds on these lessons and strategies in an effort to bring emotional sensibilities to bear on intellectual projects and to continue to think about how these projects can further political ones as well. As we have learned to think both more modestly and more widely about what counts as politics so that it includes, for example, cultural activism, academic institutions, and everyday and domestic life, it has become important to take seriously the institutions where we live (as opposed to always feeling like politics is somewhere

else out there) and to include institutional life in our approaches to intellectual problems. At this point, theory and affect are not polarized or at odds with one another, and Public Feelings operates from the conviction that affective investment can be a starting point for theoretical insight and that theoretical insight does not deaden or flatten affective experience or investment.²³

One origin for the Public Feelings group was reflection on feminist futures catalyzed by the impending twentieth anniversary of the controversial Scholar and Feminist conference on Sexuality in 1982 at Barnard College.²⁴ It seems appropriate that Public Feelings would emerge out of a return to a divisive and emotional moment in feminist sexual politics, one fraught with the question of whether dichotomies between pleasure and danger can be strictly maintained. The presumption that sex-positivity does not necessarily mean nice sex and that the queer messiness of sexuality has important political implications remains an important legacy. This history is an important starting point for thinking about the politics of affect within the longer history of feminism (including the relation between first-wave feminisms and women's genres) and its deep-seated wish, as manifest in practices of consciousness-raising, that emotional expression lead to good politics. The sex wars of the 1980s have also been formative for Public Feelings because they are such a powerful example of political conflict, which has been especially vexing for feminist ideals of sisterhood. Academic feminism in the 1980s was forged from tensions around sexuality, race, and essentialism, and my ongoing fascination with the negative feelings of political dispute has led me to a reparative perspective that embraces conflict rather than separating out right from wrong, whether generational, racial, sexual, or theoretical. Some thirty years after the publication of formative books such as *The Madwoman in the Attic* and *Women and Madness*, both of which I might once have critiqued for romanticizing the madwoman, it is interesting to find myself writing a book about depression that begins from my own (female) experience to imagine how mental health might be reconstructed (and not just for women but for everyone).²⁵ As part of the project of Public Feelings, this book rethinks the 1980s critique in order to establish a new rapprochement with legacies of 1970s feminism such as consciousness-raising, personal narrative, and craft.

Keywords: A Note on Method

In the methodological spirit of cultural studies, Public Feelings takes up *depression* as a keyword in order to describe the affective dimensions of ordinary life in the present moment. Such an investigation emerges from important traditions of describing *how capitalism feels*, but it also puts pressure on those left-progressive projects not to rush to meta-commentary. This project has been present in the rethinking of modernity by Walter Benjamin, George Simmel, and others that focuses on the felt sensations of the lived environment, especially the city; the British cultural studies work of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall that understands culture as a "way of life" and "a structure of feeling" and has flexible models for understanding how everyday experience is a manifestation of social life; the anthropology and sociology of Kathleen Stewart, Michael Taussig, Nadia Seremetakis, and Avery Gordon that focuses on sensation, tactility, and feelings.²⁶ In this tradition of thinking, accounts of sensory experience are important for understanding the present (and its histories), and they resist what have sometimes been overly reductive models within Marxist theory for analyzing the mechanisms of social change. Moreover, the focus on sensation and feeling as the register of historical experience gives rise to new forms of documentation and writing, whether in the aphorisms and spiritual materialism of Benjamin, the modular writing of Taussig, the creative nonfiction of Stewart, or the turn to fictional forms of thinking in Gordon. Their varied writing practices often turn the ordinary into the scene of surprise, and they slow down so as to be able to immerse themselves in detail and to appreciate the way that magic and mystery sit alongside the banal and the routine.

The documentation of everyday life is not just an end in itself, however. The richer accounts of the ordinary sought by the Public Feelings projects are also new ways of providing the more systemic accounts of power that have been central to cultural studies. Depression, or alternative accounts of what gets called depression, is thus a way to describe neoliberalism and globalization, or the current state of political economy, in affective terms. Lisa Duggan suggests that neoliberal economic and social policy is characterized by the shrinking of the public sphere and that affective life is forced to bear an increasing burden as the state divests itself of responsibility for social welfare and affective life is con-

fined to a privatized family.²⁷ Depression can be seen as a category that manages and medicalizes the affects associated with keeping up with corporate culture and the market economy, or with being completely neglected by it. Alain Ehrenberg suggests that the discourse of depression emerges in response to the demand that the self become a sovereign individual defined by the ability to create distinctive projects and agendas; those who fail to measure up to this demand through lack of will, energy, or imagination are pathologized as depressed.²⁸ The neoliberal management of racial conflicts and differences through policies of multiculturalism and diversity cultivates certain affects of polite recognition at the expense of really examining the explosiveness of racialized histories. What gets called depression in the domestic sphere is one affective register of these social problems and one that often keeps people silent, weary, and too numb to really notice the sources of their unhappiness (or in a state of low-level chronic grief—or depression of another kind—if they do).

Looking at neoliberalism from the vantage point of everyday affective life offers, however, an alternative approach to master narratives about global conditions that are currently circulating in cultural studies. Talk of permanent war, states of exception, and new security states, important and useful as it might be, frequently operates at such a high level of abstraction that it fails to address the lived experience of these systemic transformations.²⁹ Although it shares some of the same impulses that lead to these large conceptual categories—a desire to track the histories of the present so as to provide critical insight about current conditions and help in planning for the future—the Public Feelings project aims to find new ways of articulating the relation between the macro and the micro and new forms of description that are more textured, more localized, and also less predictably forgone in their conclusions about our dire situation. My emphasis on depression as ordinary represents an effort to describe the present through attention to the felt experience of everyday life, including moments that might seem utterly banal in comparison with the moments of shock or ordinary extraordinariness that can be found in modernists such as Benjamin and Woolf, both of whom are important theorists and writers of the ordinary.

One mark of this difference in approach is the way that Public Feelings works with the tradition of the keyword, significantly popularized by Raymond Williams as a way of making Marxist concepts more

readily accessible for cultural analysis.³⁰ Part of a tradition of Marxist thinking that has aimed to refine models of capitalism by developing critical categories that can account for the present, terms such as *post-modernism* and *postcolonialism* have been updated or replaced by terms such as *globalization*, *transnationalism*, and *diaspora*, and more recently *neoliberalism*. The notion of the keyword has been central to the work of Public Feelings, but we have often replaced definitions of the *Zeitgeist* or traditional theoretical categories such as *ideology* and *culture* with terms such as *rest*, *impasse*, and *sentimentality* that might not seem as wide-ranging in their explanatory power but which nonetheless provide entry points into social and cultural analysis.³¹ Williams's suggestive notion of a structure of feeling (generative in part because of its sketchiness) opens the way for affective terms, such as *depression*, to become keywords, nodes of speculation that offer new ways to think about contemporary culture.

Public Feelings generates an expanded set of keywords in part because, in addition to its Marxist lineages, the project is also influenced by queer and feminist work that keeps categories of gender and sexuality central to investigations of the war front and governmentality and hence looks to sometimes unexpected sites of analysis in order to see their effects. Depression is another manifestation of forms of biopower that produce life and death not only by targeting populations for overt destruction, whether through incarceration, war, or poverty, but also more insidiously by making people feel small, worthless, hopeless. It is another form of the “slow death” that Berlant attributes to the seemingly epidemic spread of obesity, but one that takes the form not of bodies expanding to the point of breakdown, but of an even less visible form of violence that takes the form of minds and lives gradually shrinking into despair and hopelessness.³² New conceptual categories and new modes of description are necessary to capture these feelings.

This project's inquiry into depression, then, is also about new ways of doing cultural studies that move past the work of critique or the exposure of social constructions. Although I explore the history of depression as a cultural discourse and the pervasive and widespread contemporary representation of it as a medical disease that can be treated pharmacologically, this book is not primarily a critique of that discourse. Instead, I seek to use depression as an entry point into a different kind of cultural studies, one with an interest in how we might track

affective life in all its complexity and in what kinds of representations might do justice to its social meanings.

In investigating the productive possibilities of depression, this book aims to be patient with the moods and temporalities of depression, not moving too quickly to recuperate them or put them to good use. It might instead be important to let depression linger, to explore the feeling of remaining or resting in sadness without insisting that it be transformed or reconceived. But through an engagement with depression, this book also finds its way to forms of hope, creativity, and even spirituality that are intimately connected with experiences of despair, hopelessness, and being stuck. Under the rubric and inspiration of Public Feelings, it hopes to spend some time with the word *depression* in order to generate new forms of cultural studies and new public discourses about feelings.



KEYWORD DEPRESSION

I'd like to be able to write about depression in a way that simultaneously captures how it feels and provides an analysis of why and how its feelings are produced by social forces. I'm interested in how, for many of us (an "us" that includes a range of social positions and identities in need of specification), everyday life produces feelings of despair and anxiety, sometimes extreme, sometimes throbbing along at a low level, and hence barely discernible from *just the way things are*, feelings that get internalized and named, for better or for worse, as depression. It is customary, within our therapeutic culture, to attribute these feelings to bad things that happened to us when we were children, to primal scenes that have not yet been fully remembered or articulated or worked through. It's also common to explain them as the result of a biochemical disorder, a genetic mishap for which we shouldn't blame ourselves. I tend to see such master narratives as problematic displacements that cast a social problem as a personal problem in one case and

as a medical problem in the other, but moving to an even larger master narrative of depression as socially produced often provides little specific illumination and even less comfort because it's an analysis that frequently admits of no solution. Saying that capitalism (or colonialism or racism) is the problem does not help me get up in the morning.

Thus I've been looking for forms of testimony that can mediate between the personal and the social, that can explain why we live in a culture whose violence takes the form of systematically making us feel bad. Ideally, I'd like those forms of testimony to offer some clues about how to survive those conditions and even to change them, but I'd also settle for a compelling description, one that doesn't reduce lived experience to a list of symptoms and one that provides a forum for feelings that, despite a widespread therapeutic culture, still haven't gone public enough. It's a task that calls for performative writing, and I'm not sure I know what that would look like or, even if I did, whether I'm up to the task of producing it. Some years ago I began this project with the following statement, a rant about the inadequacies of both pharmaceutical cures and the available public discourse, including memoirs, that cast depression as either utterly mysterious or a manageable, if chronic, medical problem.³³ It's a call to memoir that I'm still trying to answer.

Depression Manifesto

This is my version of a Prozac memoir, bad connotations included. But I want to write it precisely because I don't believe in Prozac. No, I think it's a scam, even if that makes me one of those quacks, like the people who don't believe that the HIV virus causes AIDS. Discussions about the biochemical causes of depression might be plausible, but I find them trivial. I want to know what environmental, social, and familial factors trigger those biological responses—that's where things get interesting. A drug that masks the symptoms of a response to a fucked-up world or a fucked-up life doesn't tell me anything. I want to hear about the people like me who've decided not to take drugs.

But in addition to writing a polemic against drugs, I also want to write about depression because my own experiences of it have been so unexpected and so intense, the sensations so invisible and yet so spectacular, that I feel compelled to honor them with description. I want to know how it

was that not just my mind but my body experienced such excruciatingly bad feelings. But also such excruciatingly *ordinary* bad feelings insofar as during the most extreme bouts I was overwhelmed by a sense of how easy it was to get there—the slide into numbness was brought on by such common events as moving, breaking up with someone, trying to finish a book, starting a new job. Huge life transitions, yes, but also ones that, in my culture at least, are an inevitable part of growing up, of learning to take care of oneself, of facing the fear of being alone. I want to say something about that state that satisfies me in a way that all those bestsellers don't because they make depression seem so clinical, so extreme, so pathological, so alien. Why do these accounts not call my name? What name am I trying to call?

I think I can only know why I want to talk about depression by describing it. *What* before *why*. My own experience is the antidote to all of those other descriptions I've read, whether in theory, or pop psychology, or memoirs. Have I read anything that I liked? That moved me? That seemed true enough to haunt me? No. Then I'll have to make it up myself.

Over the course of a number of years, I wrote, although often with a sense of secrecy and writerly inadequacy. My desire to write a depression memoir has been fraught with ambivalence because of the problematic place of memoir within therapeutic culture, where it has a tendency to circulate in sensationalizing and personalizing ways that don't lend themselves to the social and political analysis that I'm looking for. Equally controversial is memoir's place in academia, where its developing status as a forum for new kinds of criticism has also been met with skepticism about its scholarly value. At the same time, memoir has allowed me to circumvent the resistance I've often encountered to a critique of antidepressants, which some people take very personally—I can simply speak for myself by offering my own case history. Although for the sake of manifesto or emotional outburst it might seem otherwise, I'm not against pharmaceuticals for those who find they work. I myself don't find medical explanations of depression's causes satisfying, but I do understand that many people find them helpful either for themselves or for family members because it relieves them of debilitating forms of responsibility and self-blame. I do, though, want to complicate biology as the endpoint for both explanations and solutions, causes and effects.

The book that grew out of this initial writing and ongoing experi-

ment with process combines memoir and criticism in order to explore what each genre can offer to public discourse about depression. I found that neither on its own was satisfactory. Although the critical essay, the genre with which I have the most familiarity and skill, had much to offer, it also felt like it had some limits. If I wrote about depression in the third person without saying anything about my personal experience of it, it felt like a key source of my thinking was missing. Memoir became one of my research methods, a starting point and crucible for exploring my ideas about depression, an opportunity to figure out what kind of case history might have the richness and nuance I was looking for by actually creating one, and a way of presenting my understanding of depression as emerging from my ongoing daily experience.

At the same time, I couldn't accomplish everything I wanted to do in the genre of the memoir. There were too many other things I wanted to say, too much context that could not have been incorporated without breaking the frame of the memoir itself. Some readers suggested that I might want to combine the two in order to represent them as mutually constitutive. As attractive as that idea was, I ultimately decided to let the memoir stand alone in order to reflect its status as the first phase of my thinking and because it ended up telling a story that I wanted readers to have access to as a single coherent piece of writing. The end result, then, is a diptych, a narrative that uses two different strategies for writing about depression, with the aim of reflecting on which forms of writing and public discourse are best suited to that task.

On Being Stuck

The first part of this book, and the starting point for my subsequent thinking about depression, is a memoir about the place where I live on a daily basis, academia, where the pressure to succeed and the desire to find space for creative thinking bump up against the harsh conditions of a ruthlessly competitive job market, the shrinking power of the humanities, and the corporatization of the university. For those who are fortunate enough to imagine that their careers and other life projects can be meaningfully shaped by their own desires, depression in the form of thwarted ambition can be the frequent fallout of the dreams that are bred by capitalist culture—the pressure to be a successful professional, to have a meaningful job, to juggle the conflicting demands of work and

leisure, or to have a “personal life” in the form of a sense of self that lies outside the circuits of capital. Although academics often like to imagine that they are crafting alternatives to the socially sanctioned versions of these goals, that aspiration also creates its own set of pressures.

I turned to memoir in order to track what it’s like to move through the day, focusing in particular on the crucial years in which I was writing a dissertation, starting a job, and then finishing a book for tenure. My episodic narrative tells the story of how academia seemed to be killing me, a statement that seems very melodramatic given the privileged nature of my professional status and the specialized task of writing a dissertation or book, the stakes of which are often ultimately only personal. But to feel that your work doesn’t matter is to feel dead inside, a condition that is normalized for so many. Academia breeds particular forms of panic and anxiety leading to what gets called depression—the fear that you have nothing to say, or that you can’t say what you want to say, or that you have something to say but it’s not important enough or smart enough. In this particular enclave of the professional managerial class, there is an epidemic of anxiety-induced depression that is widely acknowledged informally but not always shared publicly or seen as worthy of investigation. In its own way, this book adds to a body of work on the current state of the academy, especially the humanities, where ongoing versions of the culture wars are one site of struggle in efforts to preserve forms of creative living and thinking in a market culture. It contributes to discussions of the role of the corporate university in neoliberal policies that shape (so-called) private and affective life.³⁴ In this context, depression takes the shape of an anxiety to be managed, a failure of productivity that is then addressed by a lucrative pharmaceutical industry and a set of accompanying discourses that encourage particular ways of thinking about the self and its failures.

For this local account of life in academia that is not just individual but available for systemic analysis, one of my target audiences is graduate students and untenured and adjunct faculty, especially those in the humanities, whose relation to these conditions is often a very palpable sense of fear, anxiety, and, very frequently, diagnoses of depression. Why is a position of relative privilege, the pursuit of creative thinking and teaching, lived as though it were impossible? What would make it easier to live with these sometimes impossible conditions? Calling it impossible might seem presumptuous, but I’m willing to take that risk.

Academics too often struggle with long-term projects such as dissertations and books while squeezed on the one hand by an intensely competitive job market and meritocratic promotion and reward system and driven on the other by a commitment to social justice that often leaves us feeling like we’re never doing enough to make a difference. I see this fear creep up on graduate students all the time, perfectly capable people who fall apart in the process of writing a first chapter or who wallow in partial dissertation drafts unable to put it all together. This form of nonproductivity may seem very specialized and almost phantasmatic in nature—how could people be so incapacitated by the relatively nonurgent task of doing some cultural readings? But my aim is to take seriously the forms of unhappiness and hopelessness produced even by these relatively privileged and specialized projects and ambitions. The forms of productivity demanded by the academic sphere of the professional managerial class can tell us something more general about corporate cultures that demand deliverables and measurable outcomes and that say you are only as good as what you produce. (In this context, it can be especially hard to justify creative or individualized intellectual work, and teaching or administration may feel more concrete than pursuing creative thought.) What would it mean to make thinking easier? Or to make its difficulties and impasses more acceptable? What is going on when you can’t write?

One of the most important turning points in my depression memoir is the moment of a major conceptual breakthrough in completing my first book, *Mixed Feelings*, about the politics of affect in the Victorian sensation novel. (See below, “The Inspiration,” 67–68.) While writing my introduction, I got stuck, torn between my desire to find evidence of feminist subversion in these lurid stories of women’s bigamy and adultery but schooled in Foucauldian paradigms that emphasized the containment and management of resistance. Although conceptual blockage can come in many forms, I don’t think it’s accidental that what had me caught was the sense that my Foucauldian reading of the management of affect in the sensation novel allowed for no escape.³⁵ My friend Lora Romero’s essay on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which ingeniously suggested that Foucault could be used in ways that didn’t lead to this impasse, provided the opening I was looking for and encouraged me to find a way of reading the sensation novel that was more open-ended and flexible, or what we have come to call “reparative.”³⁶ I needed an intellectual

framework that allowed me to believe in the possibility of sensationalism as productive, even as I also needed to insist on critique. Had I been able to see in 1984, when I first discovered and wrote on *Lady Audley's Secret*, then an obscure Dover Press publication, that the sensation novel would be important enough to become Penguin and World's Classics editions and the subject of multiple scholarly works, I might have approached my work differently. How can we make room for crazy thoughts to become intellectual projects and communities and movements?

While there is an especially neat convergence here between the content of my intellectual impasse and the experience of it—both were about hopelessness—connecting depression to hopelessness or frustration also suggests that it has solutions, however difficult they may be to conceptualize or achieve. Indeed, I was delighted when I discovered that *impasse* was one of the keywords being explored by Feel Tank Chicago, and their thinking has encouraged me to take impasse seriously as a concept and an experience. I've benefited from being able to think alongside elaborations such as the following by Berlant: "An impasse is a holding station that doesn't hold but opens out into anxiety, that dog-paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional—in the unbound temporality of the lag one hopes to have been experiencing all along (otherwise it's the *end*), it marks a delay."³⁷ For Berlant, an object of knowledge becomes a (productive) impasse when it slows us down, preventing easy recourse to critique or prescription for action and instead inviting us to see it as "a singular place that's a cluster of noncoherent but proximate attachments that can only be approached awkwardly, described around, shifted" (434–35).

With its spatial connotations of being at a "dead end" or "no exit," impasse captures the notion of depression as a state of being "stuck," of not being able to figure out what to do or why to do it.³⁸ The material dimensions of being stuck or at an impasse are important to its more conceptual meanings and suggest the phenomenological and sensory dimensions of depression, which can literally shut down or inhibit movement.³⁹ As a theoretical concept, impasse imports its spatial or literal sense into conceptual and social circumstances; it suggests that things will not move forward due to circumstance—not that they can't, but that the world is not designed to make it happen or there has been

a failure of imagination. As a political category, impasse can be used to describe moments when disagreements and schisms occur within a group or when it is impossible to imagine how to get to a better future—conditions, for example, of political depression or left melancholy. It can describe intellectual blockages, such as those produced by forms of critique that get stuck in the formulaic repetition of the failure of cultural texts to be progressive. It can also describe the experience of everyday life when we don't know what to do. And, in ways that will be relevant to the discussions ahead, it is related to the category of spiritual crisis as well, those moments when a system of belief or belonging loses meaning and faith is in question. Public Feelings approaches the impasse as a state of both stuckness and potential, maintaining a hopefulness about the possibility that slowing down or not moving forward might not be a sign of failure and might instead be worth exploring. Impasse is an important category for Public Feelings because it wants to work with and connect blockages created by critique, by desperate political circumstances, and by an everyday life that doesn't change.

If depression is conceived of as blockage or impasse or being stuck, then its cure might lie in forms of flexibility or creativity more so than in pills or a different genetic structure. *Creativity* is thus another keyword for this project. Defined in relation to notions of blockage or impasse, creativity can be thought of as a form of movement, movement that maneuvers the mind inside or around an impasse, even if that movement sometimes seems backward or like a form of retreat. Spatialized in this way, creativity can describe forms of agency that take the form of literal movement and are thus more e-motional or sensational or tactile. Indeed, my memoir focuses on the body at rest, unable to get out of bed, for example, as well as many efforts to keep it moving, whether through exercise, such as yoga or swimming, or through ordinary daily activities ranging from washing the dishes to sitting at a desk. This notion of creativity as movement can also benefit from queer phenomenologies, as well as queer ways of thinking about temporalities that move backward and sideways rather than just forward.⁴⁰ Creativity encompasses different ways of being able to move: to solve problems, have ideas, be joyful about the present, make things. Conceived of in this way, it is embedded in everyday life, not something that belongs only to artists or to transcendent forms of experience.

Although academics frequently try to justify the significance of their

work by appeal to scientific notions of progress or contributions to society, one of the most important aspects of the humanities may be the way they provide room for creativity. Sedgwick has notably defined queerness in relation to creativity, suggesting the powerfully non-normative implications of focusing on creative thought that doesn't have an immediate outcome.

Millions of people today struggle to carve out—barely, at great cost to themselves—the time, permission, and resources, “after work” or instead of decently-paying work, for creativity and thought that will not be in the service of corporate profit, nor structured by its rhythms. Many, many more are scarred by the prohibitive difficulty of doing so. No two people, no two groups would make the same use of these resources, furthermore, so that no one can really pretend to be utilizing them “for” another. I see that some find enraging the spectacle of people for whom such possibilities are, to a degree, built into the structure of our regular paid labor. Another way to understand that spectacle, though, would be as one remaining form of insistence that it is not inevitable—it is not a simple fact of nature—for the facilities of creativity and thought to represent rare or exorbitant *privilege*. Their economy should not and need not be one of scarcity.⁴¹

In making this statement, Sedgwick neatly bypasses the way progressive or left cultural studies often tries to justify itself by appealing to political and social justice. As important as such work is, and indeed my own career is steeped in it, the experience of “impasse” has to be acknowledged—it occurs at moments when the social relevance of what we're doing and thinking is not clear. At such moments, a commitment to creativity, or to pursuing one's own ways of thinking and being, can be salutary; it is certainly the impulse that enabled me to imagine that writing a memoir could be a useful part of my academic projects, even without the laminated or flamboyant style that Sedgwick describes as one of the pleasures of writing for her (although imagining that self-narration might be meaningful even when not justified by style is its own form of flaunting).

My goal in exploring the relation between depression and academic careers is thus to create more space for creative thought, for whatever it is that provides more pleasure or happiness, even if its immediate professional or social gains are not obvious. More space for “creativity”

also means a higher tolerance for “impasse,” which is sometimes the only route to new thinking and to the creation of stronger, more resilient communities that can do work in the world. I have found my work with various Public Feelings groups sustaining because they have been able to make me feel that work that didn't make sense actually did. If we can come to know each other through our depression, then perhaps we can use it to make forms of sociability that not only move us forward past our moments of impasse but understand impasse itself to be a state that has productive potential.⁴²

Writing Depression

This book is divided into two halves, the first of which consists of the memoir that provided the seed for this project—an episodic account of the troubled path to finishing my dissertation and writing my first book. The critical essay that forms the second half of the book consists of three chapters, although it should ideally be read as one extended piece of writing that aspires to the form of the essay as a public genre for speculative thinking, rather than the scholarly book divided into chapters that stand alone as individual cases. This combination of memoir and essay constitutes my version of what Jill Dolan has called “critical memoir” and is inspired by the desire to craft new forms of writing and knowledge that come from affective experience, ordinary life, and alternative archives and that don't necessarily follow the usual methods of cultural critique.⁴³ Across its different sections, including the memoir, the book seeks to craft—and it's no accident that crafting is one of its topics—a cultural analysis that can adequately represent depression as a historical category, a felt experience, and a point of entry into discussions not only about theory and contemporary culture but about how to live.

I came to writing memoir because of my interest in its power as a public feelings genre, one that is both immensely popular and a vehicle for alternative testimonial and scholarship. As my “Depression Manifesto” proclaims, I was also dissatisfied with more popular mainstream depression memoirs—such as William Styron's *Darkness Visible*, Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*, Lauren Slater's *Prozac Diary*, and Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon*—all of which largely, if ambivalently, endorse pharmaceutical treatment, but I decided that rather than cri-

tique memoir it would be more useful to engage in writing it as a form of research method. *The Depression Journals* has been a formative crucible for the more scholarly essay, not only by inspiring its intellectual questions, but also by revealing the emotional investments that guide it. The title not only riffs on other memoir titles such as *Prozac Diary* but also indicates the writing's status as a form of notebook or experimental inquiry rather than a fully fledged piece of literature or scholarship. In the brief reflections that follow it, I discuss what I learned from the project, including the writing process itself, and explain how it serves as a resource—a “feel tank,” to borrow from the Chicago collective—for the critical essay that more explicitly articulates a Public Feelings approach to depression.

In the extended essay of the book's second half, chapter 1 grapples with the failure of cultural studies to make a significant intervention against the overwhelming predominance of the medical model within the huge body of popular writing on depression. It is easy for scholars in the humanities to feel that arguments about the cultural construction of feelings have been overlooked, but rather than fully indulge that resentment, I have been motivated by a desire to develop forms of scholarship and writing that offer alternatives to critique and new ways to describe feelings—or the intersections of mind and body that encompass not just more cognitive forms of emotion but the embodied senses.

Chapter 1 also looks to the longer history of the category of depression and its conceptual relatives, especially melancholy, in search of resources for alternative understandings to the medical model and finds them in the early Christian category of *acedia*, a form of spiritual despair that resembles depression. The concept of *acedia* as sin or visitation by a demon is dismissed by medical models as either moralizing or superstitious when compared with contemporary medical notions that simultaneously relieve one of responsibility (it's just genes or chemicals) and provide agency (you can fix it by taking a pill). By contrast, I explore *acedia*'s value as a model for thinking about depression as a spiritual problem and for elucidating distinctions between left melancholy and political depression that turn on whether the presence of feeling in political movements is suspect or welcome.

Chapter 2 sets aside the medical model in order to pursue the speculative hypothesis that the cause of depression is not biochemical imbalances but the long-term effects of racism and colonialism. Its point

of departure is the histories of genocide, slavery, and exclusion and oppression of immigrants that seep into our daily lives of segregation, often as invisible forces that structure comfort and privilege for some and lack of resources for others, inequities whose connections to the past frequently remain obscure. These are depressing conditions, indeed, ones that make depression seem not so much a medical or biochemical dysfunction as a very rational response to global conditions.

Thinking about depression in relation to racism (as well as desperation and hopelessness about changing it) requires a different set of archives, ones that don't necessarily explicitly mention depression and are not on the radar screen of most popular literature on the subject, which so frequently and invisibly presumes a white middle-class subject. Chapter 2 devotes extended attention to books by two scholars of the African diaspora—Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* and Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing*—that articulate the scholarly impasses, including writer's block and political depression, created by the absent archive of slavery and the long-term effects of racism. The chapter suggests how histories of geographic and political dispossession can usefully illuminate what gets called depression, and how indigenous notions of sovereignty and what Alexander calls “radical self-possession,” or decolonization that includes not just the mind but the senses and feelings, enable a psychogeographical understanding of depression. This premise serves as a framework for reading two memoirs that are more explicitly about depression—Sharon O'Brien's *The Family Silver* and Jeffery Smith's *When the Roots Reach for Water*—in which the vulnerabilities of class aspiration, including those of academia, can be productively read in terms of histories of displacement in the Americas.

While chapter 1 looks to alternative histories and chapter 2 looks to alternative cultural geographies in order to generate new archives for depression besides those provided by medical science, the third and final chapter moves closer to the intellectual home of Public Feelings in queer and feminist archives of the ordinary and the domestic, or the intimacies of so-called private life. It emerges from now quite established feminist scholarship on the politics of feeling that has explored sensational modes and genres such as sentimentality and melodrama in order to explain the relations between the private and the public, the psychic and the social, and lived experience and social systems. It begins with the premise that depression is ordinary, building on my pre-

vious work on both trauma and sensationalism, which has kept me intrigued by the relation between that which seems notable, catastrophic, or the visible sign of trouble and moments or experiences that are less remarkable and less distinct as events.

In order to explore practices of living that both accommodate depression and alleviate it, the chapter draws on the contemporary queer culture that accompanied and shaped my thinking by making me feel better. The archive of feelings that helps me make the turn from depression to the reparative work of daily living, and what I call the utopia of everyday habit, includes Kiki and Herb's cabaret performance of maternal melodrama and Gregg Bordowitz's exploration of ongoing AIDS depression and ordinary life in the autodocumentary video *Habit*, as well as an extended meditation on the queer and feminist resurgence of interest in crafting. Drawing on ideas about utopia among fellow travelers in queer studies, the chapter links spiritual practice and creative practice by describing both as forms of felt or embodied response to getting blocked or stuck in activism and academia.

Cumulatively the book envisions depression as a form of being stuck, both literal and metaphorical, that requires new ways of living or, more concretely, moving. It seeks to be a form of reparative scholarly work that can help facilitate that path. It challenges medical and scientific methods as the only way to know depression and aims to craft ways of writing about depression that differ even from much scholarship in the humanities that relies on conventional forms of research. Its unconventional archive thus includes, in addition to personal narrative, the spiritual and religious traditions of the first chapter, the indigenous traditions and everyday experiences of racism of the second, and the queer cultures that are part of my daily life. I hope to reinvigorate forms of humanities writing that are based in creative and speculative thinking and feeling. The brief epilogue reiterates this methodological desire through the insights of a diverse group of writers—Lynda Barry, David Foster Wallace, Audre Lorde, and Eileen Myles. More than any pill or theory, their words have moved me forward not only by inspiring my thinking but, quite literally, by making it possible to get up in the morning.

Part I

THE DEPRESSION JOURNALS

(A Memoir)

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Core members of the group in Austin have included Sam Baker, Alyssa Harad, Neville Hoad, Deborah Kapchan, Ann Reynolds, Janet Staiger, Kathleen Stewart, many of our graduate students, and, as this book was being finished, Craig Campbell, Josh Gunn, Heather Hindman, Randy Lewis, Sofian Merabet, and Circe Sturm.

2. For more on Feel Tank Chicago, see Berlant, "Critical Inquiry, Affirmative Culture." Feel Tank members have included Lauren Berlant, Deborah Gould, Vanalyne Greene, Mary Patten, and Rebecca Zorach. The group helped organize a conference at the University of Chicago called "Depression: What Is It Good For?" in March 2004, and a conference called "Anxiety, Urgency, Outrage, Hope . . . A Conference on Political Feeling" in October 2007. See <http://politicalfeeling.uchicago.edu/> (accessed 15 March 2012). For a review of the conference, see Carmody and Love, "Try Anything."

3. Gordon, "Something More Powerful Than Skepticism."

4. See Clough and Halley, *The Affective Turn*, and Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*.

5. Rather than attempt an exhaustive list, I will name here some of the sources that have been most influential or productive for my thinking. I do so in the interest of acknowledging fellow travelers, many of whom have had direct connections with Public Feelings events and programming, and thus to use affiliations, influences, and networks as the way of creating a bibliography rather than some putatively more objective standard of coverage or completeness.

Among those with direct ties to Public Feelings are Baker, *Written on the Water*; Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, *The Female Complaint*, *Intimacy*, *Compassion*, *Cruel Optimism*, and many others; Boler, *Feeling Power*; Cobb, *God Hates Fags*; Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers* and *The Twilight of Equality*; Gould, *Moving Politics*; Hoad, *African Intimacies*; Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Love the Sin*; Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*; Love, *Feeling Backward*; Luciano, *Arranging Grief*; Manalansan, *Global Divas*; Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, *Cruising Utopia*, "Between Psychoanalysis and Affect: A Public Feelings Project," "Feeling Brown," and "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down"; Reynolds, Robert Smithson; Soto, *The De-Mastery of Desire*; Staiger, *Perverse Spec-*

tators; Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road* and *Ordinary Affects*; Torres, *Black, White, and in Color*; Woodward, *Statistical Panic*.

For earlier work of mine, see Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*; "Public Sentiments" (coedited with Ann Pellegrini); *An Archive of Feelings*; "Public Feelings"; and Staiger, Cvetkovich, and Reynolds, *Political Emotions*. It is hard to imagine the work of Public Feelings without the writings of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ranging from *Between Men* to *Touching Feeling*. As this book goes to press, the posthumously published *The Weather in Proust* is contributing to discussions of the "affective turn."

Other important books on affect, feeling, and emotion include Abu-Lughod and Lutz, *Language and the Politics of Emotion*; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, *Queer Phenomenology*, "Happiness," and *The Promise of Happiness*; Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*; Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, *Precarious Life*, and *Frames of War*; Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism*; Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*; Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*; Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*; Flatley, *Affective Mapping*; Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*; Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*; Holland, *Raising the Dead*; Koestenbaum, *Humiliation*; Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions*; Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*; Moten, *In the Break*; Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*; Probyn, *Blush*; Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*; Salecl, *On Anxiety*; Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*; Snediker, *Queer Optimism*; Taussig, *The Nervous System*; Terada, *Feeling in Theory* and *Looking Awry*; Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

Other foundational works include Benjamin, *Illuminations*, *Reflections*, *The Arcades Project*, and *Selected Writings*; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; and Williams, "Structures of Feeling."

Further relevant works are listed in notes on specific subtopics; for additional work on queer theory, see note 13; on trauma, see note 17; on race and affect, see note 18; and on feminism, gender, and women's genres, see note 19.

6. In addition to Clough and Halley, *The Affective Turn*, see Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, for a compilation of this work. Gregg and Seigworth trace the affective turn to the combined influence of Eve Sedgwick and Larry Grossberg, as well as Brian Massumi, who has been one of the major disseminators of Deleuze's work. An important use of Deleuzian affect theory within queer theory has been Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, as well as more generally the ongoing body of work by Elizabeth Grosz, including *Time Travels* and *Becoming Undone*.

7. For more detailed discussions of these distinctions, see Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*; Flatley, *Affective Mapping*; Gould, "On Affect and Protest."

8. See "From Surface to Depth, between Psychoanalysis and Affect," Muñoz's introduction to "Between Psychoanalysis and Affect: A Public Feelings Project," as well as the entire special issue of *Women and Performance* more generally, for a discussion of the complementary rather than mutually

exclusive relation between affect theory and psychoanalysis. See also Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, for an example of psychoanalytically inflected work that is also attentive to the somatic nature of affect and its intersubjective qualities, as well as Sedgwick's turn to Sylvan Tompkins for alternatives to psychoanalysis in Sedgwick and Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters*.

9. The fellow traveler relation between Public Feelings and the Deleuzians is a friendly and intimate one, though, visible, for example, in Clough's presence in Muñoz's "Between Psychoanalysis and Affect," Berlant's and Stewart's inclusion in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Stewart's own use of Deleuze in *Ordinary Affects*, and Gould's use of Deleuzian distinctions between affect and emotion in her essay "On Affect and Protest."

10. This book's working subtitle, "A Public Feelings Project," was changed after the manuscript was submitted. This designation has also been used by me and my coeditors Janet Staiger and Ann Reynolds in conjunction with *Political Emotions*, a collection based on a conference at the University of Texas in 2008; by José Muñoz for the special issue of *Women and Performance*, "Between Psychoanalysis and Affect"; and by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*; and this book remains "A Public Feelings Project" in spirit.

11. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," *Touching Feeling*, 123–52.

12. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*. Stewart has, however, been making this argument throughout her career, not only in her first book, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, but also in earlier essays such as "On the Politics of Cultural Theory."

13. See Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, and Sedgwick and Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters*; and in addition to works cited in note 2 by Ahmed, Cobb, Butler, Crimp, Dolan, Duggan, Eng, Gould, Halberstam, Hoad, Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Joseph, Love, Manalansan, Muñoz, Soto, Snediker, and Warner, see also work on queer temporalities such as Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*; Freeman, "Queer Temporalities," and *Time Binds*; and Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place*, which in its concern with the affective relations between past and present has been a rich source for queer affect theory.

14. This debate has circulated around Edelman's *No Future*. See Caserio, Dean, Edelman, Halberstam, and Muñoz, "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory" and Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, as well as Weiner and Young, "Queer Bonds."

15. See Snediker's critique in *Queer Optimism*, especially 21–25, of "queer pessimism" as exemplified especially by Edelman, but also by my own work on trauma.

16. See Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" and Murphy and Ruiz, "Queer Futures," as well as Muñoz's account of the dismal state of mainstream gay politics (and Edelman's version of anti-sociality) as inspiration for *Cruising Utopia*.

17. See Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*. Key texts in trauma studies include Caruth, *Trauma and Unclaimed Experience*; Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*; Felman and Laub, *Testimony*; Hirsch, *Family Frames*; Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*; LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust, History and Memory after Auschwitz*; and *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Leys, *Trauma*; Miller and Tougas, *Extremities*; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*; Young, *The Texture of Memory*.

18. This body of work on race and affect includes, in addition to Ahmed, Eng, Gordon, Hoad, Holland, Manalansan, Moten, Muñoz, and Soto, cited in note 2, Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*; Eng and Han, "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia"; Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection and Lose Your Mother*; Khanna, *Dark Continents*; and Zwarg, "Du Bois on Trauma."

19. Important work on feminism and women's genres includes Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; Barnes, *States of Sympathy*; Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* and *The Female Complaint*; Brown, *Domestic Individualism*; Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies*; Cherniavsky, *That Pale Mother Rising*; Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings*; Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*; Davidson and Hatcher, *No More Separate Spheres!*; Halberstam, *Skin Shows*; Hendler, *Public Sentiments*; Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*; Radway, *Reading the Romance*; Romero, *Home Fronts*; Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment and Romances of the Republic*; Sanchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty*; Sedgwick, *Between Men*; Stern, *The Plight of Feeling*; Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

20. The "unfinished business of sentimentality" is the subtitle of Berlant, *The Female Complaint*. My claims for the generational specificity of Public Feelings owe something to my shared graduate school training with Berlant at Cornell in the early 1980s, where her work on romance and sentimentality began along with my own on sensationalism.

21. Kleinman, Das, and Lock, *Social Suffering*; McLagan, "Principles, Publicity, and Politics," and "Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Public"; Keenan, "Mobilizing Shame"; Berlant, *Compassion*.

22. One of the other initial groups from the Chicago and Barnard meetings in 2001 was Feminist Pundits, spearheaded by Lisa Duggan, whose collaboration with Berlant on the collection *Our Monica, Ourselves* is an example of this kind of queer and feminist public commentary. More recently, Duggan has teamed up with Muñoz, Halberstam, and Tavia Nyong'o in the blogosphere to produce Bully Bloggers at <http://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/>.

23. Although the affective turn is sometimes characterized as a turn away from theory or even a sign of the exhaustion of theory, this is certainly not the case for Public Feelings or more generally, for the scholarship generated by the affective turn remains inspired by cultural and social theory. Theoretical insights may, however, be embedded in particular cases and local examples, discovery of and accounting for which can be the result of larger theoretical questions. My focus on depression as a Public Feelings project, for example,

constitutes an effort to use depression as a way of investigating larger questions about everyday life and politics. The languages of theory can include memoir and the personal essay or archival materials that address large trans-historical concerns, including methodological questions about what constitutes an archive or evidence.

24. At the University of Chicago in January 2001, organized by Janet Jakobsen and Lauren Berlant. Public Feelings emerged as a topic for future discussion and was one of the five subgroups for the second national meeting at Barnard College in late September 2001 (a meeting significantly dominated by discussions of September 11, 2001).

More recently, in March 2009, the "Rethinking Sex" conference at the University of Pennsylvania, organized by Heather Love, combined reflections on Gayle Rubin's influential essay and the infamous Barnard conference on Sexuality in 1982 with sessions on the politics of feeling, thus forging a connection between these cultural moments and movements. Some of the proceedings from the conference have been published as Love, "Rethinking Sex."

25. Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*; Chesler, *Women and Madness*.

26. See, for example, Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, especially "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 3–26; Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* and *Marxism and Literature*; Taussig, *The Nervous System*, especially "Tactility and Distraction," 141–48; Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road*; Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*; Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

27. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*

28. Ehrenberg, *La fatigue d'être soi*, translated as *The Weariness of the Self*.

29. On permanent war and states of exception, see, for example, Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended"; Agamben, *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*. On neoliberalism, see Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, and Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy."

30. See Williams, *Keywords*, as well as Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, eds., *New Keywords*, and Burgett and Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*.

31. Feel Tank Chicago made a Wiki for collaborative accounts of keywords.

32. See Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)."

33. Or as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick puts it, "As far as I can tell, current popular thought seems to understand depression in terms of a kind of chronic natural gloominess, on the one hand, or alternatively as a completely exogenous malady, from who knows where, that is liable to descend on its unsuspecting host until heroically routed by medicine and positive mental hygiene" ("Teaching/Depression").

34. See Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?* For more on the dismantling of public education and the university, see Readings, *The University in Ruins*; Newfield, *Ivy and Industry* and, especially, *Unmaking the Public University*.

35. As part of her affective turn to Sylvan Tompkins, Melanie Klein, and the reparative, Sedgwick also seizes upon this blockage in her critique of how *Mixed Feelings* exemplifies the routinized regimes of theory's paranoid position. See the discussion of *Mixed Feelings* in Sedgwick and Frank, *Shame and Its Sisters*, 15–19. In retrospect, I find it interesting that Sedgwick so astutely identifies the problem with which I was struggling, but in failing to notice the gestures toward the reparative in *Mixed Feelings*, she herself remains in the critical mode. Among other things, my work on depression and public feelings is the result of a long period of pondering this encounter with Sedgwick in order to view with more compassion the blockages that accompanied my fledgling version of the affective turn. For a discussion of the persistence of the paranoid mode in Sedgwick's critique of it, see Love, "Truth and Consequences."

36. See Romero, *Home Fronts*, and also the way the reparative is used in Davidson and Hatcher, *No More Separate Spheres!*

37. See "Starved," SAQ, 434, and republished in Halley and Parker, *After Sex? Impasse* is a central concept for Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, which was published just as this book was going into production. Here and elsewhere, I have retained references to the articles that preceded *Cruel Optimism*, since my discussion was shaped by those sources. A version of the passage cited here appears in *Cruel Optimism*, 199, and *impasse* is also introduced on 4–5.

38. For a medical theory of depression as "being stuck," which combines both traditional and alternative medicine, as well as a Jungian framework, see Gordon, *Unstuck*. Thanks to my acupuncturist, Laura Mathews, for drawing this book to my attention.

39. Ahmed's phenomenological approach to affect in *Queer Phenomenology* and *The Promise of Happiness* is relevant to thinking about depression as *impasse*, including the relation between being stuck and what she calls "sticky" feelings, which combine the material and the psychic.

40. See, for example, Freeman, *Time Binds*, as well as, more generally, "Queer Temporalities"; Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*; Love, *Feeling Backward*; Stockton, *The Queer Child, or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*.

41. Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," 19.

42. The phrase "coming to know each other through our depression" comes from comments made by José Muñoz at the wrap-up session of the conference partially sponsored by Feel Tank Chicago on Depression: What Is It Good For? at the University of Chicago, March 2004.

43. Dolan, "From Flannel to Fleece."

THE DEPRESSION JOURNALS: Reflections

1. For more on this strategy, especially as it applies to the tendency to critique women's genres such as the domestic and sentimental novel, which, like the memoir, are based in the public expression of feeling, see Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher's introduction to *No More Separate Spheres!*, 7–26.

2. For an intelligent example of the debate about memoir, although one that doesn't grapple with the queer, academic, and diasporic memoirs that inform my practice and analysis, see Yagoda, *Memoir*.

Although terms such as *creative nonfiction* have dignified memoir as a genre that merits literary recognition alongside fiction, it has also been seen as competition for fiction and has been cast as encouraging a desire for the sensationalism of "true" stories that compromises aesthetic values. The controversy over the revelation that James Frey's addiction memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, was fictionalized is only one in an ongoing series of discussions about the extent to which memoir's value (whether aesthetic, social, or economic) is grounded in its claims to truth. Because Frey was featured on Oprah's Book Club, the revelation of his book's fictional status produced huge publicity and led to the drama of her confrontation with him on her show. Oprah subsequently apologized to Frey, perhaps in recognition that dismissing him as a liar was scapegoating him for a larger set of issues about memoir and truth.

Other high-profile cases, such as the faked identity of novelist JT Leroy and Benjamin Wilkomirski's false Holocaust memoir, *Fragments*, suggest that the sensationalism of memoir in turn gives rise to sensational stories about its veracity, stories that remain fixated on questions of truth and falsehood rather than the larger social issues often embedded in even suspect memoirs. These public scandals about false memoirs are reminiscent of the false memory syndrome debates around incest, and it would be valuable to remember, as Janice Haack has argued, that even putatively false stories can provide testimony to experiences of oppression or injury, and that even in the register of truth, memoir must be read as a form of fiction. See Haack, *The Pillar of Salt*.

3. Queer memoir operates across multiple genres and often in the experimental interstices of genres such as solo performance, graphic narrative, installation art, historical fiction, and creative nonfiction. Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Dorothy Allison, Amber Hollibaugh, Joan Nestle, and Leslie Feinberg, to name just a few crucial writers, represent a generation of working-class and woman of color dykes who participated in and were shaped by lesbian feminist culture but who also used memoir and accompanying forms such as the anthology to critique homogenizing understandings of lesbian and queer identities. Examples that have been important to me include Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*; Bechdel, *Fun Home*; Kron, *2.5 Minute Ride and 101 Humiliating Stories*; Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*;