Facing Wilde; or, Emotion's Image

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It is not the least important of the lessons of endocrine analysis that there is no soul, and no body, either.

—Louis Berman, MD, *The Glands Regulating Personality* (1922)

Perhaps it isn't given to man to express all his emotions on his face, especially when we consider the many different emotions that have been named and arbitrarily classified by the philosophers.

—Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne de Boulogne, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression* (1862)

IN HIS 1862 STUDY *MÉCANISME DE PHYSIONOMIE HUMAINE* (*THE Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*), Guillaume-Benjamin Duchenne argues that "emotions, sentiments, and passions" are only genuine when their "image" appears in "muscles" of the face (28). If the emotion is not visible in "isolated contraction[s]," it has no "image" and thus has been arbitrarily classified by philosophers (28). Duchenne's charge here is to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Descartes, and Hobbes, but his complaint anticipates more recent inquiries into the relation among the face, affect, and expression. The psychologist Silvan Tomkins, for example, has argued that our faces do not merely express our affects but define them, since "affect is primarily facial behavior" (114).[1] If facial behavior can be thought of as the transmission of an image, I am interested here in the fate of emotion's image and what a face—specifically, a particularly well-known face—can show us about the meaning of expression, especially when that image is elusive, fleeting, or simply unknowable.

Whether one understands expression as physiological—as surface facial behavior—or psychological reveals a great deal about how

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we conceive of the individual as oriented toward a depth, or interior, and its relation to an exterior. As is evident in Arthur Symons's response to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's "appalling" watercolor portrait of Oscar Wilde (fig. 1), painted on the eve of his final 1895 trial, a purely physiological form of expression can be shocking to a viewer (139). Midway through the self-indulgent narrative of his own "morbid sense of aversion," Symons—in a scene of reading that is uncannily reminiscent of Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)—digresses into what is perhaps the most unflattering depiction of Wilde on paper.[2] This paragraph-long aside is a testament to the visibility of Wilde's physiological decline; in the early to mid-1890s, an assortment of print venues ferociously caricatured an engorged and fleshy Wilde.[3] As Robert Sherard put it in his well-known biography, Wilde's was a "formidable physiological problem" (2). Frank Harris similarly "lay stress on" his feeling of "physical repulsion" toward the man, who, as early as 1884, appeared "fat and oily," as if "written all over" with "fleshly indulgence and laziness" (92). Lautrec's portrait offers no exception. Not only does Wilde appear "swollen, puffed out, bloated and sinister," the painting, Symons remarks, also reveals his "womanish side." One sentence, however, says it all: "The face is bestial" (139). This "hideous countenance," this "thing that is no more a thing," fashions Wilde into a "kind of Hermaphroditus," marked by a mouth that, as painted by Lautrec (and apparently by Wilde as well, with a cosmetic), "no man who is normal could ever have had" (139). Physiognomy, invested in establishing norms of expression, underwrites Symons's pathologizing discourse, which locates the meaning of Wilde's perversion in his face.



FIG. 1
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Oscar Wilde*, 1895. Watercolor on cardboard, 58.5 × 48.0 cm.

True, the mouth is most troublesome. Crimson red and tightly pursed, it appears as if literally painted onto a preexisting portrait, unlike the sagging flesh of the face, a more natural extension of Wilde's slackening body. "No such mouth," Symons writes, "ought ever to have existed," claiming it as the focal point of a pathologizing discourse that links Wilde's deteriorating body and "bestial" face to the "horror of his hideous countenance in a mirror": the expression of his "inversions" (139), or, as Joseph Bristow has observed, his degeneration into a "racially regressive being" (18).[4] In Lautrec's portrait of Wilde, the image transmitted by expression no longer reflects an inside but rather arises from personality. As the historian Warren Susman has argued, personality became the dominant form of self-expression in the early twentieth century. In contrast to the nineteenth-century culture of character, which emphasized moral self-mastery and strength as indicators of one's internal state of being, the ideology of modern personality posited the self as something that could be constructed and further managed to influence the perceptions of others. Such a notion of personality is contradictory, as Susman notes, since attaining these qualities of

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"being different, unusual, of standing out in the crowd" meant following conformist prescriptions established in self-help manuals for making oneself attractive and likable (218).

I use the term *personality* similarly to refer to an external perception built around self-development and self-presentation, but I am specifically interested in the ways physiology informs personality and vice versa. Lautrec's portrait illustrates how personality—linked in this case to physiological decline rather than to creativity and attractiveness—is a projection based on a physiognomic ideal of a readable subject. At the same time, personality is a script that enables the reading of subjects, reframing or deforming the parameters of the image transmitted by the body. As it informs modern vision, personality thus complicates a purely physiological account of expression. I investigate this problem here in three related contexts: the historical parameters established by several texts that converge around the subject of Wilde's face; more recent debates about affects and the emotions; and, finally, the theories of visual modernity advanced by Charles Baudelaire, Max Beerbohm, and E. H. Gombrich and Ernst Kris. These accounts of expression see it as an essentially meaningful phenomenon that does not authenticate a human interior to be expressed, read, or analyzed—the result of both an embodied, expressive subject and a modern, unsingular vision.

The Glands Regulating Personality; or, Modern Physiognomy

Albeit in the service of a different ideological end—homophobia—the American scientist and proponent of endocrinology Louis Berman corroborates the same model of expression in his 1922 study *The Glands Regulating Personality: A Study of the Glands of Internal Secretion in Relation to the Types of Human Nature*. In his analysis of Oscar Wilde as a representative "facial type," Berman locates the meaning of expression in the absence of a psychologically expressive individual (121). For Berman, judging from photographs of Wilde's parents, Wilde's homosexuality derives from both the "curiously animal" features of Wilde's father and the "masculinoid" characteristics of his mother (250). Recalling characterizations of Wilde as tall and of "*great corpulence*," Berman stresses the "thymocentric significance" of the "glabrosity"—the hairlessness—of Wilde's face. Other traits of interest include Wilde's "*fleshy* and *plump*" hands, the volatile range of his voice, and his large breasts. Finally, Berman notes "the exceptional size" of Wilde's head, which, he argues, "reinforced the love of the beautiful that is part of the feminine post-pituitary nature" (251). Given the artistic genius born of his homosexuality, Wilde is indeed one of the "abnormals" without whom there would "be a great gap, a yawning absence in the world's culture" (252).

As with Lautrec's painting, the text addresses Wilde's face as a physiological object. Berman employs a physiognomic method of reading the face as a "complex of brows, eyes, nose, lips and jaws" whose "modeling and tone" manifest what "each of the endocrine glands has . . . to say" (121). In a review of Berman's study, published the same year in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology*, the Harvard psychology professor Gordon Allport, who rejected behaviorism for its too shallow conception of the individual, worries that this rapidly accelerating interest in endocrinology, and in physiology generally, has become a reductive explanation for the larger "problem of personality" as well as the "emotional and affective life of the individual." Berman, his reviewer concedes sarcastically, "brings physiognomy up to date and gives it a new lease on life" (222). That is, Berman's radical modification of physiognomy as a hermeneutic practice consists in reading individuals without reading *into* them. Put another way, Berman employs a physiognomic method organized

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around the presumed dimensionality of individuals only to render them dimensionless.

Physiognomy, claimed by Johann Lavater as a science in the late eighteenth century and revitalized by Charles Darwin in 1872 in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, predicates the expressive strength of the face on its ability to consolidate the interior and exterior dimensions of the human subject. For Berman, however, the face has become the exteriorization not of the soul's emotions but of various chemical secretions; physiology, not psychology, with its claims to understand the subject's inner recesses, becomes the basis for emotional expression and personality. Berman's study corroborates François Delaporte's argument that expression did not exist before the mid–nineteenth century and the work of Duchenne, because the face did not exist. The body first had to be constituted as an object of study, as it was in the "anatomy and physiology of affects," or the corporeal account of the emotions that emerged from Duchenne's experiments, which employed a combination of photography and electrical stimulation to simulate and capture representative human facial expressions (5). Duchenne believed that such expressions, which he claimed to have "induc[ed]" through electrophysiological stimulation, would assist psychology by producing a "language" for better understanding the emotions (28). This "new grammar of signs," Delaporte argues, aided by the development of photography, made possible the modern face, along with a corresponding "image" of an inside (6). In this case, meaning does not emerge directly from the inside but rather is an image or projection derived from an analysis of the surface.

This method of reading the individual departs from an earlier physiognomic practice that presented itself, according to Lucy Hartley, "as a science of mind designed to reveal the moral order" (7). In *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression, as Connected with the Fine Arts* (1844), the Scottish anatomist and surgeon Charles Bell attempted to preserve Lavater's theological investments in the notion of an overall design while developing a physiological account of the emotions that focused on anatomy as "the examination of that structure by which the mind expresses emotion" (qtd. in Hartley 61). Similarly, for Duchenne, shared forms of emotional expression were the product of a projection made possible in the first place by the body. Nonetheless, Duchenne, like Bell, retains an "*image* of emotions, sentiments, and passions" (91; my emphasis). I am arguing here that such an image meets its fate in Berman's *Glands*, which disables the very notion of an interior by lodging the meaning of individuality in the personality—the outermost, perceptible surface of the individual (Duchenne 28). For Berman, there is no psychological, or internal, basis for emotional expression, since personalities—"The Adrenal Personality," "The Endocrine Personality," and so on—are based on the dominance of glands that determine physical characteristics and direct individual behavior (202). In these formulations of personality, the interior, which is for Duchenne a projection born of an analysis of the outside, is no longer an image. Rather, personality is a projection born of reading the human subject.

Other than a combination of glands, Berman does not offer a clear definition of what he thinks personality is, except that it "embraces much more than merely the psychic attributes." He calls it a "soul-body, or body-soul," suggesting that personality is the embodiment of characteristics, feelings, or traits generally connected to the soul (203). In Berman's account, the meaning conventionally conferred on the face in the nineteenth century is rerouted into the personality itself. As a physiological manifestation, personality becomes the means by which the physiological tips into the pathological. Whereas Lavater's physiognomy sought to identify common forms and types, Berman's face reading seeks

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out the abnormal, the pathological, as the source of meaning.

And what better subject for Berman's analysis than that maligned and celebrated face, that notorious personality, which after 1895 embodied a set of pathological associations—Oscar Wilde? With the previous sentence, I am suggesting that in the twentieth century Oscar Wilde *is* a face. In turning to him as such, as a representative facial type, Berman's study becomes part of a lengthy history of preoccupation with Wilde's face, beginning with the explosion of visual images caricaturing the writer in the 1880s and moving through an assortment of accounts that emerged after the trials of 1895 and persisted throughout the twentieth century (121). The argument that the 1895 trials "refashioned" an otherwise merely effeminate Wilde into a "pathological being," a real queer, to say the least, is well known (Bristow 5).[5] I will return to this argument later, but for now I reiterate the idea that the trials, as Ed Cohen has argued, were the stage for a "new 'type' of sexual actor: 'the homosexual,'" which "crystallized a new constellation of sexual meanings predicated upon 'personality' and not [sexual] practices" (2, 131). This sense of personality can indeed be likened to the "pose" for which Wilde was interrogated in the first place. To replay the story, Wilde initially sued the marquis of Queensberry, Lord Alfred Douglas's father, after receiving the former's calling card, on which was written the now famous words: "For Oscar Wilde Posing as a Somdomite [sic]" (qtd. in Cohen 127). As Cohen has noted, the trials played on the indeterminacy of the word "posing." The question was not whether Wilde was a sodomite but whether he was "the kind of person" who would have committed sodomy (127). At issue was Wilde's self-presentation, the general "effects of his 'persona,'" especially his physical presence as it embodied the "unarticulated meanings" of homosexuality (206, 209). In these grotesque stylizations, Wilde's fleshy lips and "monstrous" nose embodied the "physical degeneration that such nonnormative non-'manly' practices portend" (138). As corroborated by Berman's account, Wilde's physiognomy offered the public something to read only by way of his deviation from normative masculinity and, further, from a normative face.

Expression and the "Turn to Affect"

The trials produced not only a new kind of personality, then, but also a new, and reductive, way of reading it, a practice that reaches its culmination in Berman's *Glands*. This turn to physiology as an explanation for personality—and Allport's critique of it—indeed anticipates our own critical moment and the more recent debates about affect and the emotions. In these exchanges, however, neuroscience has replaced endocrinology as an explanatory paradigm for the human personality and the affective life of the individual. I am, perhaps unsurprisingly, referring to Ruth Leys's 2011 article "The Turn to Affect: A Critique" and the series of responses it received from William Connolly, Charles Altieri, and Adam Frank and Elizabeth Wilson, all of whom fault Leys for rhetorically packaging a diverse group—which includes Brian Massumi, Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux, Paul Ekman, Silvan Tomkins, and Eve Sedgwick—into a reductive anti-intentionalist paradigm. For Leys, such "corporeal accounts of the emotions" support the idea that affective processes occur independently of the "cognition or knowledge of the objects that caused them" (438, 450); affects consequently have no cognitive content, no meaning or intention.

Leys's thesis that the turn to neuroscience as an explanatory paradigm for the complexity of human affect and emotion is indifferent to how deeply we are embedded in culture and ideology is important and timely. Though Leys grants him only a brief note, Daniel Gross, writing in 2007, argues similarly that

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a seriously "impoverished" "social model" characterizes the "brain science of emotion," as exemplified in the work of Damasio and LeDoux (31). Gross suggests that we can begin to understand how emotion informs our political sensibilities through a historical understanding in which emotion is phenomenologically embedded in a "*meaningful* world, as opposed to a world of mere matter" (16). So while Leys's critique fails to address the binary between meaning and affect, ideology and mere surface matter, that develops if an anti-intentionalist position on affect is to cohere in the first place, a phenomenological framework for understanding emotion does. For a phenomenological world is a world by virtue of its overcoming the Cartesian dualism that isolates the subject in his or her own perception. Meaning coheres through the positioning of things beside each other without authenticating an interiority that is the subject of meaningful expression.

What I am describing is something like the notion of "texture" that Eve Sedgwick advances in *Touching Feeling* (14). While relocating affects specifically to the level of bodily response robs them of dimension, as Leys suggests and Berman's reductive work makes clear, an object gains texture only through perceptual engagement and hypothesis, the guesswork surrounding the question of whether an object was "sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted, or fluffed up" (Sedgwick 14). Sedgwick, following Tomkins, does not link affects to specific objects, thereby discounting their relation to cognition and intention, but her understanding of texture maintains that affects exist in a meaningfully attached world organized by a nonvisual perceptual reality—the exploratory, indirect, and, in many ways, blind, sensation of touch. Most important for Sedgwick, again with reference to Tomkins, meaning (and "freedom") emerges from unintentional acts: the potential distance between affect and cognition, in the "possibilities . . . for being wrong about an object—and implicatively, about oneself" (108). Through this phenomenological reversal of the Greek imperative to "know thyself," the subject is, to refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, more than "what it thinks it is" (198).[6]

In lumping Sedgwick with LeDoux and Massumi, Leys thus overlooks the problems of dimension and structure that Sedgwick addresses directly, mistakenly faulting Sedgwick for flattening emotion by reducing affective experience to a disorganized grab bag of bodily responses that affirms the "singularity of one's experiences"—or her political agenda of promoting "difference" ("Turn" 465). Sedgwick's explicit critical practice, however, reorients space away from the "the topos of depth or hiddenness . . . that has been such a staple of critical work of the past four decades," thus affirming the "difference" of the humanist subject without supporting a radical break between affect and intention (or meaning or ideology [8]). This practice follows Tomkins, who, in Ley's reading, views emotions as "complex . . . assemblages" that cannot necessarily be linked to distinct cognitions or drives but that may still find themselves "embedded in scripts that serve to negotiate our motivational realities" (Frank and Wilson 876).[7]

This understanding of emotion addresses the crucial problem that Leys overlooks, that of emotional expression and, further, the meaning of expression in art, which, Leys laments, has been the subject of anti-intentionalist indifference. Admittedly, a corporeal understanding of the emotions in which affects are unrelated to any sort of content or intention does not get at the concept of expression either. Neither, I would suggest, does the attempt to distinguish between affect as it pertains to the body and to science and emotion as a function of the social elements of our feeling world. Following Massumi, critics have also employed the respective terms to draw lines between preconscious and conscious feelings or bodily

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states, so that much of the discourse circulates around the question of whether affects are motivated or intentional.[8] If, however, we adopt the view that affective experience embeds us in a perceptual world, then whether something is an affect or an emotion seems irrelevant when it comes to the question of expression. The relevant issue here, for both life and art, is what an expression can mean, especially if its object or source is absent, elusive, or simply unknowable.

Historically, the meaning of a particular expression was bound up with its existence. Reflecting again on Duchenne's nineteenth-century experiments, Delaporte argues that expressions only existed when the "muscular contractions" of the face could be "situated within a field of expressivity" (70). A "muscular spasm, a grimace," or any other "insignificant movement" (71) was otherwise inexpressive (or even pathological) because it could not be "transformed" into a "sign" through "psychological thought" (72). An expression in this context is not fully without content but instead, to extrapolate from Tomkins, writing almost a century later, is a script that informs the relation between the subject's intention and an observer. As Tomkins remarks, "[W]e learn to generate, from memory, images of these same responses which we can become aware of with or without repetition of facial skeletal or visceral responses." In these accounts, expression or affect is produced in the body, but the origin of affective expression—however linked to the body's "visceral responses"—is in the viewer's memory (114).

"Loudly Expressed"; or, Bad Form

Thus, the interplay between the image and its involuntary relation to memory best characterizes the script that informs the modern phenomenon of expression. To view expression as it originates in the fields and scripts that create personalities—rather than in the discrete, knowable, intentional individual—offers a potential resolution to the debates about affect I have just surveyed, which situate bodies as either conscious and meaningful or as purely physiological, without individual intention and, consequently, meaning in the world. For Duchenne and Tomkins, the meaning of expression resides in the image as it is generated by the observer, or what the observer sees in a face—personality. To return to Berman's *Glands*, personality is itself form, an image or expression of various hormonal combinations, transmitted through the medium of the face. This insight into the function and formation of the modern personality provides what Leys's critique of the turn to affect does not: an avenue for approaching the problem of what a physiological form of expression can mean, especially as it appears in the particular example of Wilde's face during any given point in its print circulation.

In the accounts I discuss here, the meaning of Wilde's face underwrites larger questions of aesthetic and physiological form. For Berman, "normality means harmony," a definition that renders Wilde, whom Berman classifies among the "abnormals," badly formed (254, 253). In the same vein, the modernist Wyndham Lewis, editor of *Blast*, the 1913 manifesto that assaulted all things bourgeois, recalls the French physician Jean-Jacques Matignon's statement that "he had never heard a Chinese express any disapproval of sexual inversion except that it was bad for the eyes" (209). In Wilde's case, the perception that this foremost advocate of form was indeed irregularly formed lingered throughout his career and contributed to his popularity as the subject of caricature. As declared by one Oxford publication of 1893, a rival to Douglas's *Spirit Lamp*, "[Wilde's] face is his misfortune" (qtd. in Ellmann 397). There can be no doubt that Wilde's physiological irregularities—his overlong face, his stature, and, in the 1890s, his corpulence—contributed to his popularity as a subject of caricature and established his connection to bad form.

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Writing in 1926, Lewis is preoccupied with the possibility that Wilde's bad form—his excessive affect in conjunction with the group constituting power of his personality—might indeed become good form. In his chapter "The Physiological Norm and the 'Vicious,'" Lewis inveighs against the "'Nancyism' of the joy-boy or the joy-man"—the "over-mannered personality," complete with a "grating or falsetto lisp" and a "queer insistence on 'delicate nurture'" (210). He further credits Wilde with transforming these once pathological affectations into fashionable norms: "as he possessed to the full the proselytizing zeal that usually goes with sex inversion . . . , he prepared the ground with his martyrdom, ecstatic recantations, eloquent and tear-ful confessions, and the great prestige of his wit, for the complete reversal of the erotic machinery that has ensued or is ensuing" (209). In claiming so much for Wilde's excessive affect, his "well-advertised agony," Lewis is either speaking sarcastically or giving what he thinks is due credit to Wilde's effect on modern sexuality (209). He is, in any case, wrong about Wilde's delivery on the stand, where his verbal polish and affective control actually frustrated his critics. Regardless, this charge to gay affection as a kind of bourgeois "material physiognomy" fuels Lewis's homophobia (211). Indeed, the chapter proceeds by way of an analogy in which Lewis compares the expression of inversion to the red of a drunkard's nose; inversion is thus the external, physiological expression of a vice. Lewis, however, simultaneously charges the homophobic contentions of those who are "physically offended by practices 'against nature'" as part of the "self-love" that prefers the "natural" experience of their own practices (210). For Lewis, both inversion and its apparent opposite, the "puritan conscience," are locked together in a "'vicious' circle": an essentially "*bourgeois*" dynamic that "gives sex inversion . . . its particular material physiognomy of *protest* and over-importance" (212).

Much of Lewis's rhetoric here builds on the relation he sees between his idea of the "*physical*" or "material physiognomy" and the "person" as a physiological expression. Speaking through another questionable analogy of a groom's reaction to finding that his bride has been previously deflowered, Lewis writes, "it is a person, a mind, that he has married; incarnated, and expressed, it is true, by a certain body" (211–12). The "person" is the expression—the form or the image—expressed by the body. Lewis excuses the practice of homosexuality but, echoing Symons, penalizes the "inverted fashion" primarily for its bad expression of a physiological vice that should not be expressed at all (209). And bad expression makes for bad persons. Indeed, the word *bad* here, which is my own, follows from Lewis's final and more interesting claim that the "moral indignation" and "loudly expressed disgust . . . of the Plain Man or Plain Woman" mirror the "self-satisfaction and sense of outrageous discovery" that motivate the "other ('unnatural') side of the sexual pale" (212). Both sides, Lewis suggests, are equally bourgeois in their theatricality, such that the "stimulus" against moralism actually reproduces it. Inversion, Lewis argues, with its "red tie" or "approved Badges of sexual revolt," borrows from "puritan conscience" its "particular material physiognomy of *protest* and over-importance."

Excessive moralism, then, especially when "loudly expressed," is a "physiognomy," a face (212). Consistent with bad form, it is, quite simply, ugly. In highlighting Wilde's presumably intentional theatricality as the badge of bourgeois physiognomic display, Lewis's physiological account of form, problematic as it is, points to the ways in which physiological expression creates meaningful persons, even if they are, in some cases, bad persons. As with the example of Wilde, expression creates a person by way of its attachment to a meaningful history, not an authentic interiority or even an individual. Only as a person can

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Wilde's embodied particularities, his apparently excessive expression of affect, be linked to the inverted fashion, the script or expression, the image of his homosexuality.

Ugly Pictures: The Normal and the Pathological

Writing in the 1920s, both Lewis and Berman draw on a particularly modern understanding of Wilde as personality—a threateningly fashionable aberration that, critics have argued, grew from the trials of 1895. It is in reference to these trials that Lewis makes his virulent jab associating Wilde's "inversion" with overblown physiological expression. The aforementioned arguments linking the trials to the emergence of the modern, biologically defined homosexual—as opposed to the merely effeminate dandy—and to the development of a gay personality illustrate how the trials gave inversion a face, a physiognomy. Such a face, I have been arguing, consolidates a person and thus gives meaning to a physiological form of expression that is also pathological. The focus of pathology in Lautrec's portrait of Wilde and Symons's analysis of it is the playwright's mouth, which is seemingly isolated from the rest of the face and body. In the years following Wilde's trials, various commentators attempted to situate this mouth within a "field of expressivity" (Delaporte 70), as what, according to Symons, "ought ever to have existed" became the subject of a public conversation made possible by the trials along with developments in what Delaporte terms "psychological thought" (71). In *The Life Sexual: A Study of the Philosophy, Physiology, Science, Art, and Hygiene of Love* (1905), for example, Edgar C. Beall looks to one of Napoleon Sarony's famous 1882 photographic portraits of Wilde as evidence of "femininity in all the features" (173). Of significance to Beall are the "rounded contours" of Wilde's body, his soft flesh and "narrow, drooping shoulders," along with his "large, full eyes," which testify to his "artistic talent" and "delicacy of taste" (173). Wilde's mouth, "exceptionally refined and beautifully feminine," is the ultimate proof of his sexual perversion (171).

In contrast to Delaporte's claim that in the nineteenth century the pathological exceeds the "threshold" of "expressivity," the pathologizing discourses of Beall, along with Lewis and Berman, exaggerate the powers of Wilde's expression. Distinct from the physiognomic tradition inspired by Lavater, with its emphasis on common types, the focus here is the pathological as it characterizes a readable and expressive subject. Berman further opens ways for new types by arguing that the "individuality of the individual" emerges from the sheer variety of hormonal combinations that constitute the "normal body," through "numberless hereditary gradations and transitions, blendings, and mixtures." For Berman, "pure types," those dominated by only one gland, are also the easiest to classify and thus come to represent the "norm" against the mixed types, in which the "lines of distinction are less clear." Consequently, "[i]t is possible to conceive of a million types of normals," championing the increasing sophistication of endocrine analysis as a means of extending the possibilities of "normal" to those mixed types who were not "measurable" before (113).

In *The Normal and the Pathological*, Georges Canguilhem argues that with the work of the French physiologist Claude Bernard and the influence of his scientific method in the mid–nineteenth century, hereditary anomalies came to be understood as pathological alongside a corresponding category of normalcy that reflected phenomena with measurable, observable characteristics. Pathology, then, concerns what is not measurable according to such norms. Like physiology, physiognomy addresses the normal as a means of categorizing the individual according to various types.[9] Such emphasis on measurement suggests an explicit, already identifiable correspondence between an embodied human

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subject and a desired outcome—or an explicit sense of the very norm that one is measuring for in the first place. This logic confirms Delaporte's historical account of facial pathology, which suggests that expression existed only insofar as it conformed to the field in which it could be recognized. That is, expression was understood as real, not only in relation to an embodied human subject but also in its connection to an identifiable person.

Delaporte's account of expression—focused on physiognomy as a practice of making visible the invisible—indirectly supports the view that inversion did not have an expression, or image, before the 1895 trials. As I suggest in the readings that follow, however, the phenomenon of expression—by virtue of its relation to the inaccessible, the indefinite, and the unknown—complicates this argument. As Neil Bartlett has argued, homosexuality was publicly recognizable in Victorian London.[10] Similarly, Michael Foldy has noted that the Victorian public was familiar with the "sex scandal," including the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889, which featured a homosexual brothel and a member of the royal family (50). The Wilde trials, Foldy contends, created a "single forum and a single frame of reference" for the "otherwise disparate concepts" of decadence, degeneration, criminality, male effeminacy, and, last but not least, homosexuality (70). My point here is not to diminish the importance of the trials but rather to think more theoretically about Wilde's physiological grounding in a world of signs before and after 1895. What do the changing images of Wilde tell us about the meaning of expression? As I argue here, expression does not mean or become recognizable by virtue of its relation to a specific object or a particular body. Rather, in these images, physiological forms of expression become recognizable (and meaningful) through the scripts that form around personalities, both normal and pathological.

Decidedly nastier than their British counterparts, the caricatures from Wilde's 1882 trip to America have been understood as the product of a culture of celebrity and "self-advertisement" that resulted from an easily accessible press (Gagnier 14). As others have argued, however, the American press, disturbed by Wilde's popularity, transformed him into both a "sexual predator" and a racialized subject who threatened to seduce the young and impressionable with his message of "artistic and sensual dissolution" (Marcovitch 54).[11] The caricatures racialize Wilde's aestheticism, with its focus on art for art's sake and advocacy of leisure, which they register as a threat to American control over a potentially idle population. Race is used here, I argue, to forge an ugly image, the bad form of the subject's interior.

As he is linked to a subjugated but potentially rebellious population of African American "help," Wilde becomes only a slightly less enervated version of the "racially regressive being" that appears in Lautrec's portrait (Bristow 18). In the 1882 Currier and Ives print *The Aesthetic Craze*, for example (fig. 2), the disturbance does more than simply reflect the possibility, as critics have argued, that Wilde's effeminate costume might influence male as well as female followers, resulting in the "feminization of American men" (Blanchard 214).[12] Here the subject's mouth—the frequently cited sign of Wilde's homosexuality in the twentieth century—is the primary visual and physiognomic link between him and his darker-skinned conspirators. Part of the series Darktown Comics, issued from the late 1870s to the early 1890s, the print betrays a particular Reconstruction-era anxiety about race relations in America. The illustrations were, as the company put it, "good natured hits at the populare [sic] amusements and excitements of the times," depicting African Americans foolishly attempting to enjoy the pastimes of "ordinary folks," meaning whites (qtd. in "Bit"); they are hunting, riding horses, taking music lessons, getting married, and, in the image in ques-

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tion, dressing up as Wilde.[13] The caption—"What's de matter wid de Nigga? Why Oscar you's gone wild!"—mystifies the target of the ridicule here, thus intensifying the disturbing effect of the picture. This sort of racialized image was, as Mary Blanchard has observed, the most "incisive indictment of the male aesthete," not merely for his effeminacy but also for his threat to the forms of demarcation on which the social order was based (214).



Fig. 2
Nathaniel Currier and James Ives, *The Aesthetic Craze*, 1882. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

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Such fears were echoed in a comic biography published the same year that lamented Wilde's influence on the wives and the help: "Our colored help stand speechless as he enters our hall and leave our work neglected" (Kendry 21).[14] The subject of *The Aesthetic Craze* is not speechless but stands, in the characteristic Wildean pose made famous in the Sarony portraits taken the same year, as if saying something. He is crazed or wild, pathologized; something, not quite measurable, is the matter with him. Dressed in yellow knee britches with sunflower in hand, he speaks to an audience of two black women. While one looks at Oscar with perplexed exasperation, the other, head tilted on clasped hands, has abandoned her work to admire the young dandy in his speech. Wilde's voice here is figured not as a projection of an interior but, in the mode of twentieth-century representations of the man, as a form of physiological expressivity that is the basis for the picture's comic effect.

There is, however, one major difference between this image and those that emerged after the trials: the face in this caricature does not look like Wilde's. The set of associations and expressions—ostensibly moral—are linked to what is not expressed in the picture, relegated explicitly to the realm of the pathological, the abnormal, the "wild." The visibility of the subject's racial difference from Wilde is the source of the illustration's humor and, to say the least, its racism. Affect is hypercorporealized, in its connection both to the exaggerated gestures of the black body and to the effeminate male body. Nonetheless, the expression in the picture has no relevance to a Delaporte's field of expressivity independent of its connection to the person, Oscar Wilde. In asking what's the matter, the picture makes it explicit that what is important in the expression cannot be identified. Rather than a specific content, what gives expression meaning in this caricature is personality, the outline or formalization of the person. In this particular case, Wilde's characteristic pose and accoutrements give ideological meaning to the embodied subject of the illustration. The black face in this picture is not a mask for Oscar Wilde but rather a hyperbolic sign that indicates just how thoroughly the meaning of expression can saturate the "anatomy and physiology of affects" (Delaporte 5).

Indeed, the print suggests how meaning and expression might cohere as a form outside the bounds of actual physical resemblance—and, more important, outside a coherent "expressive field," or resolute image (Delaporte 71). Personality is just as powerful in creating an image of Wilde as an expressive subject in the Currier and Ives print as in the twentieth-century depictions of him, where he looks like himself. In the 1882 print, however, caricature operates as a racist medium for devaluing the forms of expression with which Wilde's personality was associated. Consistent with nineteenth-century physiognomic practice, it retains an image of an "ugly" interior that later depictions do not. This form or outline could be recognized not simply in relation to Wilde's body but rather in regard to a range of affective displays for which the writer was famous: his costumes of silk neckties, green velvets and fur, along with his "exceedingly verbose" style of delivery ("Oscar Wilde"). Now the hair is frazzled, untamed, and wild, while the refined aristocratic speech has been crudely reinterpreted. Meanwhile, the explicit presence of laboring black hands challenges the artful leisure of aestheticism.

This picture thus exploits the visibility of racial difference to create unlikely connections that mock Oscar Wilde as an expression. Similarly, in a set of 1882 trade cards by E. B. Duval bearing the title *National Aesthetics*, Wilde is parodied in the guise of a number of figures costumed in typically "aesthetic" garb: an Irish leprechaun, a Jewish Uncle Sam figure, a Chinaman, a paunchy German, and an emasculated African (fig. 3).

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Mocking the self-absorption of the aesthetic movement, the latter card reads, "Ise g'wine for to wushup dat lily kase it sembles me." Like other images from the era, the card parodies the male aesthete swooning over the ubiquitous lily that Wilde had reportedly carried down Picadilly in London. As with *The Aesthetic Craze*, the focal point of the face is the red lips, pursed as if to kiss the lily that "sembles me." The delicacy of the hands that hold the lily, along with the subject's billowy "dress" and tie, reinforces the irony of the character's refinement, his distance from the labor associated with his skin color. Furthermore, the use of dialect becomes a way of devaluing the forms of refined expression with which Wilde was associated in 1882 and after. Long after this date, in 1926, Lewis would underline the same "refaynement," which, he argued, "goes with male inversion (the *obligation* of culture, of a 'refayned' speech, and the unreality of millionaire luxury as a necessary background)" (217).



Fig. 3
E. B. Duval, from *National Aesthetics*, 1882.

On Laughter

In deforming or inverting its subject, caricature draws on the meaning of expression as a form or outline by demonstrating the likeness in two images that are essentially different. While personality makes expression recognizable in its relation to a person, caricature can deform this expression until it is almost unrecognizable. The illustrations in question perform this misrecognition by presenting an image of Wilde's interior through the corporealized affective display of a "wild" black body. The moralism of the images, however, compromises the modernity of their expression. That is, at least, how Max Beerbohm, Wilde's caricaturist and contemporary, would likely have responded to such drawings. His 1901 article "The Spirit of Caricature" theorizes caricature as a modern art form, "the art of exaggerating, without fear or favor, the peculiarities of the human body, for the mere sake of exaggeration" (123). By "proportionately diminish[ing]" the subject's "subordinate" qualities and "magnify[ing]" the "salient" ones, caricature creates a "new" man, "wholly transformed" but still the same, so much that by "the uninitiated he will not be recognized" (124).

According to such logic, the Duval lithographs are indeed caricatures, since they do not resemble their subject. Nonetheless, the power of Wilde's personality allows us to read the expression as his. The caricature is this reading, which is, as Beerbohm observes, "the epitome of the subject's surface, the presentment . . . of the most characteristic pose, gesture, expression" (124). If we view caricature as expression, as the "epitome of . . . surface," then we are still left with the question of what the expression is expressing. While Beerbohm criticizes the "moral impulse" that he attributes to certain caricaturists, he does not say that caricature should be without meaning, what might otherwise be understood as the form's content (123). While Beerbohm's

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account of caricature aligns itself with Wilde's historical situation, it no doubt mimics that of the decadent poet Charles Baudelaire, whose 1855 essay "On the Essence of Laughter" I address here. In his detailed analysis of the form, Baudelaire counts caricature, particularly French caricature, as a "*plastic* expression of the comic" (159). Clearly, Beerbohm's notion of surface owes much to Baudelaire's interest in plasticity, which, for both figures, contradictorily ensures that there is meaning, an "idea," behind comic expression (159).

The difficulty of "On the Essence of Laughter" lies in the rhetorical tendency to question or even invalidate the viewpoints that Baudelaire initially takes on and encourages in his reader. The first of these—which he attributes to the "orthodox," or Christian, mind—connects man's "Fall, of a debasement both physical and moral" to the appearance of human laughter (150). For Baudelaire, neither laughter nor "tears" exist as expressions in the "paradise of delights," because man is not yet afflicted by "trouble": his "countenance was simple and smooth, and the laughter which now shakes the nations never distorted his face" (150). That is, without "trouble," there is no physiognomic model for laughter as expression, a "nervous convulsion, an involuntary spasm" that "disfigure[s]" the human subject (152). Formless and incomprehensible, laughter is, put plainly, part of man's "ugliness," a pathological deformity that emerges from the "unknown" (151). Baudelaire explains this phenomenon through the perspective of Virginie, in Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's 1787 *Paul et Virginie*, a figure of "absolute purity and naiveté." By imagining that Virginie "shudders" in "fear" and "suffering" when brought "face to face with caricature," having "sensed that there is offence in it," Baudelaire revises his original position that the "good" prevents laughter. "[G]azing at the unknown," the girl "hardly understands either what it means or what it is for." Nonetheless, the caricature has meaning as a "double thing . . . both drawing and idea—the drawing violent, the idea caustic and veiled" (151). What then is this ugly "idea," which Virginie can sense but fails to know or understand?

Moving on, the essay elaborates on the question of how the comic in art becomes comprehensible as expression. In claiming that comic expression begins with man's fall, Baudelaire suggests that the "moral impulse" Beerbohm denounces indeed motivates comic expression and caricature. And while Baudelaire later claims that comic expression and human laughter is "satanic," he does not give up the idea that its roots are moral. Virginie, the "immaculate angel," "shudder[s]" at the "offence *in*" the caricature she witnesses (my emphasis). The suggestion here is that moralism contributes to the perception of expression, the "offence," in the first place. For Baudelaire, laughter, "essentially human . . . essentially contradictory," is born of man's feeling of superiority over others and his anxiety that he will in turn be the subject of laughter (153–54). "[W]hat more striking token of debility," Baudelaire writes, "could you demand than a nervous convulsion, an involuntary spasm comparable to a sneeze and prompted by the site of someone else's misfortune?" (152). This difficulty, however, is essential to laughter, because from it emerges the capacity for analysis that allows for laughter in the first place. For Baudelaire, the "absolute comic," exemplified most specifically by the grotesque, is a "*unity*," in that the laughter is immediate as the image affects the "intuition" of the viewer (155). But the comic is rarely absolute, it seems. In the "significative" comedy of Voltaire, there is always a pause, where "it is quite permissible to laugh a moment late" (157).

But is it? To laugh a moment late may mean that we are slow to get the joke or did not get it all. It may be that we are only mimicking the laughter of others or that laughter may be inappropriate. Consequently, the

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reader understands that laughter a moment late may not be permissible at all, considering that, for Baudelaire, the most "exaggerate[d]" form of the "significative" comic is the "*savage* variety" (159).[15] In this case, laughter may follow a cringe, as if we are uncomfortable with the very "idea of superiority" that allows us to respond to such an expression in the first place (159). Baudelaire then characteristically scoffs at his own claim, asking how "madmen in asylums" could possibly laugh from an idea of their superiority. Laughter is in fact a "comic emanation" or "explosion" in which there must be "two beings face to face with one another," where the comic is both a gestural, bodily expression and an affective response to an expression that requires the accompanying laughter of the spectator (165). If a third party is introduced and the person laughing becomes the subject of laughter, the comic becomes a mimetic chain, however removed from the original content of comic expression. Incomprehensibility then becomes the rule, not the exception.

The takeaway here is that an expression does not mean in and of itself but that the spectator gives expression its meaning. This meaning, however, is compromised, according to Baudelaire, by the "permanent dualism in the human being," the insecure uncertainty of being two places at once, and the condition of not knowing (165). The essay thus does not diminish the contradictory, ambiguous phenomenon of expression by resolving the question of whether there is meaning behind it. Ultimately, this understanding of expression—in which meaning is our insecure not knowing—anticipates the contemporary debates about affect I reviewed earlier. In particular, Baudelaire's treatise on laughter annuls the distinction Leys draws between the anti-intentionalist view of affect as corporeal surface and the idea that our affects mean something by virtue of their identifiable relations to particular objects. For Baudelaire, the laughter of a madman or a child, a little "budding Satan," may not have an object, but it does have an "ambition" (156). Through these examples, Baudelaire affirms our knowledge that what we don't know is magical, absorbing, corrupting, and alluring.

Conclusion: The Imageless Interior

By this account, expression is only a surface to the spectator, but the dynamic that emerges from these "two beings face to face with one another" is multidimensional, textural, and temporal. In this sense, Baudelaire confirms something like the anti-intentionalist paradigm that Leys argues separates "meaning and signification" in a "nonconscious," "autonomic reaction system" ("Turn" 449). Similarly, for Baudelaire, the suspended moment between content and its expression, meaning and signification, may cause us to laugh a moment late, in a bodily response—a "spasm" and "convulsion"—that is out of sync with our mental perception of its source. If the virtual is, according to Massumi, "reality in the reality of change" or a fleeting "sign of the passing of process," a "deformational field," then we need not look to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari or even resort to this lingo to understand how expression (or image) unfolds in time ("Sensing" 16, 17). My point here is not to equate Baudelaire's understanding of the comic or these ugly pictures of Wilde with Massumi's notion of a virtual experience of the image mediated by various screens and interfaces, a fully "imageless" form of "interrelating" (*Parables* 134). Rather, I am suggesting that "deformation" is a condition of expression and of modern forms of perception that are hardly "nonconscious" or anti-intentional but rather riddled with the self-consciousness that allows us to perceive expression in the first place (134, 137).

To think of expression as the product of perception as a form of deformation and delay might help us understand what these ugly pictures of Oscar Wilde really mean—and,

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ultimately, how we are to interpret the literally degenerating image of Wilde's face in Lautrec's 1895 watercolor. For the art historian E. H. Gombrich and the psychoanalyst Ernst Kris, writing at the onset of World War II, caricature is not simply an art but rather a psychology of deformation, having developed at the end of the sixteenth century alongside the notion that art was a "*projection* of an inner image." Before this time, pictures were considered not representative but real embodiments of a person, such that "distort[ing] a man's face" was tantamount to injuring him. For Gombrich and Kris, distortion is a defining element of modern vision that influences the forms of "*projection*" through which the subject is visualized, so that the "inner image" is a "readjustment." This process, the pair argue, resembles Freud's notion of primary process, a dreamlike, nonconscious state, in which a particular mental image diminishes the frustration of not having an object.[16]

In connecting caricature to Freud's primary process, Gombrich and Kris, however indirectly, qualify the position they articulate earlier, where they define caricature as a physiognomic genre. Like the physiognomist, the caricaturist penetrates, or reads, the outer surface of the subject but, in contrast to the tenets of nineteenth-century physiognomy, does not attempt to synthesize its interior and exterior dimensions: "The caricaturist . . . does not seek the perfect form but the perfect deformity, thus penetrating through the mere outward appearance to the inner being in all its littleness or ugliness." In its link to personality as a script that enables reading, modern caricature is a reading, an art of deformation based on misrecognition. To return to Baudelaire, the moment of not seeing our own faces in the mirror is also the point where we may laugh a moment late. This suspension of perception in time, for Gombrich and Kris, is tantamount to the way "a joke is thought out." While the aim of the joke may be intentional, its dynamics are not. That particular aim, "ridicule," offends its viewer through its concretization of a momentary, even unglimpsable expression that is only a projection.

As it captures these projections, caricature can ultimately be understood as a recording of the spectator's encounter with a surface—or a picture of a scene of reading, of Baudelaire's "two beings face to face with one another." This scene, as it comes to stand in for the larger phenomenon of modern aesthetic expression, is characterized by the temporal suspense of laughter. Laughter is a form of reading that, unlike Symons's insidious analysis of Lautrec's portrait, is unsure of itself. As an expression that deforms an expression, caricature underlines the value of the unreadable, of the possible suspension or gap between our affects and our conscious understanding of them.

As I have suggested, in posttrial depictions Wilde's face no longer offers an avenue into the dimensions of his character but rather becomes a badge of personality. Meaning is not a projection of the inside, but, rather, as is evident in Symons's account of Wilde's degenerating visage, the pathological informs the construction of a seemingly readable subject based on the physiological expression of the person or personality. As Baudelaire's "On the Essence of Laughter" suggests, however, this readability is a fiction, since the most overtly moralistic intentions regarding a work's content are subject to the deformation of the modern viewer. In the earlier caricatures of Wilde, I have argued, Wilde's real physical irregularities cohere to locate meaning in an image that is, in many ways, a projection of an interior. This interior evaporates in the twentieth century, but the image of Wilde still flourishes as a form of expression that exceeds the very particularities of his embodiment. Viewed in this way, the phenomenon of expression demonstrates how meaning emerges from our embodied attachments to a multidimensional and sensory world. Of course, I have not addressed here how Wilde would have responded to such

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questions and in particular the deformation entailed in "not seeing his own face in a glass." For him, the question of likeness, the coherency of the image, trumps any consideration of its content, "as those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming." In these epigrams from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde is elaborating a practice of modern reading that involves not looking into things too deeply (21).

Notes

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1. Tomkins here is actually identifying the face as the "primary site" of affect, in contrast to the secondary, "bodily" behavior to which affect can be related (114).

2. Bristow also mentions this passage of Symons's: "[t]his single paragraph of contemptuous loathing shows how troublingly Wilde had come to represent all that was sexually other to the so-called normal virile man" (17).

3. For example, in the illustrations accompanying the review of *An Ideal Husband* in the 12 January 1895 issue of the illustrator Harry Furniss's magazine *Lika Joko*, a plump Wilde, dressed in a kimono, holds a crying baby in one hand while bathing a second, older child in a wash pan with "carnation soap" (Rev.).

4. For an excellent analysis of the concepts of degeneration and decadence in relation to the trials, see Foldy.

5. See Sinfield; Cohen; and Dowling.

6. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty faults the Cartesian logic that affirms the notion of a top and bottom, in which the "subject is nothing but what it thinks it is" (198). "Analytical reflection," he argues, is a problem, because it "knows nothing of the problem of other minds, or of that of the world" (xii).

7. Frank and Wilson also respond to Leys's reading of Tomkins's concept of "facial affectivity" (876).

8. For Massumi, affect cannot be fully realized in language. Affect, he argues in *Parables of the Virtual*, is "intensity," an "*autonomic*" reaction to the image (27, 28). For a useful distinction between affect and emotion as it has been employed in the work of Connolly, Massumi, and others, see Papoulias and Callard.

9. As Curtis has observed, such physiognomic theories informed caricature as a technique; the protruding jawline characteristic of prognathism was a regular feature of English caricatures of the Irish that "helped to harden as well as perpetuate the stereotypes of 'white Negroes' and simianized Celts" (15).

10. While Bartlett concurs with other critics that the trials of 1895 were important in making homosexuality the subject of more explicit conversation in Victorian London, he suggests that the "before" and "after" critical discourse that has developed in relation to the trials has contributed to a "fiction of our invisibility" before that date (128).

11. For an excellent analysis of Wilde's racialized position as an Anglo-Irish subject, see also Marez.

12. Blanchard details the rise of aestheticism in America in relation to cultural fears about manhood and idleness.

13. For analysis of Darktown Comics in relation to post-Reconstruction history, see Logan 164.

14. The 1882 pamphlet *Ye Soul Agonies in Ye Life of Oscar Wilde*, illustrated by Kendry and published anonymously, comically details the coming of age of Oscar Wilde, from infancy to his appearance in America.

15. On whether laughter is "permissible," one is reminded of Freud's contention in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* that laughter is an expression of inhibition related to feelings that are, in fact, forbidden.

16. In the primary process, Freud explains, the psychic apparatus is thought to bind the "*freely-mobile* processes which press toward discharge" (*Beyond* 40). He describes the primary processes in contrast to the "secondary processes" of "normal waking life" (41).

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