***As if\****

***an editorial***

**Laura Edbrook, August 2019**

What does it mean to fall in love with a writer? Or rather, to be ensorcelled in some kind of remedial romance, or, maybe the question is, to practice weak (at the knees?) (compassionate) theory? The concluding paragraph of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s essay ‘Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins’ proposes the critical attachment of love; of affection, gratitude, solidarity, as a mode of cathecting ‘a theoretical moment not [of] one’s own’[[1]](#footnote-1)—a critical attention, attentiveness, a form of care as a form of practice which situates itself towards the/a present.

The caveat question Sedgwick and Frank go on to ask is: ‘what else *could* [loving] mean?’[[2]](#footnote-2) Their work on the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1911-1991) prefigures Sedgwick’s call for a reparative reading practice[[3]](#footnote-3) as a spirit of resistance and necessary form of renarrativising.

In a workshop launching the first year of the Master of Letters in Art Writing at The Glasgow School of Art, we thought about what it might, or could, mean to write in or from an art studio. We thought about the meeting point between literature, art and critical theory: supporting this conversation we read the reflective essays in *Theory, A Sunday*, a collection anthologising a Québec-based discussion group which met every two months during 1983. Proposals for the writing studio reflected hopes for the same ‘living, writing, and discussing through [one’s] own specificity’ that Lisa Robertson describes in her introduction, ‘Theory, A City’. ‘What supported [this] intellectual generosity and intensity?’[[4]](#footnote-4) asks Robertson.

If we think of the studio as an embodied location situated in the present, then we know of its forces for writing and voicing, its capacity for active, tacit, speculative and transformative practices. The shared studio is a collective activity and yet a site that does not negate solitude. Such relational and conversational modes of art, writing and theory are activated by a reparative model of practice, one that has supported each student on the Art Writing programme to flourish according to their own rhythm. I don’t attempt here to canonise this inaugural year or determine a pedagogical practice-led ontology, but to reflect on the value of temporal belonging, of friendship and care (even within the institution), both in the localised sense of encounters with one another, and in a contextual sense of the works we carry into our own, of who and what we live and write *with*.

As the year draws to a close, we contemplate Roland Barthes’ *How to Live Together*, a series of lectures translated by Kate Briggs, considering the potential of writing and art to create and reinvent shared spaces, ways of living, forms of social and ecological relations. This project saw Barthes explore forms and techniques of temporal belonging, and specifically, a fantasy of idiorrythmy: a form of ‘living together’ where ‘cohabitation does not preclude individual freedom.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

To love a writer (let’s name them a writer)[[6]](#footnote-6) reconnects literature, art and critical theory to life and literature, art and critical theory to the writer *and* the reader. As we sit around the low circular plinth repurposed as a coffee table and cloaked in a patterned cloth (let’s name this a point of contact), we remind one another to reimagine what we see as a vital form of interaction with the world, a vigorous attempt to *clear the air*.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This first edition of *The Yellow Paper* marks the beginning of the Graduate Programme in Art Writing at The Glasgow School of Art. It gathers work from the inaugural cohort and contributions from artists and writers who have been key to its establishment; Kate Briggs, Laurence Figgis, Daisy Lafarge and Susannah Thompson. This is by no means representative of the generosity received both this year and in the design and planning of the programme, too many people to mention here, but I would like to note with gratitude the spirited contributions of Lauren Dyer Amazeen and Elizabeth Reeder.

1. \* In *The Preparation of the Novel*, a series of lectures translated by Kate Briggs, Roland Barthes speaks of *as if* as the motto of *method:* ‘Method = the methodical exploitation of a hypothesis; here, as you’ll have grasped: a hypothesis not of *explanation* (of interpretation) (meta-Novel), but of *production.’*

   Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick & Adam Frank, ‘Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins’, *Critical Inquiry,* *21*(2), p521 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sedgwick & Frank, *ibid* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In *Touching Feeling*:*Affect*,*Pedagogy*,*Performativity* (2003), Sedgwick calls fora critical practice that seeks to nurture its objects of study as resistance of a hermeneutics of suspicion-based reading and paranoid rhetoric. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lisa Robertson, ‘Theory, A City’, *Theory, A Sunday*. (Belladonna\* USA, 2013), p11 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Roland Barthes, Kate Briggs, *How to Live Together: Literary Simulations of Some Everyday Living Spaces*, (Columbia University Press, 2013), p11 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kate Briggs’ ‘A bit, a piece, a thing, a twin’ (pp 17-20) considers an anxiety of interdisciplinarity (Julia Kristeva 1998) in how we speak of or name the work that we do, its critical intentions, its particular epistemology. Her workshop, with reference to the interdisciplinary field of art writing and semantic claims for its post-critical surge and shifting disposition, signaled the potency of naming and genre distinctions. Similarly, Laurence Figgis’ ‘Paintings with Legs’(pp 11-14) also presents the idea of words as only names for things. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Norman Denny, in his introduction to the 1950 collected edition of *The Yellow Book*, refers to the significant outrage to the quarterly volume published between 1894-1897. Critics claimed that the works published signaled a decadence and a ‘fin de siècle’. Instead of an ending, writes Denny, this work—much of which has come to be acknowledged as seminal—demonstrated a ‘youthful and vigorous attempt to make a beginning, to break new ground, to clear the air.’ (p9) Hubert Crackanthorpe’s ‘Reticence in Literature: Some Roundabout Remarks’ (pp94-104) comments upon this fury as caused by a sense of unease, a struggle with not knowing and a difficulty in naming. *The Yellow Book: A Selection* (London, Bodley Head, 1950) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)