Review of Tomkins
Affect, Imagery, Consciousness

Vol. 1. The Positive Affects, 1962

F.E. Emery

Note from ME. Here we see another example of how Fred worked, persisting with what he considered to be an important task over time. He had immense respect for Silvan Tomkins' work to which he constantly returned and referred, particularly his first two volumes. These notes below were originally four separate ones which I have put into one chronological document.

Even the reader who has learnt enough in life to control his courage may find it helpful to have recourse to a premier. Fortunately, Tompkins has provided one such. A contribution like this is not without danger. A review of this book would be irresponsible if it did not draw attention to one aspect that could have serious convergence. He is quite literally an embarrassment of riches. His reviewer is probably not unique in having missed the warning that Tompkins gave of his… at the Montreal…... None is being heavily…for time to keep up with work of fruit class quality in his areas of special interest. Tompkins work arriving from the….into this type of situation in almost too much to cope with.

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Date : 17 January 1963
To : Diana Burfield

Re : Consciousness Affect and Memory Vol. 1 (Review of Tomkins)

The development of psychology has been hindered by the lack of adequate general conceptions. Most of our work is done in restricted problem areas and development is very often a matter of sensing relevancies in neighbouring areas, of sensing the general limits and general characteristics of these restricted areas. General conceptions help us in these matters. Hebb's neurological models, information theory and cybernetics have each helped some psychologists in this way. If is my belief that Tompkins has gone a very great distance further.

One of the great inadequacies of our general conceptions of psychological man has been that the models have been too impoverished to guide psychological practice – observed behaviour is too rich by far. From a depth of knowledge of psychology, neurology and animal biology Tompkins has created a model of appropriate richness. His hypothesis of the dominance of the effect system is a major breakthrough in the face of the traditional narrow attempts to builds a model of man on his motives. His hypothesis on consciousness and memory are equally enlightening.

It is difficult to think of comparable books in the history of psychology. One thinks of William James "Principles of Psychology' and perhaps next of Koffka's 'Principles of Gestalt Psychology'. It is very likely to have the same sort of long-range effect and publication history.
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***Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*. By Silvan S. Tomkins, Vol.1. *The Positive Affects*, New York: Springer 1962; London: Tavistock, 1964. Pp. xiv + 522. 65s**

1964

This is the first of four volumes; three were originally projected but a fourth has been deemed necessary to cope with the elaboration of the theoretical framework. The second volume has now appeared and the reviewer has been privileged to see drafts of large parts of the other two but this review will be confined to the first.

Reviewing just the first volume had proved an almost impossible task. A great many important revolutionary hypotheses from a wide array if disciplines. It would be possible in a review to seize upon one or two hypotheses as critical and comment accordingly. However, not only would this presuppose a high degree of prescience but it would miss the major feature of the work, that it is a massive re-thinking of psychological science. The challenge it poses to our accepted models of man (and of our near neighbours) cannot be met simply by re-thinking each part, yet once again, in terms of our current knowledge. Nothing metaphysical is intended in this statement; it is simply that enough of Tomkins's hypotheses are so well establish that we would need new and different data to rebut his others and thus maintain the ones to which we are accustomed.

The main task for the reviewer seems to be that of drawing attention to characteristics of psychology is hindered by the lack of adequate general unifying conceptions. Most of our work is done in restricted problem areas, and development is very often a matter of sensing the general characteristics and limits of these restricted areas. General conceptions help in these matters. Hebb's neurological model, information theory and cybernetics have each helped some psychologists in this way. Tomkins has gone a very great distance further. One of the marked inadequacies of our general psychological conceptions of man has been that the models have been too impoverished to guide psychological practice – observed behaviour is too rich by far. From a deep knowledge psychology, physiology, ethology and biology, Tomkins has created a model of appropriate richness. His hypothesis of the centrality of the affect system is a major breakthrough in the face of our traditional models narrowly based as they are on the primacy of drives. The drives, manifesting as they do the boundary conditions of a relatively stable, homeostatic internal environment, are shown to be low in urgency and high in specific informational content about 'where and when to do what'. In contrast the affects manifest and amplify states and change of states of the C.N.S. which are no more stable than one could expect for any organism that is mobile in an already complex environment. The affects are in consequence high in urgency but low in specific

informational content. In combination the effects and drives define a system that is essentially open – the logically sufficient conditions for its behaviour may arise from within the system or in its environment. The relevance of this system for the adaptiveness of the organism lies in the fact that it matches in its complexity ‘the receptor, analyser, storage and motor mechanisms within

AFFECT DYNAMICS - Resume of SST.

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1. The affects of startle, fear and excitement, based on quantum increases in stimulation, will override the affects of distress and anger. (e.g. the soldier wounded in battle and remaining unaware of it till later). Distress and anger, based on the continuing absolute level of stimulation, will override independent sources of joy based on reduction of stimulation. The exception is a non-independent source with rapidly reduced stimulation e.g. when one stops beating one's head against a brick wall.

2. There is an inverse relationship between the density of neural firing of an affect and its duration (a consequence of the equilibrium that must be maintained between metabolic and catabolic processes - a thyroid/ adrenal relationship that varies both between and within species (Crile).
Thus, the affects of startle, fear and excitement can only temporarily mask anger and distress.

3. Continuing novelty and challenge (e.g. keeping busy as a therapy for chronic distress or chronic worries) can mask distress and anger to the point where the 'energy debt' (Selye) produces a 'nervous breakdown" - a prolonged period of depression and irrational outbursts of anger. This process is strengthened insofar as the pursuit of novelty and challenge reduces the opportunities for the joyful reduction of stimulation that comes from commerce with that which is familiar. (Studies that lump together joy and interest/ excitement under the rubric of 'happiness' or 'satisfaction', as in 'job satisfaction').

4. There are two limits to the adaptive functioning of the affect system as the primary information system of an organism. a) panic, horror and terror are the human responses to an exponential increase in density of stimulation. Tomkins takes the startle response as his theoretical extreme, but admits that this is more of the nature of a reflex than an affect. In his brief discussion of dreaming (Vol.1, pp281-2) he admits to these affects in order to account for nightmares but does not bring them into his theory. He does point to accumulated 'unfinished business' as a potent source of such affects. One would expect an overload of unfinished business to be a very likely consequence of a creative intellectual commitment where every question that is answered leads to twice as many more questions to be explored. That is another path to 'nervous breakdown".

b) At the other extreme, as a limiting condition, is sensory deprivation. So long as this is relative deprivation the effect is much the same as persistent non-optimal over-stimulation. Both conditions can lead to 'nervous breakdown'

Prolonged sensory deprivation, depending on the degree of deprivation, can lead to psychotic and irreversible disintegration of sensory functioning. The affects attending this extreme appear to be those that attend the other extreme, i.e. panic, horror and terror.

c) Tomkins theory allows for three directions of objective conditional states that would lead to adaptive affective reactions: increasing stimulation, persisting non-optimal stimulation and reduction of stimulation. We have considered the limits that might apply to the first two. In the interests of theoretical adequacy we should consider whether there is a limit to the third direction: reduction of stimulation. In his graphical representation of innate activators of affects (Vol.1 p251) Tomkins includes laughter as the extreme of stimulation reduction but appears not to have discussed it further, nor to include it in his subsequent list of primary affects. I suggest that laughter is an exponential rate of reduction of tension. I suggest, further, that hysterical laughter is the end of the road - the point where, like in panic or terror, the affect is no longer informative about anything other than the affective state it is locked into. [Tomkins, in his theory, tried to encompass the range of human affects in the informational properties of level of neural firing, e.g. aggression higher than distress; rate of increase in neural firing, e.g. startle being a higher rate than fear ,and fear being a higher rate than excitement. We have ample evidence that living systems use the evidence given by 'the rate of the rate of increase'. If the human affect system had not used such information we would have faced a very serious problem of explaining why (particularly since we know that the perceptual system does, as in detecting looming objects). I am suggesting that the affects of panic/horror/terror (different aspects of the same affect?) do correspond to the rate of the rate of change of stimulation.

I suspect that Tomkins desisted from postulating affects related to the 'rate of rate' information because at that time, 1959-60, the only information- bearing biological systems that we had firm knowledge of were the hormonal and the neuronal. Systems that were vastly different in their speed and range of action. It is only in the last decade or so that a firm body of evidence has emerged on the intermediary range of pheromones and neuropeptides. It is only in the last couple of years, when we have identified some sixty neuropeptides and discovered that some, at least of the hormones are neuropeptides, that we have a picture of a unified biological information system: a system that is quite adequate for the handling of information coming from the rate of the rate of change in critical variables.

This information gap might also explain why the affects of disgust, shame and contempt are not represented in the graph that Tomkins uses to relate stimulus change and density to innate affects. Disgust appears to be the basis of the subsequent

emergence of contempt and shame. Disgust, like startle, appears to be more like a reflex than an affect. It is highly probable that it is a residual pheromonal response. As a pheromonal response it would not fall within the laws of concentration and duration that apply to internally generated hormonal, neuropeptidal or neuronal stimulation. Pheromones act at a distance with quantum effect- if present, in even the minutest quantity, they carry their message.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN AFFECTS.

1." reduction of any negative affect is "rewarding" whether or not it instigates positive affect. Such reward is sufficient to motivate future attempts to reduce the same negative affects... Not to feel afraid any more, not to feel distressed, not to fell ashamed is innately preferred to feeling afraid, distressed or ashamed."(p283). No affect is preferable to experiencing negative affect.

2. "the reduction of any positive affect is 'punishing' whether or not it instigates negative affect. This is sufficient to motivate future attempts to avoid the same reduction of positive affect." (p284).
In these two cases that motivational properties emerge from the experienced quality of the affect and the experienced quality of no affect; no affect is preferred to experiencing negative affect, and positive affect is preferred to no affect. People are thus highly motivated to manage their affects over time, not just in the here-and-now.

3. instigation of negative affect is usually more punishing that reduction of positive affect and instigation of positive affect more rewarding that relief from negative affect.

4. the effect of intense, enduring affect is to magnify the effect of any interruption or change.

5. the sudden interruption of positive affect (excitement or joy) may lead to distress and aggression or to shame, depending on whether the interruption is attributed to inner or outer constraints. Shame, and self-alienation, typically arises when one part of the personality constrains another part. The oscillation between approach and withdrawal is typical of depressive states. Step-by-step interruption may succeed in evoking no negative affect.

6. incomplete reduction of fear releases excitement e.g. the role of alcohol in closely tied communities where flight is not a solution. Complete reduction releases joy.

7. Induction. Any half-baked reduction of an intense, on-going affect will induce a strengthening of that affect.

8. Contagion. "All affects are specific activators of themselves." (p296) They tend to activate the same emotions in others.

9. "Distress which is unrelieved and intense is a specific releaser of anger" (p298) One consequence of this innate connection is that people learn that to control their aggression they must learn to control their distress. Extreme inhibition of distress can lead to denial that there is any reason for dissatisfaction with any state of affairs (coarctation, in Rorschach terms).

10. "Affect is a high energy venture. The activation of any affect generates an energy debt proportional to the intensity and duration of the affect. (p299) There appears to be an exhaustion level from which endocrinological recovery is never complete (e.g. studies of war veterans who have been diagnosed as 'battle fatigue'). A persisting debt is often characterized by a relative affectlessness.

11. "Low energy raises the threshold of positive affect and lowers the threshold of negative affects. Conversely with high energy (p303)

12. "The maintenance of sufficient energy to support goal striving depends in no small measure on the individual's commitment to goals which engage him... This activation of positive affect or negative affect is a necessary condition for the mobilization of the energy reserves which support the behaviour calculated to achieve positive and negative goals. In the absence of negative or positive affect, energy reserves cannot be mobilized and goal striving is thereby jeopardized."(p304).