

Claire
Colebrook

Earth Felt the Wound: The Affective Divide

We are suffering, today – here and now – from hyper-hypo-affective disorder. We appear to be consuming nothing other than affects; even the supposed material needs of life – food, sex, sociality – are now marketed affectively. Branding relies on irrational attachments or “lovemarks,”¹ while politics trades in terror and resentment. Affects themselves are marketed: one can purchase games of horror or disgust, and even the purchase of a cup of coffee is perhaps undertaken less for the sake of the caffeine stimulant and more for the Starbucks affect.² This is what led Michael Hardt to theorise a new era of affective labour.³ But this over-consumption and boom of marketable affects is accompanied by affect fatigue, as though there were an inverse relation between the wider and wider *extension* of affective influx and the ever-diminishing *intensity* of affect. It is not surprising then that cultural diagnoses of the present observe two seemingly incompatible catastrophic tendencies: a loss of cognitive or analytic apparatuses in the face of a culture of affective immediacy, and yet a certain deadening of the human organism (ranging from Walter Benjamin’s observation of an absence of experience in an information age to Fredric Jameson’s claim for a “waning of affect” in a world of over-stimulation in which there is no longer a distinction

between experiencing subject and external object, or other person, for whom one might feel empathy⁴).

On the one hand there is a widespread consensus and diagnosis that the human sensory motor apparatus has departed from an informational-cognitive or even image-based mode of immaterial consumption to one of affect. (Such a turn to affect has been both lamented and celebrated, seen either as a retreat from judgment *or* as a liberation from overly calculative modes of reason.) Katherine N. Hayles has referred to a shift from deep attention to hyper attention (2007). Bernard Stiegler, working critically from Hayles, has diagnosed a widespread cultural attention deficit disorder. He rejects Hayles suggestion that this shift or loss might be ameliorated by different pedagogic strategies; more is required than – as Hayles proposes – simply intertwining Faulkner with computer games. Stiegler places the turn to mere stimulus within a broader *fault* or potential deficit of the human brain, which has always required (and yet been threatened by) inscriptive technologies that extend its range beyond its organic boundaries. For Stiegler the loss of deep attention is also an atrophy of trans-individual networks; the script technologies that had always supplemented the brain’s power

and had also always threatened to weaken that power through externalization and alienation reach new levels of risk. Without extended circuits connecting the reading-writing brain to logics not its own we face the perils of a new infantilism (Stiegler 2009). *Techné* no longer opens the brain onto broader circuits but produces short-circuits. Flickering screens leave the eye-brain within itself. In a more popular mode, closer to the more panicked tones of Nicholas Carr's *In the Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (2010), Susan Greenfield (2008) argues that we are no longer developing the neural networks or habits that allow us to read with a connecting grammar. We are more oriented to the flashing stimuli of detached intensities, not so much meaning as sensation. In a contrasting celebratory mode Mark Hansen, whose signature maneuver has been one of returning texts to lived bodies ("correcting" Deleuze by way of Bergson, "correcting" Stiegler by way of Husserl) argues that digital media's simulation of faces has the direct affect of re-engaging the viewer-consumer's affective responses thereby redeeming art history and "high theory" from the errors of its inhuman ways:

Insofar as the confrontation with the DFI functions by triggering affectivity as, precisely, a faculty of embodied heterogenesis, it operates a transfer of affective power from the image to the body. Instead of a static dimension or element intrinsic to the image, affectivity thereby becomes the very medium of interface with the image. What this means is that affectivity actualizes the potential of the image at the same time as it virtualizes the body: the crucial element is neither image nor body alone, but the dynamical interaction between them. As the digital artworks discussed at the end of this article propose, if we can allow the computer to impact our embodied affectivity directly, our communication and our coevolution with the computer – and along

with it visual culture more generally – will enter a truly new, "post-imagistic" phase.⁵

Before we launch into too simplistic a notion of historical break or fall into a myopic culture of affect we need to note that there has always been an affective component of cultural production, and that this has always been acknowledged and theorized (going back to the doctrine of affects). It would be more accurate to say that we are witnessing a shift in the cultural dominant. Just as the affective component of cultural production has always been present, so has a suspicion of the *merely* felt. The anxiety regarding a dominance of the merely affective or visually captivating in the face of a weakening of cognition has often blamed the externality of technological and mnemonic devices for deflecting the brain from its proper potentiality. There have always been fears regarding the capacity for technology to weaken cognition, reducing the brain to mere automaton of stimulus interface. This is why Stiegler's reading of the history of *techné* as *pharmacological* is so important: he neither simply adopts Derrida's history of metaphysics in which writing technologies have always been unjustifiably purged as parasitic, nor celebrates a posthuman digital culture in which illusions of the brain's autonomy would have been overcome. For Stiegler, any brain-extending system, including the brain's own mnemonic networks, at once enables more complex relations *and* precludes the brain from ever having a law or propriety of its own. What Stiegler laments is not alienation, technology and loss of internal integrity per se, but the historical loss of *individuation* where systems would not be general and mechanistic but would enable 'a' singular time to be read for all time. It is not technology's takeover Stiegler laments so much as its

reduction to localized stimuli at the expense of broader and more complex circuits, not so much the liberation or tyranny of digital culture as its over-simplification. To read *Plato's* dialogues, Stiegler argues, requires a highly sophisticated writing-reading system that enables a sense to be intuited that is not that of my present world, and that also allows something like “a” Plato to be reactivated by future generations (generations who can nevertheless read a past time for the present). What the present threatens to do is break those individuating modes of reading – which is why, perhaps, Stiegler attributes an individuating potential to social networking sites, such as *facebook*. (Stiegler 2010, 134) *Here*, the screen I encounter is not a simply stimulating prompt for rule-bound response but an opening to other speeds and networks.

So while it would be too simplistic to create a pure divide between cognition or affect, and similarly inadequate to posit a straightforward historical break it is possible to notice within any work two tendencies or temporal economies – the connective delays of cognition versus the immediacy of affective stimulus – there is nevertheless a contraction or weakening of grammars and syntaxes of cognition in the face of the instant gratification of affections. Computer games, and the cinematic and tele-visual cultural products that are inflected by game culture may have narrative and teleological components, but the dominant experience is that of intensities. A culture of shock and awe allows us to sit before a screen and enjoy the affects of horror, terror, mourning, desire, disgust, fear and excitement without *sense*. The distinction between cognitive-semantic and affective-stimulant aesthetic modes is not purely historical and operates in any recognition of an art-work as art or a text as true. If a text were “purely” true then its affective dimension, though present, would

be immaterial; by contrast, if one grants an object the status of *art* then one attributes some monumental quality to its materiality, some sense of an affective component that is that of the art object itself.

This dependence of artworks on an autonomous materiality that is intrinsic to the work (whereas pure cognition or logic would aim to be substrate neutral) would still be the case for digital or mass-produced media, for it is digital culture that manages to create an infinitely divisible matter. The digital codes that enable the continual repetition of a materiality, such as a sound, colour or text generated by codes, may be purely formal and substrate neutral, but the outcome of digitalization is the capacity to reproduce matters without any loss or division of the original. Digital culture could therefore be *either* purely formal and cognitive, with the manipulation of digits and empty variables *or* predominantly affective with digital technologies enabling the simulation of stimulating matters. What is significant is digital culture's tendency towards a far more strict retraction of the digit or the circulating unit: even when visual culture is not digital in the sense of being digitally rendered into codes for computer replication, there can be a retreat of attention to the already established digits or units of communication. If one laments the waning of a culture of reading and the loss of deep attention in favour of hyper-attention then this may also count as a mourning for analog modes of reading, whereby there was not a direct passage or translation between stimulus and response but a delay in assessing what counted as a unit of information or input. The very history and possibility of reading relies on a complex relation between digital and analog. All reading operates by way of digitalization, or – as Bergson noted – a capacity to reduce differential complexity to already

established units of recognition; without that reduction of differential complexity perception would be paralyzed (Bergson 1912). Concepts enable generality and at once reduce the experienced world to recognizable form to enable action, so the simpler the digit the higher the speed, the greater the efficiency. What appears to be operating today is a high degree of digital distinction and accuracy, precluding the need for interpretive delays. Digital culture would include not only computer digitalization in the narrow sense, but a culture of speeds whereby stimulus circulates without translation or transfer, where there is a single circuit of relay. This would begin to explain why attention deficit is actually the need for *more* stimulus – precisely because there would be no delay or depth of decoding.

The symptomatology of attention deficit, which is tied to an over-stimulus of affect, makes a historical claim regarding the dialectic between cognition (or reading *as*) and affective pleasure (or stimulant vision). The eye-brain is abandoning or self-extinguishing one of its evolved powers, and one sees this exhaustion of the power of *sense* and the hypertrophy of sensation not just in the proliferation of new media but in the invasion of new media speeds into traditional media.

Non-digital forms of production are resonant, now, both of digital speeds – with even “heavy” novels being produced in bite-sized chunks from multiple and dispersed viewpoints. Even seemingly slow and remarkably human cultural productions, such as the unstructured reality television events of *Big Brother* rely not on plotting and character development so much as the capacity to pick up or leave the screen at any point. Such works are unsigned or devoid of sense precisely insofar as they are

less events of production, created to stand alone or possess a certain force, as events of consumptive immediacy: the camera simply takes up whatever is there to be passed on and viewed. Cinema and visual culture can be both narrative-semantic and stimulant-affective. (There is, of course a distinction between stimulus and affect: the former is neutral and pre-semantic, and could either be read as information or merely felt. But affect is often associated with the merely, solely or simply felt as though it were only stimulus; this conflation is at the heart of hyper-hypo affective disorder. For if affect could be distinguished from cognition and yet still have a non-informational or non-semantic sense then one might find a way of overcoming the deep mourning for a culture of meaning and deep attention without celebrating the brain’s self-extinction.)

Any historical divide or paradigm break can be intuited only by distinguishing tendencies within mixtures. The relation between felt stimulus and conceptual order was long ago placed within the artwork in Kant’s aesthetic: one feels the influx of sensation but not as bodily pathos but as that which ought to find its way to some communicable sense, not sense as what this object is but sense as how this *would feel* - *sensus communis*. To a certain extent this is what Stiegler refers to as trans-individuation, which depends crucially on technologies that create a network in which the reading-viewing brain is invaded by signatures and speeds not its own. More close to Kant, though, there has been an art-critical tradition of considering affect *not* as feeling but as the sense of a work, where sense is an orientation prompted by perceived relations. What this implies is that viewed objects, or relations of viewing, have different promissory temporalities: the sense of a feeling of humanity in general,

what “one” would feel. It is in this tradition that Deleuze draws upon Worringer’s (1953) historical work to place the relation between cognition and affect within art history: early art is geometrically abstract, giving order to the world; but this is superseded by empathy or the depiction of organic forms that one might perceive and feel. Deleuze then places this historical problem *within* the work of Francis Bacon: how can one paint the body not as an organism one *feels* but as a figure emerging from forces not its own? Deleuze and Guattari also write a pre-history of the reading eye that is directly political: the eye moves from being a collective organ, *feeling* the pain as it sees knife enter flesh, to being a privatized reading machine, viewing the cut of the knife as a *sign* of a punishment for a transgression committed and a retribution to be paid. The eye becomes organized as a reading and memory machine:

...the voice no longer sings but dictates, decrees; the graphy no longer dances, it ceases to animate bodies, but is set into writing on tablets, stones, and books; the eye sets itself to reading. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 223)

This occurs as the organization of the body, an organism in which seeing, hearing, speaking and touching all fold in on the private body who can now view the world as a single matter determined from “a” point of order (an event of deterritorialisation).

With that Deleuzo-Guattarian work in the background it is not surprising that there has been a celebration of affect, as though affect would release us from the ‘despotism of the signifier’ (or, more broadly, the tyranny of Cartesian and computational paradigms). And yet it is the event of privatization, with forces or pure predicates

being referred back to the single organizing living body that is celebrated by the affective turn, much of what passes as Deleuzian inflected theory champions precisely what Deleuze and Guattari’s aimed for future would go beyond. So while Deleuze and Guattari chart the genesis of the organized body from affects, and then describe the organization of those affects (now as lived) by way of the unified organism of the man of reason, this does not imply that they want to return to the site of genesis, return to the embodied lived affect that has been alienated by the axiomatics of the single system of capital. On the contrary, the problem of affect – the *truth of affect, which would be something like force as such* – cannot be retrieved by a return to the body. Rather, capitalism is not axiomatic enough, not inhuman enough. It suffers from an anthropomorphism that can also be accounted for by, and as, hyper-hypo-affective disorder. Capitalism, if pushed to its maximum potential or nth power, would open the relations among forces to produce multiple differential quantities. But as long as everything is organized according to consumption and production (in terms of the digits of the private organism) the potential for forces to be produced – such as affects - will always be grounded upon affections. The visual production of the affect of horror or terror will be oriented to horrifying or terrorizing (as in many horror films or political campaigns). As long as affects are confused with affections, or feelings of the lived body, then nothing will ever be felt; the body will only re-live itself.

An element that has always been present in any work – the degree of lived bodily stimulus – has now become the focus not only of consumption and production but also of criticism and “theory.” The “affective turn” accounts for the emergence of language, music, morality

and art in general by referring to the lived body's desire for self-maintenance. (In a similar manner the ethical turn was also a turn *back* to social relations, feelings and duties: and we might ask why this turn back occurs just as humanity is facing a world where there may be an *un-lived*?) Deleuze and Guattari offer a complex history of the relation between brain, body, intellect and affect, and follow Bergson in arguing for a history of thought's different powers, with technologies of concepts and artistic methods allowing at once for organic *unity* (the sensory motor apparatus that reduced all to efficiency) *and* for another tendency to think time as such or difference as such. Concepts, for example, reduce complex differences to generalities so that thinking can proceed efficiently, in the service of action. But there could also be concepts that destroyed efficiency and action – such as the concepts of justice, democracy, humanity – but that opened thinking to a future. What would justice be? The same might be said of affects: it would only be by destroying affections – the ready and easy responses craved by our habituated bodies – that might open affects. If Deleuze's work has seemed to license a return to lived and bodily affections this should alert us to the constant tendency for relapse and re-territorialisation in the brain's relation to its world. Deleuze and Guattari were critical of a historical tendency of paranoid capitalism: the tendency to read all events through the scheme of the individual set over and against of world of differences that can be felt and lived as his own. Any supposed private affection, they argued – including parental love – opens to all of history, and eventually the 'intense germinal influx.' The mother arrives as already organized, racialised and historicized, and the love between any couple carries all of history and politics with it. In the beginning, they argue, is not the body and its affections, but the affect. There is the force

of knife and flesh, or the dazzling light of the screen; bodies become organisms through the affections composed from these potentialities.

So what can we say about both the "affective turn" in theory, and the addiction to affections at the expense of affect, especially if we do not want to fall too easily into a historical break or nostalgia?

It is not new to diagnose an epoch. Freud placed modernity at the neurotic end of the spectrum, suggesting that an over-fixation on symptomatic displacements needed some release. And perhaps we have swung towards psychosis - not so much tied to libidinal containment and repression as lacking all sense of order, generality, universality or transcendence. If Deleuze and Guattari appealed to schizophrenia they did so against what they saw as the paranoia of modern capitalism - the over-attachment to a single system in which any event or affect would be the sign *of* one single system of life, a life that becomes nothing other than the interaction and exchange of quantifiable force (a simple digitalism of a single axiomatic). Schizoanalysis would split or de-synthesize forces, not reducing all flows to a single system of exchange. And this splitting would give force a "stand-alone" quantity, creating it neither as felt-stimulus *nor* recognized generality. It would short-circuit hyper-hypo affective disorder: the over-stimulated appetite for consuming affects alongside the hypertrophy of the capacity to think affectively. Whereas affect-empathy and abstraction-cognition have been noted as opposing historical and formal tendencies, the present's diagnosed retreat into affect-sensation evidences not a tipping into one of these modes or the other but their indistinction; it is as though there can be no abstract conceptual thinking that is not confused by

“feelings,” and no experiencing of affects that is not already generalized or pre-marketed and “branded.” So we need to note first that there is a growing market in pre-packaged, already-consumed-consumable affections. And yet it is for this reason that there is no affect.

We need, I would suggest, a far more nuanced understanding of affect that distinguishes it from affections. If art and art theory had always had some orientation or sense of affect this was never that of a simple bodily response or lived feeling, not an affection but a force that *would yield* an affection. Affects would be “stand alone” powers, possessing a certain autonomy. One would need to distinguish affect – such as the terror of tragedy – from the affection of being terrified, and these tendencies would have different temporalities. Affect would have to do with the art work’s capacity to create circuits of force beyond the viewer’s own organic networks.

Something of the autonomy of affect in this respect was theorized by Brian Massumi when he suggested bodily responses that bypassed cognitive or emotional sense (Massumi 1995). Antonio Damasio (2000) also enables us to consider that there is, in addition to the feeling of what happens in the body, another dimension of organism’s response that is not attended to. If we are suffering from hyper-affective disorder this is because a potentiality of the body for undergoing stimulus outside conceptuality and attention is now no longer a background condition but accounts for the desiring structures of contemporary culture. The social and political organization of bodies does not occur by way of ideas or beliefs – the imposition of semantic content or structure – but by way of affective addiction, either to the diverting stimuli of personal screens and headphones, or to the bodily stimulants

of caffeine, sugar, tobacco or other widely ingested and publicly legitimated substances. If the constitutive human condition was once deemed to be *Angst* – a sense *that* there might be some event, without any fleshing out of just *what* that event would be – or if the dominant mode of politico-economic affect was that of speculation (a paranoid control of all events into a single system), then we can observe a new and possibly post-human affective order. Rather than *Angst*, or the channeling of attention and investment into an overly mapped and determined future, we have perhaps become psychotically detached from any object domain, “experiencing” the immediacy of affects without any sense that we are being affected by a world of which sensations would be signs. We may well be in an era of a new self-enclosed narcissism, each “individual” being nothing more than a privatized bubble of instantaneous intensities.

Or, more accurately, what would be wanting would be narcissism, for we would no longer be entranced or motivated by a better image of ourselves. Instead, it would be the absence of self-image, of the figure of myself as a beautiful or worthy ‘member of humanity’ that would release me from being driven by anything other than the immediacy of sensations. (Is not the popular refusal of stereotypes along with a certain academic critique of normativity as repressively normalizing indicative of a refusal of anything other than the self as pure performance, an affirmation of active immediacy and a horror of any element that would not be included in the dynamism of life that is always already the self’s own?) Many of the celebrations of affect today, directed as they are against the linguistic paradigm or intellectualist or Cartesian accounts of the self, valorize a model of life in which the self is not really a self at all. There is not an

enclosed individual who then represents the world; in the beginning is the relation or affect, from which some relatively stable responsive centre emerges. Jeremy Rivkin argues not only that we are presently driven by affect and that affective bonds precede the formation of individuals and competitive aggression but that empathy is the human civilizing drive *tout court* (2009). Antonio Damasio, along with Joseph LeDoux (1996) and Maturana and Varela (1987) – and many supposed Deleuzians continuing their emphasis on embodiment and living systems – have turned theory and analysis away from the cognitive, conceptual or reflective dimensions of experience towards embodied, distributed and autopoietic selves. Damasio theorises that the background self is largely unnoticed, and that “Descartes error” consisted in taking the fragment of the responsive self that came to attention as some sort of centre or representing “theatre.” Maturana and Varela, insisting on the embodied nature of the mind, reject the notion of “a” world that would then be pictured or known by a distinct self. There is no world in general, no subject in itself; the world is always given *for* this or that living system and *as* this domain or horizon of possible affects to which bodies would respond. The Cartesian subject is not only a philosophical error, for it is embedded in a tradition of Western individualism in which minds are set over against a world that they quantify and master. A more mindful tradition, closer to Buddhist models of selflessness, would not only be more correct, but may help us in domains as diverse as artificial intelligence and management studies (Flanagan 2007).

All these turns in theory are, I would suggest, *both* expressive of and reactions against hyper-hypo affective disorder. That is, it is precisely at the point at which we have become glutted with affect – so consuming of

affects in a blind and frenzied manner – that theory insists upon the intelligence and profundity of affect. This complex reaction formation is similar to the three sides of the obesity epidemic: we stuff ourselves full of food at indiscriminate speeds, cannot taste or discern anything outside its pre-branding (for we have to be alerted to a food being “chicken-flavoured”) and yet all this is accompanied by a new genre of food porn: master chef competitions, the spectacle of celebrity chefs, restaurant menus that require literary criticism and the migration of artful food depictions from the genre of still life to advertising. Similarly, we gorge on affections yet cannot get the sense of any affect, and all the while live in an age of theory that wallows in the autonomy of affect. Whether we regard the predominantly affective self as a loss of a subject whose identity would yield greater social responsibility and awareness (mourning cognition and grammar in the widespread loss of attention), or whether we see the Cartesian tradition as something better left behind, there seems to be agreement that there has been some affective turn (Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Clough and Halley 2007). This occurs not only at the level of theory, where we recognize the error of the linguistic paradigm or the cognitivist or computational models of the self; it also occurs in a widespread shift in perceptual mechanisms and relations.

It is possible to say that we are indulging in affective over-consumption and that cinematic and marketing devices have to remain constantly innovative – the genre of “torture porn” reflecting and reflecting upon this hyper-affective addiction trend. On the other hand, if it is possible to note a deterioration of the traditionally bounded and individuated subject, alongside an atrophy of the narrative or novelistic imagination of a life lived as a trajectory towards wholeness, recognition and social

meaning – whereby I consider myself from the point of view of the better self I would like others to see me as being – it is also possible to note a contrary tendency towards waning of affect. I would, though, want to give this a different inflection from Fredric Jameson's criticism of a postmodern subject who, deprived of historical connectedness and any broad political sense, becomes nothing more than a schizoid field of intensities, caring little about social trajectories or class consciousness (Jameson 1991). In many respects hypo-affective disorder occurs alongside a strongly informational, if not narrative, attentiveness. There is no shortage of information about the dire threats posed not only to the future of the human species, but to current systems upon which present generations rely in order to survive. Predictions regarding catastrophic economic disorder, imminent resource depletion, viral devastation, chemical warfare, bio-terrorism, rogue states in possession of nuclear weapons or unforeseen disasters brought about by various genetic technologies seem to have had little effect on behaviour and decision making *despite* their widespread narration and imaginative rehearsal. In addition to explicit thought experiments such as Alan Weisman's *World Without Us* or the television series *Life Without Humans*, or one-off documentaries such as *Aftermath*, cinema of the last decade has intensified and multiplied a long-standing tradition of disaster epics entertaining the possibility of the annihilation of the species. Whereas these were once imagined as exogenous events (usually the invasion of alien species), climate change and viral threats now dominate the cinematic imaginary. Novels such as McCarthy's *The Road* or Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* begin in a world in which devastation has occurred; just what event led to such a situation can quite easily remain unstated precisely because the idea of a

near-post-human world is today utterly plausible. To call such novels or films post-apocalyptic misses their significance, for there is not only no apocalyptic revelation or dramatic disclosure, there is also no real sense that there need be a radical intrusion or disturbance for such worlds of depletion and post-humanity to appear. Yet, despite all this information and narrative entertainment regarding humanity's probable end, there is neither panic nor any apparent affective comportment that would indicate that anyone really feels or fears the sense of the end. Climate change denial is one thing, and possibly more rational than climate change awareness coupled with minor delusory negotiations (such as cap and trade, mitigation, adaptation or any of the other bargaining strategies).

The affective turn is not then a solely academic or theoretical correction to the supposed linguistic paradigm of high theory; it is also a pathology of the populace (which is certainly not a polity for it has nothing to do with bodies assembling to speak, deliberate and communicate in common). There is a passion for affective consumption that is *extensive* – more affective input please!!! – but inversely devoid of *intensity*. There is nothing effective about affections; and this includes the fact that we constantly remind ourselves of the primacy of the affective and insist that in the beginning is the emotive attachment, and then proceed to act as if the same old cognitive rules applied. We recognize our affective core, repair our theory and then proceed with argument as usual. Our response tends to be pharmaceutical rather than pharmacological: that is, just as we deal with ADD by providing the brain with chemical stimulus (because ADD sufferers fail to focus because nothing is stimulating enough) so we have dealt with our affective hypertrophy (our inability to sense) by over-consuming and over-producing affects.

How then might we assess the seeming dominance of or addiction to the intensities of affect – including the direct marketing of affects in “feel good” experiences or the horrors of torture porn – alongside the no less apparent atrophy of affective response to an overload of information regarding genuine threats to organic life? Perhaps the way in which affect itself has been theorized might indicate a peculiar structure that would go some way to accounting for this divide.

What if the *concept* of affect were potentially a formation that would shatter the organism’s emotive enclosure? That is, it is possible to see affect as a *concept* in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense: it would not be extensive – referring to an already lived and actualized set of phenomena – but would be intensive, creating new relations and lines of thought, opening different mappings or potentials among what is, what is lived, and what might be thought. Affect can be thought of *not* as the influx of sensation that prompts response or engagement, for it is in the *not acting*, or in the receptivity without responsiveness or relation that affect occurs. Affect becomes a genuine concept when it poses the possibility of thinking the delay or interval between the organism as a sensory-motor apparatus and the world that is (at least intellectually) mapped according to its own measure. If we do tend to conflate affect with emotion – if we do not mark a distinction between the feeling of what happens and a whole domain of pulsations and fluxes beyond the perceptions of the organism – then this is symptomatic of the tendency to reduce the force of concepts to the lived. And is it surprising that the concept of affect with its potential for thinking of forces detached from the lived, from the organism’s responses, from feeling and from emotion would be reduced to an association with thoroughly humanized notions of meaning?

Such problems are particularly important today when the distinction between affect and emotion may go some way to allowing us to envisage life beyond the organism. For it is life beyond the organism – both an actual world in which organic life has been extinguished and a virtual world of potentialities that are not lived – that has become increasingly unthinkable. Such a world may exist (dimly) at the level of affect but not at the level of feeling and the lived. On the contrary, what is presented as potential affect (a world without us) is reduced to affections – feelings of horror that are resolved ultimately as redemption narratives. That is, there is an industry today built on the affective lure of humanity’s and possibly life’s non-existence: this would include high culture installation pieces that feature machines, mechanized robotic humanoids, lost objects and automated sound productions (something like Thomas Mann’s camera without person at the end of *Death in Venice*) to popular visions of a life without humans, such as the sublime opening scene of Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* of 2002 (or the conclusion of Matt Reeve’s *Cloverfield* (2008) (where a supposed department of defense filming of the last humans to have suffered from a violent viral intrusion plays out to the film’s end). There is a widespread circulation of the image of life without life, of witnessing without vision. Or, at least, one might begin to note that there is a disjunction between affect and the lived and that what might at first appear to be differences in degree – such that affect would be a response in the body’s systems that would only partly be lived or felt – might eventually become a difference in kind, such that there would be affects that “stand alone.” Now might be the time to begin considering affect not as the base or ground from which cognition has been abstracted, nor as a primarily embodied and *barely lived* near phenomenon, differing in its intensity

from fully fledged and conceptualised experience, but as a power or force with a tendency to persist or endure.

When Brian Massumi wrote about the autonomy of affect he was referring to somatic responses that not only exceeded the cognitive but also the level of feeling and emotion. (His examples included a melting snowman and President Reagan. Images of both produced bodily responses that could not be mapped onto cognitive values of affirmation or negation, and were not felt as emotions that would then prompt action or belief. In the case of the melting snowman, the children who reported on their felt responses were at odds with their bodily responses; what they described as memorable and pleasant was – when measured physiologically by heart-rate and galvanic skin activity – of a certain intensity rather than to do with content).

...the primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between *content* and *effect*: it would appear that the strength or duration of an image's effect is not logically connected to the content in any straightforward way. This is not to say that there is no connection and no logic. What is meant here by the content of the image is its indexing to conventional meanings in an intersubjective context, its socio-linguistic qualification. This indexing fixes the *quality* of the image; the strength or duration of the image's effect could be called its *intensity*. What comes out here is that there is no correspondence or conformity between quality and intensity. If there is a relation, it is of another nature. (Massumi 1995, 84-85)

The disjunction between quality and intensity may, in the case I would like to conclude by considering, be one of disjunction or reaction formation. That is, the higher the degree of threat to the organism, the more the quality of

affect is that of terror or sublime annihilation, the more disengaged the intensity appears to be. “We” late near-extinction humans appear to be addicted to witnessing annihilation, to the *feeling* of near-death or post-human existence, and yet have no intensity: it does not prompt us either to action or to any sense of what a post-human world would be. On the contrary, the more evidence, imagery, feeling and “experience” of a world without humans is displayed, the less affect or intensity occurs.

In fact, both theory and experience become increasingly organic: with thinkers ranging from Maturana and Varela, to philosophers such as Evan Thompson and Andy Clark insisting that the world we are given is exhausted by the world as felt or lived (Clark 2003, Thompson 2007). “We” are now living a world of popular, academic and “high” culture in which scenes of human and organic annihilation are repeatedly and obsessively lived, and yet at the cognitive level we continue to affirm the primacy of the world for the embodied, emotional and living organism. Man is no longer *homo economicus* or *homo faber*, defined by enterprising activity or production, but by feeling. What is occluded is the *unlived*, that which occurs both at the level of somatic responses that fail to be registered (other than by their negation at the level of reaction formation, with the shrill affirmation of emotion). What is also occluded is what Deleuze and Guattari theorized in *What is Philosophy?* as the definitive capacity of art – an art that occurs outside the human and beyond the organism: affects stand alone, exist in themselves and cannot be reduced to the lived.

On the one hand this appears to be an example of a privilege accorded to high modernist aesthetics, in the assumption of an art object that breaks with the bourgeois

banalities of consumption and enjoyment. On the other hand, though, there is a sense in which Deleuze and Guattari's distinction among art, philosophy and science – and, in turn, their geneses of these potentialities outside the organism – also breaks with the high modernist aesthetic of art as cultural revivification. That is, if modernism separated the art object from feeling and emotion in order to break with social codes and conventions of consumption, it nevertheless re-humanized or re-vitalized affect: that is, art restored *thinking to life and returned life to thinking*. There was a sense that critical art might return thinking to the sense of *its* own emergence. A debased form of this aesthetic occurs today with many of the wars on the banality of images (including the myriad of denunciations of the internet or mass media as dehumanizing – for such denunciations seek to restore individual perception, autonomy and feeling).

What Deleuze and Guattari suggest in all three of their potentialities for thinking – creation of concepts in philosophy, of functions in science, and affects and percepts in art – is a locus of production outside the organism and outside the lived. Brian Massumi, separating intensity from quality, nevertheless located affect entirely within the living system:

Both levels, qualification and intensity, are immediately embodied. Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin-at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. Depth reactions belong more to the form/ content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing. The reason may be that they are associated with expectation, which depends on consciously positioning oneself in a line of narrative continuity. (Massumi 1995, 85)

For Massumi affect occurs as the *event* or disruption into social coding of the newness of a (not-yet narrated or linear) disturbance.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their chapter on affects and percepts, give a relatively clear instance of the autonomy of percepts – prior not only to human, but also to animal life. They describe the stagemaker bird, organizing coloured leaves to assemble a territory. The bird is only able to move and self-organise because there are expressive matters that enable processes of assembling: in the beginning is neither the doer nor the deed but the matters to be dealt with (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 184). The coloured matters precede and are followed by the bird, with the bird becoming a functional and defined organism through this assemblage of autonomous sensory qualities. When art captures sensations that stand alone – as though the perceptions of organisms would only be possible because of these autonomous potentialities of percepts – then this is relatively easy to understand, as though a Mondrian or Cezanne drew upon, rather than produced, the vibrations of colour. But how could we say the same of affects, render them autonomous, inhuman and inorganic, in a way that would render them distinct from affections?

There is some indication in Deleuze's book on Francis Bacon of how art might capture affect in its autonomy – not simply its distinction from symbolic orders and cognition (as in Massumi) but in its inorganic or incorporeal moment. Deleuze refers to Bacon's painting of the scream – not the feeling of horror, felt by the body, but a depiction through the body of the forces that seize it. Unlike a viewing of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the viewer is not horrified – the work does not cause horror – but we are capable, supposedly, of witnessing affect, not

as felt or lived but as force beyond the organism and its meaningful responsiveness:

If we scream, it is always as victims of invisible and insensible forces that scramble every spectacle, and that even lie beyond pain and feeling. ... Bacon creates the painting of the scream because he establishes a relationship between the visibility of the scream (the open mouth as a shadowy abyss) and invisible forces, which are nothing other than the forces of the future. (Deleuze 2005, 43)

But are these forces really affects, or the forces from which affects are composed? And is their depiction by Bacon, via the screaming body, really akin to the pure sensory qualities that we can think of in the use of colours or expressive matters? Some provocation is given by Deleuze's phrase, "forces of the future," for it is here that we might think affects beyond the era of humanity, both in traditional modes of literary expression and in recent genre shifts. How are affects created by art if they are not expressions of some artist's or character's psycho-physical organism? How could affects possess that stand-alone inhuman inorganic quality that percepts seem to do when they provide potentials for assemblages (rather than being derived from them)? There would be no easy answers to this problem; it should not be easy to distinguish between art that makes us feel joyous –tapping into our sensory motor apparatus – and art that *is joyous*, that intimates a joy outside humanity and organisms. (What, for example, is trance music: a drugging sound that detaches us from meaning and the traditional temporal lines of chord progression and development, or a physical pulsation that operates directly at the level of sensory motor response rather than thought?)

Canonical literature gives us some indication of an autonomy of created affects that are not those of the organism, as though art could give body to that which exceeds the lived. Adjectives such as Kafka-esque, Dickensian or Lawrentian and Orwellian refer to affective assemblages that are not those of characters. Nor do such affective complexes prompt us to *feel* absurd bureaucratic torpor, oppressive urban paternalism, phallic atavistic passion or nightmarish social surveillance: it as though these worlds offered affects as such, there *to be lived*, as if they existed as potentialities for all time, even if captured through the depiction of a certain time. Such expressions pass into common parlance and refer not to a style of writing so much as the potentiality of that writing to seize on forces that it manages to assemble. If we travel through middle America we might view certain scenes *as if* captured by a David Lynch or Raymond Carver. Beyond canonized art there are today many attempts to capture affects beyond the lived and humanity: books (and television series) such as Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* or cinematic scenes such as the opening of *28 Days Later*, along with a vast range of unremarkable nature documentaries do not only depict worlds and life beyond humans, but can also suggest (perhaps) a melancholy or joy of a world without living witness. It would be telling, then, in the face of this tendency to imagine or contemplate joys, depressions, horrors and screams outside the lived – and right at the moment of possible human self-annihilation – if *theory* were unable to think affects beyond the lived world of the bounded organism.

Notes:

1. Alan M. Webber, "Trust in the Future," <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/38/roberts.html>
2. Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape our Decisions* (New York: Harper, 2008).
3. Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *boundary 2*. 26. 2 (Summer 1999): 89-100.
4. The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 438.
5. Mark B.N. Hansen, "Affect as Medium, or the 'Digital-Facial-Image,'" *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (August 2003): 205-228, 208.

References:

- Bergson, Henri. 1912. *Matter and memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer. London: G. Allen and New York: Macmillan.
- Carr, Nicholas. 2009. *In the shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. New York: Norton.
- Clark, Andy. 2003. *Natural-born cyborgs: Minds, technologies, and the future of human intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto and Jean Halley. 2007. *The affective turn: Theorizing the social*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Damasio, Antonio R. 2000. *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness*. New York: Harcourt.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 2004. *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Brian Massumi. London: Continuum.
- Flanagan, Owen J. 2007. *The really hard problem: Meaning in a material world*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Greenfield, Susan. 2008. *ID: The quest for identity in the 21st century*. London: Sceptre.
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. 2010. *The affect theory reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. 2007. Hyper and deep attention: The generational divide in cognitive modes. *Profession* 13: 187-199.
- Jameson, Fredric. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- LeDoux, Joseph E. 1996. *The emotional brain: The mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Massumi, Brian. 1995. The autonomy of affect. *Cultural Critique*, No. 31 (The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II): 83-109.
- Maturana, Humberto R. and Francisco J. Varela. 1987. *The tree of knowledge: The biological roots of human understanding*. Boston: New Science Library.
- Rifkin, Jeremy. 2009. *The empathic civilization: The race to global consciousness in a world in crisis*. New York: J. P. Tarcher and Penguin.
- Stiegler, Bernard. 2009. *Technics and time: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 2010. *For a new critique of political economy*, trans. Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity.
- Thompson, Evan. 2007. *Mind in life: Biology, phenomenology, and the sciences of mind*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Worringer, Wilhelm. 1953. *Abstraction and empathy*. New York: International Universities Press.