



## THE AESTHETICS OF AFFECT: Thinking art beyond representation

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Art is thus confused with a cultural object and may give rise to any of the discourses to which anthropological data in general lend themselves. One could do a history, sociology, or political economy of it, to mention just those few. One can easily show that its destination, anthropologically speaking, undergoes considerable modification depending on whether the artwork “belongs” to a culture that is tribal, imperial, republican, monarchical, theocratic, mercantile, autocratic, capitalist, and so on, and that it is a determining feature of the contemporary work that it is obviously destined for the museum (collection, conservation, exhibition) and for the museum audience. This approach is implied in any “theory” of art, for the theory is made only of objects, in order to determine them. But the work is not merely a cultural object, although it is that too. It harbours within it an excess, a rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its “reception” and “production.”

*Jean-François Lyotard,*  
*“Critical Reflections” 93*

**H**ow could it happen that in thinking about art, in reading the art object, we missed what art does best? In fact we missed that which defines art: the aesthetic – because art is not an object amongst others, at least not an object of knowledge (or not only an object of knowledge). Rather, art does something else. Indeed, art is precisely antithetical to knowledge; it works against what Lyotard once called the “fantasies of realism” (*The Postmodern Condition* 93). Which is to say that art might well be *a part* of the world (after all it is a made thing), but at the same time it is *apart* from the world. And this apartness, however it is theorised, is what constitutes art’s importance.

In this paper I want to think a little about this apartness; this “excess” or “rapture” which, as Lyotard remarks above, constitutes art’s effective-

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ity over and above its existence as a cultural object. I want to claim that this excess need not be theorised as transcendent; we can think the aesthetic power of art in an *immanent* sense – through recourse to the notion of *affect*.

Before moving on, however, a backward glance. What happened? What caused this aesthetic blindness? In the discipline of art history there were, are (at least) two factors in play. First, Marxism (or “The Social History of Art”) and the propensity to explain art historically, through recourse to its moment of production. Second, deconstruction (or “The New Art History”) and the propensity to stymie (historical) interpretations, whilst still inhabiting their general explanatory framework. Marxism and deconstruction: understanding art as representation, and then understanding art as being in the crisis in representation; appealing to origins as final explanation, and then putting the notion of

origin under erasure. First aesthetics fell foul of Marxism. A disinterested beauty? A transcendent aesthetic? Ideological!<sup>1</sup> Then it fell foul of deconstruction. The apparatus of capture that is deconstruction: Derrida neatly reconfiguring the discourse of aesthetics as a discourse of/on representation. Aesthetics is deconstructed, and art becomes a broken promise.<sup>2</sup> Both Marxism and deconstruction were, still are, powerful critiques. However, deconstruction especially is negative critique par excellence; indeed, it is implicitly a critique of Marxism (so that Marx and Derrida will always be troublesome bed mates, at least in this sense).<sup>3</sup>

Deconstructive reading is not itself a bad thing; indeed, it might be strategically important to employ deconstruction precisely to counteract the effects of, to disable, a certain kind of aesthetic discourse (deconstruction as a kind of expanded ideological critique). However, after the deconstructive reading, the art object remains. Life goes on. Art, whether we will it or not, continues producing *affects*. What is the “nature” of affects, and can they be deconstructed? Affects can be described as extra-discursive and extra-textual.<sup>4</sup> Affects are moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter.<sup>5</sup> We might even say that affects are *immanent* to matter. They are certainly immanent to experience. (Following Spinoza, we might define affect as the effect another body, for example an art object, has upon my own body and my body’s *duration*.<sup>6</sup>) As such, affects are not to do with knowledge or meaning; indeed, they occur on a different, *signifying* register.<sup>7</sup> In fact this is what differentiates art from language – although language, too, can and does have an affective register; indeed, signification itself might be understood as just a complex affective function (meaning would be the effect of affects).

Of course, from a certain perspective, affects are only meaningful within language. Indeed the affect can be “understood,” can be *figured*, as always already a representation of what we might call the Ur or originary affect – the latter positioned as an unreachable (and unsayable) origin; again, so much for deconstruction. And yet affects are also, and primarily, affective. There is

no denying, or deferring, affects. They are what make up life, and art.<sup>8</sup> For there is a sense in which art itself is made up of affects. Affects frozen in time and space. Affects are, then, to use Deleuzo-Guattarian terms – and to move the register away from deconstruction and away from representation – the *molecular* “beneath” the *molar*. The molecular understood here as life’s, and art’s, intensive quality, as the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification.<sup>9</sup>

But what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them? Certainly, in a space such as art history where deconstructive – let alone semiotic – approaches to art are becoming, indeed have become, hegemonic, the existence of affects, and their central role in art, needs asserting. For this is what art is: a bundle of affects or, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, a *bloc of sensations*, waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, you cannot read affects, you can only experience them. Which brings us to the crux of the matter: *experience*. Paul de Man, as a more or less typical spokesperson for that melancholy science that is deconstruction, writes: “It is a temporal experience of human mutability, historical in the deepest sense of the term in that it implies the necessary experience of any present as a *passing* experience, that makes the past irrevocable and unforgettable, because it is inseparable from any present or future” (148–49).

As with Derrida, so with de Man: present experience – the moment, the event – is inaccessible to consciousness. All we ever have is its trace (we experience “passing” moments). If the affect “is” precisely present experience, it could be said, following de Man et al., that all we ever have is a kind of echo, the *representation* of affect. Now this is a clever and beguiling story, giving the affect a logocentric spin. But, I wonder, is the affect really of this type? Is the affect transcendent in this sense (beyond experience)? Or, rather, is it not the case, as I have already suggested, that the affect is *immanent* to experience<sup>11</sup> and that all this writing about the affect is really just that: writing. Writing which produces an effect of representation. (Parodying Derrida a little, we might say that by asking the question

“what is an affect?” we are already presupposing that there is an answer (an answer which must be given in language). We have in fact placed the affect in a conceptual opposition that always and everywhere promises and then frustrates meaning.)

So much for writing, and for art as a kind of writing. In fact the affect is something else entirely: precisely an event or happening. Indeed, this is what defines the affect. It is not that de Man (or Derrida for that matter) is wrong. As subjects we can certainly be positioned, and position ourselves, in de Man's temporal predicament (a name for which is representation). This has often been the way in the West – in modernism and in postmodernism. Indeed, we might say, following Michael Fried and his detractors, that this oscillation between aesthetics and its deconstruction has animated the discourse of art history up to today.<sup>12</sup> But this deconstructive mechanism, this way of thinking art (and ourselves), inevitably closes down the possibility of accessing the event that is art. Indeed, within this mechanism art is either positioned as transcendent or, with deconstruction, is always already positioned and predetermined by the discourse that surrounds it – the event as always already captured by representation. Art here becomes a broken promise, a fallen angel.

But is this the end of the story? Might there in fact be a way of rescuing art from this predicament, this double bind, without necessarily returning to a traditional, transcendent, aesthetic? Indeed, how might we think art as event? This is a slippery area – and much recent philosophy has been written on how to think the event.<sup>13</sup> It is almost a question of faith. Either you side with deconstruction: the event as always already constituted, determined by the scene of the event. Or you get a little more religious: the event as something genuinely unexpected. Importantly, this need not involve a transcendent aesthetic (no return to Clement Greenberg, no return to Kant). In fact there may be a way of reconfiguring the event as *immanent* to this world, as not arriving from any kind of transcendent plane (and as not transporting us there) but as emerging from the realm of the *virtual*. In the realm of the virtual, art – art *work* – is no longer

an object as such, or not only an object, but rather a space, a zone<sup>14</sup> or what Alain Badiou might call an “event site”: “a point of exile where it is possible that something, finally, might happen” (84, n. 5). At any rate art is a place where one might encounter the affect.

Such an accessing of the event might involve what Henri Bergson calls *attention*: a suspension of normal motor activity which in itself allows other “planes” of reality to be perceivable (an opening up to the world beyond utilitarian interests) (101–02). Following Bergson we might say that as beings in the world we are caught on a certain spatio-temporal register: we see only what we have already seen (we see only what we are interested in). At stake with art, then, might be an altering, a switching, of this register. New (prosthetic) technologies can do this. Switching temporal registers: time-lapse photography producing firework flowers and flows of traffic; slow-motion film revealing intricate movements which otherwise are a blur. And switching spatial registers too: microscopes and telescopes showing us the molecular and the super-molar. Indeed, at this point the new media coincide with art: indeed, the new media take on an *aesthetic* function (a *deterritorialising* function). However, we need not turn to new technologies. The realm of affects is all around us and there are as many different strategies for accessing it as there are subjects. For Deleuze and Guattari, these two sorcerers, it is a question of making yourself a *body without organs*: in this context, a strategy for accessing that which is normally “outside” yourself; your “experimental milieu” which everywhere accompanies your sense of self (*A Thousand Plateaus* 149–66). For Deleuze and Guattari this is a pragmatic project: you do not just read about the body without organs – you make yourself one.

Georges Bataille talks about such a pragmatic project in *Lascaux*, his book on the Lascaux cave paintings. For Bataille, such a project, such a ritual, can be understood as the creation of a sacred space. Indeed art, for Bataille, is precisely a mechanism for accessing a kind of *immanent beyond* to everyday experience; art operates as a kind of play which takes the participant out of mundane consciousness (hence Bataille's under-

standing of the Lascaux cave paintings as precisely performative). This might involve a representational function (after all, we can recognise the animals at Lascaux), but representation is not these paintings' sole purpose, and we miss something essential about them if we attend merely to their history (if we simply read them). Jean-François Lyotard is perhaps most attuned to this experimental and rupturing quality of art. Lyotard calls for a practice of patience, of listening – a kind of meditative state that allows for, produces an opening for, an experience of the event, precisely, as the affect. In *Peregrinations* Lyotard writes:

[One must] become open to the “It happens that” rather than the “What happens” ... [and this] requires at the very least a high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences ... In order to take on this attitude you have to impoverish your mind, clean it out as much as possible, so that you make it incapable of anticipating the meaning, the “What” of the “It happens...” The secret of such asceticism lies in the power to be able to endure occurrences as “directly” as possible without the mediation of a “pre-text.” Thus to encounter the event is like bordering on nothingness. (18)<sup>15</sup>

And so this event, this affect, as Bataille also teaches us, is not really about self-consciousness – the representation of experience to oneself; the self as constituted through representation – at all. In fact we might say that the affect is a more brutal, *apersonal* thing. It is that which connects us to the world. It is the matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us. The affect is, in this sense, *transhuman*. Indeed, with the affect what we have is a kind of transhuman *aesthetic*. Paul de Man might *figure* art as a shield from mortality, a reassuring mirror to a fearful subject (and then, of course, demonstrate that the shield is always already broken). But in fact art is something much more dangerous: a portal, an access point, to another world (our world experienced differently), a world of impermanence and interpenetration, a molecular world of becoming. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this, ultimately, is what makes painting *abstract*: the

“summoning” and making visible of forces (*What is Philosophy?* 181–82).<sup>16</sup>

This world of affects, this universe of forces, is our own world seen without the spectacles of subjectivity. But how to remove these spectacles, which are not really spectacles at all but the very condition of our subjectivity? How, indeed, to sidestep our selves? In fact we do it all the time – we are involved in molecular processes that go on “beyond” our subjectivity. Indeed we “are” these processes.<sup>17</sup> We “are” – as well as subjects (bound by *strata*) – bundles of events, bundles of affects (in a constant process of destratification).<sup>18</sup> At stake here, then, are practices and strategies which reveal this “other side” to ourselves; practices which *imaginatively* and *pragmatically* switch the register. After all, why not try something new? As Deleuze remarks in an interview: “What we’re interested in, you see, are modes of individuation beyond those of things, persons or subjects: the individuation, say, of a time of day, of a region, a climate, a river or a wind, of an event. And maybe it’s a mistake to believe in the existence of things, persons, or subjects” (*Negotiations* 26).

This is art’s function: to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world. Art opens us up to the non-human universe that we are part of. Indeed, art might well have a representational function (after all, art objects, like everything else, can be read) but art also operates as a *fissure* in representation. And we, as spectators, as representational creatures, are involved in a dance with art, a dance in which – through careful manoeuvres – the molecular is opened up, the aesthetic is activated, and art does what is its chief *modus operandi*: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our “selves” and our notion of our world.

This is, of course, to claim quite an importance for art. Certainly it is to move far away from those postmodernists who assert that it is time for art to be included within the “broader picture of representational practices in contemporary society” (Burgin 147). Indeed, it is to claim a kind of autonomy for art. But this autonomy is not the same as, for example, Adorno’s, although it might appear similar. It is in fact a reconfiguration of aesthetics away from Adorno

and the whole Kantian heritage. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno writes: "Art's utopia, the counter-factual yet-to-come is draped in Black, it goes on being a recollection of the possible with a critical edge against the real ... It is the possible, as promised by its impossibility. Art is the promise of happiness, a promise that is constantly being broken" (196).

For Adorno, art operates as a utopian blink: it presents the possible through its difference to the existent. Indeed, art, for Adorno, is not really of this world at all – it prefigures and promises a world yet-to-come. Art, if you like, operates within Walter Benjamin's *messianic time*. And yet art is inevitably doomed to frustration: the promise (of reconciliation) is constantly being broken. Art operates within this melancholy field. In fact it is worth noting that philosophy, for Adorno, operates on the same register: "The only philosophy which can be reasonably practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption" (*Minima Moralia* 247). In a sense, then, Adorno has abandoned the existent (his is a forsaken world). Indeed, this is what gives his work its melancholy tenor.

However, we might want to turn from Adorno to Deleuze and to a more affirmative notion of the aesthetic impulse. Here, instead of the *existent* and the *possible* as ontological categories and as coordinates for art, we might utilise Deleuze's categories of the *actual* and the *virtual*. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze outlines this shift, and the difference between the two sets of categories, as follows:

The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a "realisation." By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself. (211)

At stake in art is not a utopian and, in some senses, negative aesthetic, but an affirmative actualisation of the virtual – the latter being a

genuinely *creative* act (as opposed to the realisation of the possible, which ultimately always already resembles the real).<sup>19</sup> The virtual here can be understood as the realm of affects. Art precisely actualises these invisible universes;<sup>20</sup> or at least it opens up a portal onto these other, virtual worlds (we might say that art is situated on the borderline between the actual and the virtual).<sup>21</sup> This gives art an ethical imperative, because it involves a kind of moving beyond the already familiar (the human), precisely a kind of self-overcoming.

For Guattari this new *ethico-aesthetic* paradigm pertains not just to art but to subjectivity as well (in fact notions of subject and object become blurred here). Guattari argues that by allowing individuals access to "new materials of expression," "new complexes of subjectivation" become possible; new "incorporeal universes of reference" are opened up which allow for what Guattari calls a process of *resingularisation* – a process of reordering our selves and our relation to the world (*Chaosmosis* 7). In such a pragmatic, and aesthetic, reconfiguration "one creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way an artist creates new forms from a palette" (*ibid.*). (For Guattari the La Borde clinic where he worked, understood as a *machinic assemblage*, was precisely a site of resingularisation. But in fact people resingularise themselves every day: academics plant allotments, manual labourers visit the theatre. Different activities take on aesthetic, deterritorialising, functions.)

This is to take art away from the Frankfurt school register. For Adorno, art's importance lay, at least in one sense, in its uselessness, its irreducibility to conceptual thought. Art did not partake in, and thus provided a critique of, instrumental reason and its accompaniment, the world commodity system. With Deleuze and Guattari and their allies we have a different mapping of the world, and of philosophy's and art's role within it. Philosophy is no longer to be understood as a utopian pursuit,<sup>22</sup> but is rather to do with pragmatics: active concept creation in order to solve problems (to get something done). Likewise with art. Art is not useless but performs very specific roles.<sup>23</sup> These roles or *functions* differ, depending on the kind of art and the

milieu in which a work of art exists. Indeed, conceptual art might have more in common with what Deleuze and Guattari call philosophy (problem solving). Installation art, on the other hand, might be a paradigmatic case of art as access point to other worlds. Julia Kristeva arrives at precisely this conclusion (here she is writing about contemporary installations at the Venice Biennale):

In an installation it is the *body* in its entirety which is asked to participate through its sensations, through *vision* obviously, but also *hearing*, *touch*, on occasions *smell*. As if these artists, in the place of an “object” sought to place us in a space at the limits of the sacred, and asked us not to contemplate images but to communicate with beings. I had the impression that [the artists] were communicating this: that the ultimate aim of art is perhaps what was formerly celebrated under the term of *incarnation*. I mean by that a wish to make us feel, through the abstractions, the forms, the colours, the volumes, the sensations, a *real experience*. (Quoted in Bann 69)

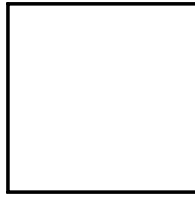
For Kristeva, art (in this case installation) is a bloc of sensations made up of abstractions, forms, colours, and volumes. This art is also a sacred space whose aim it is to give us a real (in this case, multi-sensory) experience. Kristeva talks about these installations not in terms of representation but in terms of their function, a function of *incarnation*. For Kristeva, this aesthetic function is the “ultimate aim of art.” This is in a sense to move to a *post-medium* notion of art practice, in that it is not so important what the specifics of a medium might be (no Greenbergian truth to materials, no more asking “what is art?,” “what is painting?” and, thus, no more deconstructions); rather, what becomes important is what a particular art object can do. In relation to aesthetics and affects, this function might be summed up as the making visible of the invisible, of the making perceptible of the imperceptible or, as Deleuze and Guattari would say, as the harnessing of forces.<sup>24</sup> Another way of saying this is that art is a deterritorialisation, a creative deterritorialisation into the realm of affects.

Art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function

of *transformation*. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced.<sup>25</sup> Finally, less involved in shielding us from death, but indeed precisely involved in actualising the possibilities of life. Paradoxically the notion of an “aesthetic function” might well return us to a productive utilisation of the term “visual culture.” But this will be a return marked by its passage through aesthetics, through Adorno and Deleuze especially. In a sense this passage – this championing of art as an autonomous, aesthetic practice – was only the first moment, the second being a detachment of the aesthetic from its apparent location within (and transcendent attachment to) certain objects (the canonical objects of art history). This *immanent* aesthetic, as function, can now be thought in relation to a variety of objects and practices. So, yes, perhaps we can speak of a kind of visual culture after all, not through the notion of a general semiotics, but rather through the notion of a general aesthetics.

How might this effect the practice of art history? A certain kind of art history might disappear: that which attends only to art’s signifying character, that which understands art, positions art *work*, as representation. Indeed, these latter functions might be placed alongside art’s other asignifying functions – art’s affective and intensive qualities (the molecular beneath, within, the molar). In this place art becomes a more complex, and a more interesting, object. And the business of art history changes from a hermeneutic to a heuristic activity: art history as a kind of parallel to the work that art is already doing rather than as an attempt to fix and interpret art; indeed, art history as precisely a kind of *creative writing*. So I end this paper, this skirmish against representation, with the outline of a new project: the thinking of specific art works, the writing on specific art works, as exploration of art’s creative, aesthetic and ethical function.<sup>26</sup> This will involve attending to the specificity of an art work, and the specificity of the milieu in which the art object operates. This is not a retreat from art history but a reconfiguration of its prac-

tice – a reconfiguration which might well involve, as one of its strategies, a return to those writers who have always seen the aesthetic as the function of art, and to those writers who might not be art historians but who are nevertheless attuned to the aesthetics of affect.



## notes

My thanks to *Angelaki's* reviewers.

1 Indeed, there is a “tradition” of positioning critical art history as a form of ideological critique, and specifically as a critique of aesthetics. See, for example, Kurt Foster’s polemical essay, “Critical History of Art or a Transfiguration of Values.”

2 Jacques Derrida performs precisely this deconstruction of aesthetics in “The Parergon,” in his *The Truth in Painting* 37–82.

3 For a more affirmative mapping of Derrida’s contribution towards thinking the art object, see my “Art as Text: Rethinking Representation.”

4 They can be described as extra-discursive in the sense that they are “outside” discourse understood as structure (they are precisely what is irreducible to structure). They can be described as extra-textual in the sense that they do not produce – or do not only produce – knowledge. Affects might, however, be understood as textual in that they are felt as *differences in intensity*.

5 For Brian Massumi, in “The Autonomy of Affect,” affects are likewise understood as moments of intensity – which might resonate with linguistic expression but which, strictly speaking, are of a different and prior order. For Massumi, as for myself: “approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level, however that level is defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these combinations, as a Symbolic). What they lose, precisely, is the event – in favour of structure” (ibid. 220).

Massumi identifies the realm of affect as one of increasing importance within “media, literary and art theory” but points out the problem that there is “no cultural–theoretical vocabulary specific to affect,” indeed, our “entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure” (ibid. 221). From one perspective

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Massumi is right: there is no vocabulary of affect. However, it is not so simple as inventing one. To invent a language for/of affect is to bring the latter into representation – and hence to invite deconstruction. In a sense there is no way out of this predicament except to acknowledge it as a problem – and move beyond it. Which is what this paper attempts to do.

6 See Deleuze’s “Spinoza and the Three Ethics,” where “affect” is defined as the effect affections have on the body’s duration, the “passages, becomings, rises and falls, continuous variations of power (*puissance*) that pass from one state to another. We will call them *affects*, strictly speaking, and no longer affections. They are signs of increase and decrease, signs that are *vectorial* (of the joy–sadness type) and no longer scalar like the affections, sensations or perceptions” (139).

7 As Félix Guattari observes in an interview:

The same semiotic material can be functioning in different registers. A material can be both caught in paradigmatic chains of production, chains of signification ... but at the same time can function in an a-signifying register. So what determines the difference? In one case, a signifier functions in what one might call a logic of discursive aggregates, i.e. a logic of representation. In the other case, it functions in something that isn’t entirely a logic, what I’ve called an existential machinic, a logic of bodies without organs, a machinic of bodies without organs. (“Pragmatic/Machine” 15)

8 For Guattari, affects can be understood precisely as what makes up life. They establish a kind of centre or “self-affirmation” that occurs parallel to the discursive (what Guattari terms “linear”) elements of subjectivity. For Guattari, this affective element is present in Freud’s theory of the drives, but has been overlooked by “the structuralists” (Guattari has Lacan in mind) (“On Machines” 10). Guattari writes:

I consider that limiting ourselves to this coordinate [i.e., linearity] is precisely to lose the element of the machinic centre, of subjective autopoiesis and self-affirmation. Whether located at the level of the complete individual or partial subjectivity, or even at the level of social subjectivity, this element undergoes a *pathic* relationship by means of the affect. What is it, then, that makes us state phenom-



enologically that something is living? It is precisely this relation of affect. This is not a description, nor a kind of propositional analysis resulting from a sense of hypotheses and deductions – i.e., it is a living being, therefore it is a machine; rather an immediate, pathic and non-discursive apprehension occurs of the machine's ontological autocomposition relationship. (Ibid.)

Interestingly, in “On Machines” Guattari develops the notion of a non-discursive, affective, *foyer*, which has much in common with Bergson's notion of living beings as affective “centres of indetermination” (28–34).

9 Lyotard addresses this double functioning of the sign in “The Tensor.” Like Guattari (see note above), Lyotard's point of departure is Freud's theory of the drives. Lyotard merely points out that the sign can operate within two (or presumably even more) economies: metonymic and metaphoric systems but also affective ones: “It is at once a sign that creates meaning through divergence and opposition, and a sign that creates intensity through strength and singularity” (11).

10

[T]he work of art is ... *a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*. Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. (*What is Philosophy?* 164)

In their chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari map out a theory and language of art outside of representation. I want to note here an interesting dovetailing of their theory with a kind of aporia which “The Social History of Art,” and in particular T.J. Clark, finds itself/himself in. Suffice to say that Deleuze and Guattari's language – of movement, materials, and matter – is precisely the object of art history's secret desire and fear; a language of art which is no longer to do with signifiers and signifieds (poached, as Clark himself remarks, from film theory). Unfortunately, all materialist art historians (“The Social History of Art”) eventually, and inevitably, hit an aporia which, very briefly, goes like this: how to attend to the material object behind the ideological veils (the cultural readings/meanings), whilst *still* attend-

ing to the object's history. The problem arises because ideology and history are here synonymous. In a sense “The Social History of Art” and art history in general could not, cannot, put this language together: they are working within the horizon of signification. A language of material and matter would, for them, be a fetishisation – an emptying out of meaning or of that trope of meaning: history. They would be guilty of the very ideological mystification of which they are against. It is only within a different model or paradigm that a language of materials and matter makes sense.

11 Massumi is useful in rethinking the relationship between the event, as intensity, and experience:

Although the realm of intensity that Deleuze's philosophy strives to conceptualise is transcendental in the sense that it is not directly accessible to experience, it is not transcendent, it is not exactly outside experience either. It is immanent to it – always in it but not of it. Intensity and experience accompany one another, like two mutually presupposing dimensions, or like two sides of a coin. Intensity is immanent to matter and to events, to mind and to body and to every level of bifurcation composing them and which they compose. (226)

Hence, intensity for Massumi is indeed experienced “in the proliferations of levels of organisation it ceaselessly gives rise to, generates and regenerates, at every suspended moment” (226).

12 For a tracking through of this oscillation, see the debates around allegory in the visual arts carried out in *October*, in particular Craig Owens' “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” and, most impressive, Stephen Melville's “Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Art Criticism.”

13 See, for example, Andrew Benjamin's *The Plural Event*. For another interesting take on this problematic, especially in relation to Deleuze's project of thinking multiplicity, see Alain Badiou's *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*.

14 For Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, art is a zone: “a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons ... endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. This is what

is called an *affect* ... Life alone creates such zones where living beings whirl around, and only art can reach and penetrate them in its enterprise of co-creation" (173).

15 In general, Lyotard tends to configure this unknown event in Kantian terms, specifically in relation to the sublime. As we shall see, there need not be a recourse to the transcendent in order to allow for the possibility of a beyond to everyday experience.

16 John Rajchman has also written on this notion of the abstract, and on its difference to the more typical, one might say Greenbergian, notion of abstraction as reduction and purity. For Rajchman abstraction must be understood as a realm of possibilities, of potentialities, prior to figuration. In order to paint "one must come to see the surface not so much as empty or blank but rather as intense, where 'intensity' means filled with the unseen virtuality of other strange possibilities" (Rajchman 61). The question of how to "paint outside force" is, according to Rajchman's reading of Deleuze, "the basic question of modernity" (60).

17 This insight *can* be experienced. Through drugs, through meditation, through anything that, if only for a moment, dissolves the molar aggregate of our subjectivity.

18 As Deleuze and Guattari remark in "587 B.C.–A.D. 70: On Several Regimes of Signs," the "principal strata binding human beings are the organism, signifi-ance and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 134). It is the function of the next chapter, "How to Make Yourself a Body without Organs," to offer strategies for destratification. This chapter might also be considered as a mapping through of a series of experimental strategies for accessing the realm of affect. It is worth noting Deleuze and Guattari's warning here, against "wildly destratifying" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 160) – this can end merely in empty, botched bodies without organs (or worse). In fact, "you have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signifi-ance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when circumstances demand it ... and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality" (*ibid.*). See also my "In Violence: Three Case Studies Against the Stratum."

19 For a thorough working through of this logic of the real and the possible, the virtual and the actual, see Deleuze's *Bergsonism* 96–98.

20 As do philosophy, science and, as we have seen, prosthetic technologies. By altering our temporal and spatial registers new technology opens worlds previously invisible to us but not worlds non-existent. We might say something similar about pure mathematics: abstract equations as a way of actualising events and processes which cannot be represented (indeed, this actualisation is a form of problem solving).

21 As Massumi remarks: "It is the edge of the virtual, where it leaks into the actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found" (236).

22 For Deleuze and Guattari philosophy is not a utopian pursuit in the sense of positing *transcendent* (and thus *authoritarian*) utopias. However, philosophy might be figured as utopian if we understand by this term *immanent, revolutionary* utopias. Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, political philosophy is this kind of utopian practice which involves a "resistance to the present," and a creation of concepts which in itself "calls for a future form, for a new people that do not yet exist" (*What is Philosophy?* 108). Although not within the scope of this paper, a reading of Frankfurt school utopias via Deleuze and Guattari's notion of immanence would be an interesting and productive project. Deleuze and Guattari themselves seem to have this in mind when they footnote the writings of Ernst Bloch in *What is Philosophy?* (224).

23 A good example of rethinking art away from the horizon of instrumental reason (and of the latter's critique) is Ronald Bogue's "Art and Territory." Bogue, taking his lead from Deleuze's notion of the refrain, argues that bird song, as a kind of art practice, involves processes and movements of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. Which is to say that art is not here involved in a logic of the possible, but is to do with *function*, a function of deterritorialisation.

24 Ronald Bogue has outlined this "aesthetics of force," as he calls it, in relation to painting and, more interestingly, in relation to music (see "Gilles Deleuze: The Aesthetics of Force"). Bogue reads Deleuze as offering an "open system" of the

arts where at stake is less a definition of art or any demarcation between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic, but rather a general function of art as what “harnesses forces” (ibid. 268). This is particularly the case with painting, and of course Deleuze outlines this theory in relation to the paintings of Francis Bacon. However, the function of music is also involved in forces. As Bogue remarks: “The basic function of the refrain is to territorialise forces, to regularise, control and encode the unpredictable world in regular patterns. But the refrain never remains purely closed and stable. Its emergence from the chaotic flux is only provisional and its rhythms always issue forth to the cosmos at large” (ibid. 265).

This larger function of deterritorialisation is precisely a “line of flight” into the molecular. It is this – an affective line (and, I would argue, an *aesthetic* one) – that defines art.

25 This is precisely Lyotard’s point in “Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity”: “Today’s art consists in exploring things unsayable and things invisible. Strange machines are assembled, where what we didn’t have the idea of saying or the matter to feel can make itself heard and experienced” (190).

26 I attempt such a project, albeit briefly, in this paper’s companion piece, “Writing on Art (Case Study: The Buddhist Puja).”

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