Brian Massumi

PARABLES FOR THE VIRTUAL

Movement,

Affect,

Sensation

Duke University Press Durham & London 2002

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction: Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn't 1

1 The Autonomy of Affect 23

2 The Bleed: Where Body Meets Image 46

3 The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relation 68

4 The Evolutionary Alchemy of Reason: Stelarc 89

5 On the Superiority of the Analog 133

6 Chaos in the "Total Field" of Vision 144

7 The Brightness Confound 162

8 Strange Horizon: Buildings, Biograms, and the Body Topologic 177

9 Too-Blue: Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism 208

Notes 257

Works Cited 301

Index 311

1

THE AUTONOMY OF AFFECT

I

A man builds a snowman on his roof garden. It starts to melt in the afternoon sun. He watches. After a time, he takes the snowman to the cool of the mountains where it stops melting. He bids it good-bye and leaves.

Just images, no words, very simple. This was a story depicted in a short film shown on German television as filler between programs. The film drew complaints from parents reporting that their children had been frightened. That drew the attention of a team of researchers. Their subsequent study was notable for failing to find very much of what it was studying: cognition.[1]

Researchers, headed by Hertha Sturm, used three versions of the film: the original wordless version and two versions with voice-overs added. The first voice-over version was dubbed "factual." It added a simple step-by-step account of the action as it happened. A second version was called "emotional." It was largely the same as the factual version but included, at crucial turning points, words expressing the emotional tenor of the scene under way.

Groups of nine-year-old children were tested for recall and asked to rate the version they saw on a scale of "pleasantness." The factual version was consistently rated the least pleasant and was also the least remembered. The most pleasant was the original wordless version, which was rated just slightly above the emotional. And it was the emotional version that was most remembered.

This is already a bit muddling. Something stranger happened when the subjects of the study were asked to rate the individual scenes in the film both on a "happy-sad" scale and a "pleasant-unpleasant" scale. The "sad" scenes were rated the *most pleasant;* the sadder the better.

The hypothesis that immediately suggests itself is that in some kind of precocious anti-Freudian protest, the children were equating arousal with

pleasure. But this being an empirical study, the children were wired. Their physiological reactions were monitored. The factual version elicited the highest level of arousal, even though it was the most unpleasant (that is, "happy") and made the least long-lasting impression. The children, it turns out, were physiologically split: factuality made their heart beat faster and deepened their breathing, but it also made their skin resistance fall. (Galvanic skin response measures *autonomic* reaction.) The original nonverbal version elicited the greatest response from their skin.

From the tone of their report, it seems that the researchers were a bit taken aback by their results. They observed that the difference between sadness and happiness is not all that it's cracked up to be and worried that the difference between children and adults was also not all that it was cracked up to be (judging by studies of adult retention of news broadcasts). Their only positive conclusion emphasized *the primacy of the affective* in image reception.

Accepting and expanding upon that, it may be noted that 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 sociolinguistic qualification. This indexing fixes the determinate *qualities* 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 qualities and intensity. If there is a relation, it is of another nature.

To translate this negative observation into a positive one: the event of image reception is multilevel, or at least bi-level. There is an immediate bifurcation in response into two systems. The level of intensity is characterized by a crossing of semantic wires: on it, sadness is pleasant. The level of intensity is organized according to a logic that does not admit the excluded middle. This is to say that it is not semantically or semiotically ordered. It does not fix distinctions. Instead, it vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate. When asked to signify itself, it can only do so in a paradox. There is disconnection of signifying order from intensity—which constitutes a different order of connection operating in parallel. The gap noted earlier is not only between content

and effect. It is also between the form of content—signification as a conventional system of distinctive difference—and intensity. The disconnection between form/content and intensity/effect is not just negative: it enables a different connectivity, a different difference, in parallel.

Both levels, intensity and qualification, 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. Modulations of heartbeat and breathing mark a reflux of consciousness into the autonomic depths, coterminous with a rise of the autonomic into consciousness. They are a conscious-autonomic mix, a measure of their participation in one another. Intensity is beside that loop, a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function. It is narratively delocalized, spreading over the generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart.

Language, though headstrong, is not simply in opposition to intensity. It would seem to function differentially in relation to it. The factual version of the snowman story was dampening. Matter-of-factness dampens intensity. In this case, matter-of-factness was a doubling of the sequence of images with narration expressing in as objective a manner as possible the commonsense function and consensual meaning of the movements perceived on screen. This interfered with the images' effect. The emotional version added a few phrases that punctuated the narrative line with qualifications of the emotional content, as opposed to the objective-narrative content. The qualifications of emotional content enhanced the images' effect, as if they resonated with the level of intensity rather than interfering with it. An emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state—actually to re-register an already felt state, for the skin is faster than the word.

The relationship between the levels of intensity and qualification is not one of conformity or correspondence but rather of resonation or interference, amplification or dampening. Linguistic expression can resonate

with and amplify intensity at the price of making itself functionally redundant. When on the other hand it doubles a sequence of movements in order to add something to it in the way of meaningful progression—in this case a more or less definite expectation, an intimation of what comes next in a conventional progression—then it runs counter to and dampens the intensity. Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonation and feedback that momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static—temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It is like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it. It is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted objects and aims (if only on screen). Of course, the qualification of an emotion is quite often, in other contexts, itself a narrative element that moves the action ahead, taking its place in socially recognized lines of action and reaction. But to the extent that it is, it is not in resonance with intensity. It resonates to the exact degree to which it is in excess of any narrative or functional line.

In any case, language doubles the flow of images on another level, on a different track. There is a redundancy of resonation that plays up or amplifies (feeds back disconnection, enabling a different connectivity) and a redundancy of signification that plays out or linearizes (jumps the feedback loop between vital function and meaning into lines of socially valorized action and reaction). Language belongs to entirely different orders depending on which redundancy it enacts. Or, it always enacts both more or less completely: two languages, two dimensions of every expression, one superlinear, the other linear. Every event takes place on both levels—and between both levels, as they resonate together to form a larger system composed of two interacting subsystems following entirely different rules of formation. For clarity, it might be best to give different names to the two halves of the event. In this case, *suspense* could be distinguished from and interlinked with *expectation* as superlinear and linear dimensions of the same image-event, which is at the same time an expression-event.

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 in combination, as a Symbolic). What they lose, precisely, is the expression *event*—in favor of structure. Much could be gained by integrating the dimension of intensity into cultural theory. The stakes are the new. For structure is the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self-consistent set of invariant generative rules. Nothing is prefigured in the event. It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox. It is the suspension of the invariance that makes happy happy, sad sad, function function, and meaning mean. Could it be that it is through the expectant suspension of that suspense that the new emerges? As if an echo of irreducible excess, of gratuitous amplification, piggybacked on the reconnection to progression, bringing a tinge of the unexpected, the lateral, the unmotivated, to lines of action and reaction. A change in the rules. The expression-event is the system of the inexplicable: emergence, into and against regeneration (the reproduction of a structure). In the case of the snowman, the unexpected and inexplicable that emerged along with the generated responses had to do with the differences between happiness and sadness, children and adults, not being all they're cracked up to be, much to our scientific chagrin: a change in the rules. Intensity is the unassimilable.

For present purposes, intensity will be equated with affect. There seems to be a growing feeling within media, literary, and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information- and image-based late capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered. Fredric Jameson notwithstanding, belief has waned for many, but not affect. If anything, our condition is characterized by a surfeit of it. The problem is that there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect.[2] Our entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences (the divorce proceedings of poststructuralism: terminable or interminable?). In the absence of an asignifying philosophy of affect, it is all too easy for received psychological categories to slip back in, undoing the considerable deconstructive work that has been effectively carried out by poststructuralism. Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion.[3] But one of the clearest lessons of this first story is that emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders.

An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique.

It is not that there are no philosophical antecedents to draw on. It is just that they are not the usual ones for literary and cultural studies. On many of these points there is a formidable philosophical precursor: on the difference in nature between affect and emotion; on the irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect; on affect as a suspension of action-reaction circuits and linear temporality in a sink of what might be called "passion," to distinguish it both from passivity and activity; on the equation between affect and effect; and on the form/content of conventional discourse as constituting a separate stratum running counter to the full registering of affect and its affirmation, its positive development, its expression as and for itself. On all of these points, it is the name of Baruch Spinoza that stands out. The title of his central work suggests a designation for the project of thinking affect: *Ethics*.[4]

II

Another story, this time about the brain: the mystery of the missing half second.

Experiments were performed on patients who had been implanted with cortical electrodes for medical purposes. Mild electrical pulses were administered to the electrode and also to points on the skin. In either case, the stimulation was felt only if it lasted more than half a second: half a second, the minimum perceivable lapse. If the cortical electrode was fired a half second before the skin was stimulated, patients reported feeling the skin pulse first. The researcher speculated that sensation involves a "backward referral in time"—in other words, that sensation is organized recursively before being linearized, before it is redirected outwardly to take its part in a conscious chain of actions and reactions. Brain and skin

form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind. Its anomaly is smoothed over retrospectively to fit conscious requirements of continuity and linear causality.[5]

What happens during the missing half second? A second experiment gave some hints.

Brain waves of healthy volunteers were monitored by an electroencephalograph (EEG) machine. The subjects were asked to flex a finger at a moment of their choosing and to recall the time of their decision by noting the spatial clock position of a revolving dot. The flexes came 0.2 seconds after they clocked the decision, but the EEG machine registered significant brain activity •.3 seconds *before* the decision. Again, a half-second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression.

Asked to speculate on what implications all this might have for a doctrine of free will, the researcher, Benjamin Libet, proposes that "we may exert free will not by initiating intentions but by vetoing, acceding or otherwise responding to them after they arise."[6]

In other words, the half second is missed not because it is empty, but because it is overfull, in excess of the actually-performed action and of its ascribed meaning. Will and consciousness are *subtractive*. They are *limitative, derived functions* that reduce a complexity too rich to be functionally expressed. It should be noted in particular that during the mysterious half second, what we think of as "free," "higher" functions, such as volition, are apparently being performed by autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger but prior to action and expression. The formation of a volition is necessarily accompanied and aided by cognitive functions. Perhaps the snowman researchers of our first story couldn't find cognition because they were looking for it in the wrong place—in the "mind," rather than in *the body* they were monitoring. Talk of intensity inevitably raises the objection that such a notion involves an appeal to a prereflexive, romantically raw domain of primitive experiential richness—the nature in our culture. It is not that. First, because something happening out of mind in a body directly absorbing its outside cannot exactly said to be experienced. Second, because volition, cognition, and presumably other

"higher" functions usually presumed to be in the mind, figured as a mysterious container of mental entities that is somehow separate from body and brain, are present and active in that now not-so-"raw" domain. Resonation assumes feedback. "Higher functions" belonging to the realm of qualified form/content in which identified, self-expressive persons interact in conventionalized action-reaction circuits, following a linear time line, are fed back into the realm of intensity and recursive causality. The body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds *contexts*, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial, but not presocial—it *includes* social elements but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning and combines them according to different logic. How could this be so? Only if the *trace* of past actions, *including a trace of their contexts*, were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, direct spirit and dumb matter. Only if past actions and contexts were conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed. Intensity is *incipience*, incipient action and expression. Intensity is not only incipience. It is also the beginning of a selection: the incipience of mutually exclusive pathways of action and expression, all but one of which will be inhibited, prevented from actualizing themselves completely. The crowd of pretenders to actualization tend toward completion in a new selective context. Its newness means that their incipience cannot *just* be a conservation and reactivation of a past. They are *tendencies*—in other words, pastnesses opening directly onto a future, but with no present to speak of. For the present is lost with the missing half second, passing too quickly to be perceived, too quickly, actually, to have happened.

This requires a reworking of how we think about the body. Something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually, is *virtual*. The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded and sadness is happy (happy because the press to action and expression is life). The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained. For out of the pressing crowd an individual action or expression *will* emerge and be

registered consciously. One "wills" it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on sociolinguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one's life—by dint of inhibition.

Since the virtual is unlivable even as it happens, it can be thought of as a form of superlinear abstraction that does not obey the law of the excluded middle, that is organized differently but is inseparable from the concrete activity and expressivity of the body. The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential.

It is Henri Bergson who stands as a philosophical precursor on many of these points: the brain as a center of indetermination; consciousness as subtractive and inhibitive; perception as working to infold extended actions and expressions, *and* their situatedness, into a dimension of intensity or *in*tension as opposed to extension; the continual doubling of the actual body by this dimension of intensity, understood as a superlinear, superabstract realm of potential; that realm of the virtual as having a different temporal structure, in which past and future brush shoulders with no mediating present, and as having a different, recursive causality; the virtual as cresting in a liminal realm of emergence, where half-actualized actions and expressions arise like waves on a sea to which most no sooner return.[7]

Bergson could profitably be read together with Spinoza. One of Spinoza's basic definitions of affect is an "affection [in other words an impingement upon] the body, *and at the same time the idea of the affection*" (emphasis added). This starts sounding suspiciously Bergsonian if it is noted that the body, when impinged upon, is described by Spinoza as being in state of passional suspension in which it exists more outside of itself, more in the abstracted action of the impinging thing and the abstracted context of that action, than within itself, and if it is noted that the idea in question is not only not conscious but is not in the first instance in the "mind."

In Spinoza, it is only when the idea of the affection is doubled by an *idea of the idea of the affection* that it attains the level of conscious reflection. Conscious reflection is a doubling over of the idea on itself, a self-recursion of the idea that enwraps the affection or impingement at two removes. For it has already been removed once by the body itself. The body infolds the *effect* of the impingement—it conserves the impinge-

ment minus the impinging thing, the impingement abstracted from the actual action that caused it and actual context of that action. This is a first-order idea produced spontaneously by the body: the affection is immediately, spontaneously doubled by the repeatable trace of an encounter, the "form" of an encounter, in Spinoza's terminology (an infolding, or contraction, of context in the vocabulary of this essay). The trace determines a tendency, the potential, if not yet the appetite, for the autonomic repetition and variation of the impingement. Conscious reflection is the doubling over of this dynamic abstraction on itself. The order of connection of such dynamic abstractions among themselves, on a level specific to them, is called mind. The autonomic tendency received secondhand from the body is raised to a higher power to become an activity of the mind. Mind and body are seen as two levels recapitulating the same image/expression event in different but parallel ways, ascending by degrees from the concrete to the incorporeal, holding to the same absent center of a now spectral—and potentialized—encounter. Spinoza's ethics is the philosophy of the becoming-active, in parallel, of mind and body, from an origin in passion, in impingement, in so pure and productive a receptivity that it can only be conceived as a third state, an excluded middle, prior to the distinction between activity and passivity: affect. This "origin" is never left behind, but doubles one like a shadow that is always almost perceived, and cannot but be perceived, in effect.

In a different but complementary direction, when Spinoza defines mind and body as different orders of connection, or different regimes of motion and rest, his thinking converges in suggestive ways with Bergson's theories of virtuality and movement.

It is Gilles Deleuze who reopened the path to these authors, although nowhere does he patch them directly into each other. His work and theirs could profitably be read together with recent theories of complexity and chaos.[8] It is all a question of *emergence,* which is precisely the focus of the various science-derived theories that converge around the notion of self-organization (the spontaneous production of a level of reality having its own rules of formation and order of connection). Affect or intensity in the present account is akin to what is called a critical point, or a bifurcation point, or singular point, in chaos theory and the theory of dissipative structures. This is the turning point at which a physical system paradoxically embodies multiple and normally mutually exclusive potentials, only

one of which is "selected." "Phase space" could be seen as a diagrammatic rendering of the dimension of the virtual. The organization of multiple levels that have different logics and temporal organizations, but are locked in resonance with each other and recapitulate the same event in divergent ways, recalls the fractal ontology and nonlinear causality underlying theories of complexity.

The levels at play could be multiplied to infinity: already mentioned are mind and body, but also volition and cognition, at least two orders of language, expectation and suspense, body depth and epidermis, past and future, action and reaction, happiness and sadness, quiescence and arousal, passivity and activity, and so on. These could be seen not as binary oppositions or contradictions, but as resonating levels. Affect is their point of emergence, in their actual specificity, and it is their vanishing point, in singularity, in their virtual coexistence and interconnection—that critical point shadowing every image/expression-event. Although the realm of intensity that Deleuze's philosophy strives to conceptualize 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. Thus it also cannot but be experienced, in effect—in the proliferations of levels of organization it ceaselessly gives rise to, generates and regenerates, at every suspended moment.[9] Deleuze's philosophy is the point at which transcendental philosophy flips over into a radical immanentism, and empiricism into ethical experimentation. The Kantian imperative to understand the conditions of possible experience as if from outside and above transposes into an invitation to recapitulate, to repeat and complexify, at ground level, the real conditions of emergence, not of the categorical, but of the unclassifiable, the unassimilable, the never-yet felt, the felt for less than half a second, again for the first time—the new. Kant meets Spinoza, where idealism and empiricism turn pragmatic, becoming a midwifery of invention—with no loss in abstractive or inductive power. Quite the contrary—both are heightened. But now abstraction is synonymous with an unleashing of potential, rather than its subtraction. And the sense of induction has changed, to a triggering of a pro-

cess of complexifying self-organization. The implied ethics of the project is the value attached—without foundation, with desire only—to the multiplication of powers of existence, to ever-divergent regimes of action and expression.

Feedback (Digression)

A key to the rethinking of affect is the feedback of atoms of "higher" modes of organization into a level of emergence.[10] The philosopher of science Gilbert Simondon sees this functioning even on the physical level, where "germs" of forms are present in an emergent dimension along with unformed elements such as tropisms (attractors), distributions of potential energy (gradients defining metastabilities), and nonlocalized relations (resonation). According to Simondon, the dimension of the emergent—which he terms the "preindividual"—cannot be understood in terms of form, even if it infolds forms in a germinal state. It can only be analyzed as a continuous but highly differentiated *field* that is "out of phase" with formed entities (that is, has a different topology and causal order from the "individuals" which arise from it and whose forms return to it).[11] A germinal or "implicit" form cannot be understood as a shape or structure. It is more a bundle of potential functions localized, as a differentiated region, within a larger field of potential. In each region a shape or structure begins to form, but no sooner dissolves as its region shifts in relation to the others with which it is in tension. There is a kind of bubbling of structuration in a turbulent soup of regions of swirling potential. The regions are separated from each other by dynamic thresholds rather than by boundaries. Simondon calls these regions of potential "quanta," even as they appear on the macrophysical level and on the human level—hence the atomic allusion.[12] The "regions" are as abstract as they are actual, in the sense that they do not define boundaried spaces but are rather mobile differentiations within an open field characterized by action at a distance between elements (attractors, gradients, resonation). The limits of the region and of the entire field (the universe) are defined by the reach of its elements' collective actions at a distance. The limit will not be a sharp demarcation but more like a multidimensional fading to infinity. The field is open in the sense it has no interiority or exteriority: it is limited *and* infinite.

"Implicit" form is a bundling of potential functions, an infolding or

contraction of potential interactions (intension). The playing out of those potentials requires an *unfolding* in three-dimensional space and linear time—extension as actualization; actualization as *expression*. It is in expression that the fade-out occurs. *The limits of the field of emergence are in its actual expression.* Implicit form may be thought of as the effective presence of the sum total of a thing's interactions minus the thing. It is a thing's relationality autonomized as a dimension of the real. This *autonomization of relation* is the condition under which "higher" functions feed back. Emergence, once again, is a two-sided coin: one side in the virtual (the autonomy of relation), the other in the actual (functional limitation). What is being termed affect in this essay is precisely this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other. Affect is this two-sideness *as seen from the side of the actual thing,* as couched in its perceptions and cognitions. Affect is *the virtual as point of view,* provided the visual metaphor is used guardedly. For affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing's potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another. (Tactility and vision being the most obvious but by no means the only examples; interoceptive senses, especially proprioception, are crucial.)[13] Affects are *virtual synesthetic perspectives* anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness.* Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that *capture*—and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains unactualized, inseparable from but unassimilable to any *particular,* functionally anchored perspective. That is why all emotion is more or less disorienting, and why it is classically described as being outside of oneself, at the very point at which one is most intimately and unshareably in contact with oneself and one's vitality. If there were no escape, no excess or remainder, no fade-out to infinity, the universe would be without potential, pure entropy, death. Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them. Their autonomy is the autonomy of affect.

The escape of affect *cannot but be perceived,* alongside the perceptions that are its capture. This side-perception may be punctual, localized in an event (such as the sudden realization that happiness and sadness are something besides what they are). When it is punctual, it is usually described in negative terms, typically as a form of *shock* (the sudden interruption of functions of actual connection).[14] But it is also continuous, like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian. When the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. For it is nothing less than the *perception of one's own vitality,* one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as "freedom"). One's "sense of aliveness" is a continuous, nonconscious self-perception (unconscious self-reflection or lived self-referentiality). It is the perception of this *self-perception,* its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analyzed—as long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive.[15]

Simondon notes the connection between self-reflection and affect. He even extends the capacity for self-reflection to all living things—although it is hard to see why his own analysis does not force him to extend it to all things, living or not.[16] (Is not resonation a kind of self-reflection?) Spinoza could be read as doing this in his definition of the idea of the affection as a trace—one that is not without reverberations. More radically, he sees ideas as attaining their most adequate (most self-organized) expression not in us but in the "mind" of God. But then he defines God as Nature (understood as encompassing the human, the artificial, and the invented). Deleuze is willing to take the step of dispensing with God. One of the things that distinguishes his philosophy most sharply from that of his contemporaries is the notion that ideality is a dimension of matter (also understood as encompassing the human, the artificial, and the invented).[17]

The distinction between the living and the nonliving, the biological and the physical, is not the presence or absence of reflection, but its directness. Our brains and nervous systems effect the autonomization of relation, in an interval smaller than the smallest perceivable, even though the operation arises from perception and returns to it. In the more primitive organisms, this autonomization is accomplished by organism-wide networks of interoceptive and exteroceptive sense-receptors whose impulses are not centralized in a brain. One could say that a jellyfish is its

brain. In all living things, the autonomization of relation is effected by a center of indetermination (a localized or organism-wide function of resonation that delinearizes causality in order to relinearize it with a change of direction: from reception to reaction). At the fundamental physical level, there is no such mediation.[18] The place of physical nonmediation between the virtual and the actual is explored by quantum mechanics. Just as "higher" functions are fed back—all the way to the subatomic (that is, position and momentum)—quantum indeterminacy is fed forward. It rises through the fractal bifurcations leading to and between each of the superposed levels of reality. On each level, it appears in a unique mode adequate to that level. On the level of the physical macrosystems analyzed by Simondon, its mode is potential energy and the margin of "play" it introduces into deterministic systems (epitomized by the "three-body problem" so dear to chaos theory). On the biological level, it is the margin of undecidability accompanying every perception, which is one with a perception's transmissibility from one sense to another. On the human level, it is that same undecidability fed forward into thought, as evidenced in the deconstructability of every structure of ideas (as expressed, for example, in Gödel's incompleteness theorem and in Derrida's *différance*). Each individual and collective human level has its own peculiar "quantum" mode; various forms of undecidability in logical and signifying systems are joined by emotion on the psychological level, resistance on the political level, the specter of crisis haunting capitalist economies, and so forth. These modes are fed back and fed forward into one another, echoes of each other one and all.

The use of the concept of the quantum outside quantum mechanics, even as applied to human psychology, is not a metaphor. For each level, it is necessary to find an operative concept for the objective indeterminacy that echoes what on the subatomic level goes by the name of quantum. This involves analyzing every formation as participating in what David Bohm calls an *implicate order* cutting across all levels and doubled on each.[19] Affect is as good a general term as any for the interface between implicate and explicate order.[20] Returning to the difference between the physical and the biological, it is clear that there can be no firm dividing line between them, nor between them and the human. Affect, like thought or reflection, could be extended to any or every level, providing that the uniqueness of its functioning on that level is taken into account. The difference between the dead, the living, and the human is not a question

of form or structure, nor of the properties possessed by the embodiments of forms or structures, nor of the qualified functions performed by those embodiments (that is, their utility or ability to do work). The distinction between kinds of things and levels of reality is a question of degree: of the way in which modes of organization (such as reflection) are differentially present on every level, barring the extremes. The extremes are the quantum physical and the human, inasmuch as it aspires to or confuses itself with the divine (which occurs wherever notions of eternity, identity, and essence are operative). Neither extreme can be said to exist, although each could be said to be real in entirely different ways: the quantum is productive of effective reality, and the divine is effectively produced as a fiction. In between lies a continuum of existence differentiated into levels, or regions of potential, between which there are no boundaries, only dynamic thresholds.

As Simondon notes, all of this makes it difficult to speak of either transcendence or immanence.[21] No matter what one does, they tend to flip over into each other, in a kind of spontaneous Deleuzian combustion. It makes little difference if the field of existence (being plus potential; the actual in its relation with the virtual) is thought of as an infinite interiority or a parallelism of mutual exteriorities. You get burned either way. Spinoza had it both ways: an indivisible substance divided into parallel attributes. To the extent that the terms transcendence and immanence connote spatial relations—and they inevitably do—they are inadequate to the task. A philosophical sleight of hand like Spinoza's is always necessary. The trick is to get comfortable with productive paradox.[22]

All of this—the absence of a clear line of demarcation between the physical, the vital, the human, and the superhuman; the undecidability of immanence and transcendence—also has implications for ethical thought. A common thread running through the varieties of social constructivism currently dominant in cultural theory holds that everything, including nature, is constructed in discourse. The classical definition of the human as the rational animal returns in new permutation: the human as the chattering animal. Only the animal is bracketed: the human as the chattering of culture. This reinstates a rigid divide between the human and the nonhuman, since it has become a commonplace, after Lacan, to make language the special preserve of the human (chattering chimps notwithstanding). Now saying that the quantum level is transformed by our perception is not the same as saying that it is only *in* our perception; saying

that nature is discursively constructed is not necessarily the same as saying that nature is *in* discourse. Social constructivism easily leads to a cultural solipsism analogous to subjectivist interpretations of quantum mechanics. In this worst-case solipsist scenario, nature appears as immanent to culture (as its construct). At best, when the status of nature is deemed unworthy of attention, it is simply shunted aside. In that case it appears, by default, as transcendent to culture (as its inert and meaningless remainder). Perhaps the difference between best and worst is not all that it is cracked up to be. For in either case, nature as naturing, nature as having its own dynamism, is erased. Theoretical moves aimed at ending Man end up making human culture the measure and meaning of all things in a kind of unfettered anthropomorphism precluding—to take one example—articulations of cultural theory and ecology. It is meaningless to interrogate the relation of the human to the nonhuman if the nonhuman is only a construct of human culture, or inertness. The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible *alterity* of the nonhuman in and through its active *connection* to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, in irreducible alterity and infinite connection.

A final note: the feedback of "higher" functions can take such forms as the deployment of narrative in essays about the breakdown of narrative.

III

Next story.

The last story was of the brain. This one is of the brainless. His name is Ronald Reagan. The story comes from a well-known book of pop-neurophysiology by Oliver Sacks.[23]

Sacks describes watching a televised speech by the "Great Communicator" in a hospital ward of patients suffering from two kinds of cognitive dysfunction. Some were suffering from global aphasia, which rendered them incapable of understanding words as such. They could nonetheless understand most of what was said, because they compensated by developing extraordinary abilities to read extraverbal cues: inflection, facial expression, and other gesture—body language. Others on the ward were suffering from what is called tonal agnosia, which is the inverse of aphasia. The ability to hear the expressiveness of the voice is lost, and with it

goes attention to other extraverbal cues. Language is reduced to its grammatical form and semantic or logical content. Neither group appeared to be Reagan voters. In fact, the speech was universally greeted by howls of laughter and expressions of outrage. The "Great Communicator" was failing to persuade. To the aphasics, he was functionally illiterate in extraverbal cuing; his body language struck them as hilariously inept. He was, after all, a recycled bad actor, and an aging one at that. The agnosiacs were outraged that the man couldn't put together a grammatical sentence or follow a logical line to its conclusion. He came across to them as intellectually impaired. (It must be recalled that this is long before the onset of Reagan's Alzheimer's disease—what does that say about the difference between normality and degeneration?)

Now all of this might come as news to those who think of Reagan and other postmodern political stars on the model of charismatic leadership, in which the fluency of a public figure's gestural and tonal repertoire mesmerize the masses, lulling them into bleary-eyed belief in the content of the mellifluous words. On the contrary, what is astonishing is that Reagan wasn't laughed and jeered off the campaign podium, and was swept into office not once but twice. It wasn't that people didn't hear his verbal fumbling or recognize the incoherence of his thoughts. They were the butt of constant jokes and news stories. And it wasn't that what he lacked on the level of verbal coherence was glossed over by the seductive fluency of his body image. Reagan was more famous for his polyps than his poise, and there was a collective fascination with his faltering health and regular shedding of bits and pieces of himself. The only conclusion is that Reagan was an effective leader not in spite of but because of his double dysfunction. He was able to produce ideological effects by non-ideological means, a global shift in the political direction of the United States by falling apart. His means were affective. Once again: affective, as opposed to emotional. This is not about empathy or emotive identification, or any form of identification for that matter.[24]

Reagan politicized the power of mime. That power is in interruption. A mime decomposes movement, cuts its continuity into a potentially infinite series of submovements punctuated by jerks. At each jerk, at each cut into the movement, the potential is there for the movement to veer off in another direction, to become a different movement. Each jerk suspends the continuity of the movement, for just a flash, too quick really to perceive but decisively enough to suggest a veer. This compresses into the

movement under way potential movements that are in some way made present without being actualized. In other words, each jerk is a critical point, a singular point, a bifurcation point. At that point, the mime almost imperceptibly intercalates a flash of virtuality into the actual movement under way. The genius of the mime is also the good fortune of the bad actor. Reagan's gestural idiocy had a mime effect. As did his verbal incoherence in the register of meaning. He was a communicative jerk. The two levels of interruption, those of linear movement and conventional progressions of meaning, were held together by the one Reagan feature that did, I think, hold positive appeal: the timbre of his voice, that beautifully vibratory voice. Two parallel lines of abstractive suspense resonated together. His voice embodied the resonation. It embodied the abstraction. It was the embodiment of an asignifying intensity doubling his every actual move and phrase, following him like the shadow of a mime. It was the continuity of his discontinuities.[25]

Reagan operationalized the virtual in postmodern politics. Alone, he was nothing approaching an ideologue. He was nothing, an idiocy musically coupled with an incoherence. But, that's a bit unfair. He was an incipience. He was unqualified and without content. But, his incipience was prolonged by technologies of image transmission and then relayed by apparatuses such as the family or the church or the school or the chamber of commerce, which in conjunction with the media acted as part of the nervous system of a new and frighteningly reactive body politic. It was on the receiving end that the Reagan incipience was qualified, given content. Receiving apparatuses fulfilled the inhibitory, limitative function. They selected one line of movement, one progression of meaning, to actualize and implant locally. That is why Reagan could be so many things to so many people; that is why the majority of the electorate could disagree with him on major issues but still vote for him. Because he was actualized, in their neighborhood, as a movement and a meaning of their selection—or at least selected for them with their acquiescence. He was a man for all inhibitions. It was commonly said that he ruled primarily by projecting an air of confidence. That was the emotional tenor of his political manner, dysfunction notwithstanding. Confidence is the emotional translation of affect as *capturable* life potential; it is a particular emotional expression and becoming-conscious of one's side-perceived sense of vitality. Reagan transmitted vitality, virtuality, tendency, in sickness and interruption. ("I am in control here," cried the general, when Reagan was shot. He wasn't,

actually.) The actualizations relaying the Reagan incipience varied. But, with the exception of the cynical, the aphasic, and the agnosiac, they consistently included an overweening feeling of confidence—that of the supposedly sovereign individual within a supposedly great nation at whose helm idiocy and incoherence reigned. In other words, Reagan was many things to many people, but always within a general framework of affective jingoism. Confidence is the apotheosis of affective capture. Functionalized and nationalized, it feeds directly into prison construction and neocolonial adventure.

What is of dire interest now, post-Reagan, is the extent to which he contracted into his person operations that might be argued to be endemic to late-capitalist, image- and information-based economies. Think of the image/expression-events in which we bathe. Think interruption. Think of the fast cuts of the video clip or the too-cool TV commercial. Think of the cuts from TV programming to commercials. Think of the cuts across programming and commercials achievable through zapping. Think of the distractedness of television viewing, the constant cuts from the screen to its immediate surroundings, to the viewing context where other actions are performed in fits and starts as attention flits. Think of the joyously incongruent juxtapositions of surfing the Internet. Think of our bombardment by commercial images off the screen, at every step in our daily rounds. Think of the imagistic operation of the consumer object as turnover times decrease as fast as styles can be recycled. Everywhere the cut, the suspense—incipience. Virtuality, perhaps?

Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology. For although ideology is still very much with us, often in the most virulent of forms, it is no longer encompassing. It no longer defines the global mode of functioning of power. It is now one mode of power in a larger field that is not defined, overall, by ideology.[26] This makes it all the more pressing to connect ideology to its real conditions of emergence. For these are now manifest, mimed by men of power. One way of conceptualizing the non-ideological means by which ideology is produced might deploy the notions of *induction* and *transduction*—induction being the triggering of a qualification, of a containment, an actualization, and transduction being the transmission of an impulse of virtuality from one actualization to another and across them all (what Guattari calls transversality). Transduction is the transmission of a force of potential that cannot but be felt, simultaneously doubling, enabling, and ultimately counteracting the lim-

itative selections of apparatuses of actualization and implantation.[27] This amounts to proposing an *analog* theory of image-based power: images as the conveyors of forces of emergence, as vehicles for existential potentialization and transfer. In this, too, there are notable precursors. In particular, Walter Benjamin, whose concept of shock and image bombardment, whose analyses of the unmediated before-after temporality of what he called the "dialectical image," whose fascination with mime and mimicry, whose connecting of tactility to vision, all have much to offer an affective theory of late-capitalist power.[28]

At this point, the impression may have grown such that affect is being touted here as if the whole world could be packed into it. In a way, it can and is. The affective "atoms" that overfill the jerk of the power-mime are monads, inductive/transductive virtual perspectives fading out in all directions to infinity, separated from one another by dynamic thresholds.[29] They are autonomous not through closure but through a singular openness. As unbounded "regions" in an equally unbounded affective field, they are in contact with the whole universe of affective potential, as by action at a distance. Thus they have no outside even though they are differentiated according to which potentials are most apt to be expressed (effectively induced) as their "region" passes into actuality. Their passing into actuality is the key. Affect *is* the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence. How the element of virtuality is construed—whether past or future, inside or outside, transcendent or immanent, sublime or abject, atomized or continuous—is in a way a matter of indifference. It is all of these things, differently in every actual case. Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.

Resistance is manifestly not automatically a part of image reception in late capitalist cultures. But neither can the effect of the mass media and other image- and information-based media simply be explained in terms of a lack: a waning of affect, a decline in belief, or alienation. The mass media are massively potentializing, but the potential is inhibited, and both the emergence of the potential and its limitation are part and parcel of the cultural-political functioning of the media, as connected to other apparatuses. Media transmissions are breaches of indetermination. For them to

have any *specific* effect, they must be determined to have that effect by apparatuses of actualization and implantation that plug into them and transformatively relay what they give rise to (family, church, school, and chamber of commerce, to name but a few). The need to actively actualize media transmission is as true for reactive politics as it is for a politics of resistance and requires a new understanding of the body in its relation to signification and the ideal or incorporeal. In North America at least, the far right is far more attuned to the imagistic potential of the postmodern body than the established left and has exploited that advantage for at least the last two decades. Philosophies of affect, potential, and actualization may aid in finding countertactics.

IV

Last story:

> A man writes a health-care reform bill in his White House. It starts to melt in the media glare. He takes it to the Hill, where it continues to melt. He does not say good-bye.

And, although economic indicators show unmistakable signs of economic recovery, the stock market dips. By way of explanation, TV commentators cite a secondhand feeling. The man's "waffling" on other issues has undermined the public's confidence in him and is now affecting the health care initiative. The worry is that President Clinton is losing his "presidential" feel. What does that have to do with the health of the economy? The prevailing wisdom among the same commentators is that *passage* of the health care reform would harm the economy. It is hard to see why the market didn't go *up* on the news of the "unpresidential" falter of what many "opinion-makers" considered a costly social program inconsistent with basically sound economic policy inherited from the previous administration that was credited with starting a recovery. However, the question does not even arise, because the commentators are operating under the assumption that the stock market registers affective fluctuations in adjoining spheres more directly than properly economic indicators. Are they confused? Not according to certain economic theorists who, when called upon to explain to a nonspecialist audience the ultimate foundation of the capitalist monetary system, answer "faith."[30] And what, in the late cap-

italist economy, is the base cause of inflation according to the same experts? A "mindset," they say, in which feelings about the future become self-fulfilling prophesies capable of reversing "real" conditions.[31]

The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory. Actually, it is beyond infrastructural, it is everywhere, in effect. Its ability to come secondhand, to switch domains and produce effects across them all, gives it a metafactorial ubiquity. It is beyond infrastructural. It is transversal.

This fact about affect—its matter-of-factness needs to be taken into account in cultural and political theory. Don't forget.