

POST-CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

Series Editors: Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson

Brian Massumi

PARABLES FOR THE VIRTUAL

Movement,

Affect,

Sensation

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INTRODUCTION

Concrete Is as Concrete Doesn't

When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?

If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, the slightest, most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. Qualitative difference: immediately the issue is change. Felt and unforeseen.

The project of this book is to explore the implications for cultural theory of this simple conceptual displacement body—(movement/sensation)—change. Cultural theory of the past two decades has tended to bracket the middle terms and their unmediated connection. It can be argued that in doing so it has significantly missed the two outside terms, even though they have been of consistent concern—perhaps *the* central concerns in the humanities. Attention to the literality of movement was deflected by fears of falling into a “naive realism,” a reductive empiricism that would dissolve the specificity of the cultural domain in the plain, seemingly unproblematic, “presence” of dumb matter. The slightness of ongoing qualitative change paled in comparison to the grandness of periodic “rupture.” Against that possibility, the everyday was the place where nothing ever happens. Culture occupied the gap between matter and systemic change, in the operation of mechanisms of “mediation.” These were ideological apparatuses that structured the dumb material interactions of things and rendered them legible according to a dominant

signifying scheme into which human subjects in the making were “interpellated.” Mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been in glimpses at certain privileged historical junctures, it might still be a site of modest acts of “resistance” or “subversion” keeping alive the possibility of systemic change. These were practices of “reading” or “decoding” counter to the dominant ideological scheme of things. The body was seen to be centrally involved in these everyday practices of resistance. But this thoroughly mediated body could only be a “discursive” body: one with its signifying gestures. Signifying gestures make sense. If properly “performed,” they may also unmake sense by scrambling significations already in place. Make and unmake sense as they might, they don’t *sense*. Sensation is utterly redundant to their description. Or worse, it is destructive to it, because it appeals to an unmediated experience. Unmediated experience signals a danger that is worse, if anything can be, than naive realism: its polar opposite, naive subjectivism. Earlier phenomenological investigations into the sensing body were largely left behind because they were difficult to reconcile with the new understandings of the structuring capacities of culture and their inseparability both from the exercise of power and the glimmers of counterpower incumbent in mediate living. It was all about a subject without subjectivism: a subject “constructed” by external mechanisms. “The Subject.”

“The Body.” What is it to The Subject? Not the qualities of its moving experience. But rather, in keeping with the extrinsic approach, its *positioning*. Ideological accounts of subject formation emphasize systemic structurings. The focus on the systemic had to be brought back down to earth in order to be able to integrate into the account the local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbor. The concept of “positionality” was widely developed for this purpose. Signifying subject formation according to the dominant structure was often thought of in terms of “coding.” Coding in turn came to be thought of in terms of positioning on a grid. The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a “site” on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid. Proponents of

this model often cited its ability to link body-sites into a “geography” of culture that tempered the universalizing tendencies of ideology.

The sites, it is true, are multiple. But aren’t they still combinatorial permutations on an overarching definitional framework? Aren’t the possibilities for the entire gamut of cultural emplacements, including the “subversive” ones, precoded into the ideological master structure? Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very “construction,” but seems to prescript every possible signifying and countersignifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms? How can the grid itself change? How can what the system has pinpointedly determined flip over into a determining role capable of acting on the systemic level? The aim of the positionality model was to open a window on local resistance in the name of change. But the problem of change returned with a vengeance. Because every body-subject was so determinately local, it was boxed into its site on the culture map. Gridlock.

The idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture. This catches the body in cultural freeze-frame. The point of explanatory departure is a pinpointing, a zero-point of stasis. When positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. After all is signified and sited, there is the nagging problem of how to add movement back into the picture. But adding movement to stasis is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product. Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might succeed in making a move to occupy another position. In fact, certain normative progressions, such as that from child to adult, are coded in. But this doesn’t change the fact that what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects. These are predefined. Adding movement like this adds nothing at all. You just get two successive states: multiples of zero.

The very notion of movement as qualitative transformation is lacking. There is “displacement,” but no transformation; it is as if the body simply leaps from one definition to the next. Since the positional model’s definitional framework is punctual, it simply can’t attribute a reality to the

interval, whose crossing is a continuity (or nothing). The space of the crossing, the gaps between positions on the grid, falls into a theoretical no-body's land. Also lacking is the notion that if there is qualitative movement of the body, it as directly concerns sensings as significations. Add to this the fact that matter, bodily or otherwise, never figures into the account *as such*. Even though many of the approaches in question characterize themselves as materialisms, matter can only enter in indirectly: as mediated. Matter, movement, body, sensation. Multiple mediated miss.

The present project began almost ten years ago in response to these problems. It was based on the hope that movement, sensation, and qualities of experience couched in matter in its most literal sense (and sensing) might be culturally-theoretically thinkable, without falling into either the Scylla of naive realism or the Charybdis of subjectivism and without contradicting the very real insights of poststructuralist cultural theory concerning the coextensiveness of culture with the field of experience and of power with culture. The aim was to put matter unmediatedly back into cultural materialism, along with what seemed most directly corporeal back into the body. Theoretically, the point of departure would have to be to part company with the linguistic model at the basis of the most widespread concepts of coding (almost always Saussurian in inspiration, often with Lacanian inflections) and find a semiotics willing to engage with continuity (in fact, a major preoccupation of the founder of the discipline, C. S. Peirce). This was undertaken not in a spirit of opposition to "Theory" or "cultural studies," but in the hope of building on their accomplishments, perhaps refreshing their vocabulary with conceptual infusions from neglected sources or underappreciated aspects of known sources.

If at any point I thought of this refreshing in terms of regaining a "concreteness" of experience, I was quickly disabused of the notion. Take movement. When a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition: its own variation. The range of variations it can be implicated in is not present in any given movement, much less in any position it passes through. In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary. That relation, to borrow a phrase from Gilles Deleuze, is real but abstract. The positional grid was abstract, despite the fact that it was meant to bring cultural theory back down to the local level, since it involved an overarching definitional grid whose determinations preexisted the bodies they

constructed or to which they were applied. The abstract of Deleuze's real-but-abstract is very different from this. It doesn't preexist and has nothing fundamentally to do with mediation. If ideology must be understood as mediating, then this real-abstract is not ideological. (Chapters 2, 3, and 9 tackle the description of nonideological mechanisms of power.) Here, abstract means: never present in position, only ever in passing. This is an abstractness pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation—that of a body to its own *indeterminacy* (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now).

The charge of indeterminacy carried by a body is inseparable from it. It strictly coincides with it, to the extent that the body is in passage or in process (to the extent that it is dynamic and alive). But the charge is not itself corporeal. Far from regaining a concreteness, to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body*. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct. If this is "concrete," the project originally set out on will take some severe twists.

One way of starting to get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal is to say it is to the body, as a positioned thing, as energy is to matter. Energy and matter are mutually convertible modes of the same reality. This would make the incorporeal something like a phase-shift of the body in the usual sense, but not one that comes after it in time. It would be a conversion or unfolding of the body *contemporary* to its every move. Always accompanying. Fellow-traveling dimension of the same reality.

This self-disjunctive coinciding sinks an ontological difference into the heart of the body. The body's potential to vary belongs to the same reality as the body as variety (positioned thing) but partakes of it in a different mode. Integrating movement slips us directly into what Michel Foucault called *incorporeal materialism*.¹ This movement-slip gives new urgency to questions of ontology, of ontological difference, inextricably linked to concepts of potential and process and, by extension, event—in a way that bumps "being" straight into becoming. Paraphrasing Deleuze again, the problem with the dominant models in cultural and literary theory is not that they are too abstract to grasp the concreteness of the real. The problem is that they are not *abstract enough* to grasp the real incorporeality of the concrete.

When it comes to grappling productively with paradoxes of passage and position, the philosophical precursor is Henri Bergson. The slip into

an incorporeal materialism follows the logic of Bergson's famous analysis of Zeno's paradoxes of movement.² When Zeno shoots his philosophical arrow, he thinks of its flight path in the commonsense way, as a linear trajectory made up of a sequence of points or positions that the arrow occupies one after the other. The problem is that between one point on a line and the next, there is an infinity of intervening points. If the arrow occupies a first point along its path, it will never reach the next—unless it occupies each of the infinity of points between. Of course, it is the nature of infinity that you can never get to the end of it. The arrow gets swallowed up in the transitional infinity. Its flight path implodes. The arrow is immobilized.

Or, if the arrow moved it is because it was never *in* any point. It was in *passage* across them all. The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity. That *continuity* of movement is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed. It doesn't stop until it stops: when it hits the target. Then, and only then, is the arrow in position. It is only after the arrow hits its mark that its real trajectory may be plotted. The points or positions really appear *retrospectively*, working backward from the movement's end. It is as if, in our thinking, we put targets all along the path. The in-between positions are logical targets: *possible* endpoints. The flight of the arrow is not immobilized as Zeno would have it. We stop it in thought when we construe its movement to be divisible into positions. Bergson's idea is that space itself is a retrospective construct of this kind. When we think of space as "extensive," as being measurable, divisible, and composed of points plotting possible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements. We are looking at only one dimension of reality.

A thing is when it isn't doing. A thing is concretely where and what it is—for example a successfully shot arrow sticking in a target—when it is in a state of arrest. *Concrete is as concrete doesn't.*

Solidify?³

Fluidifying with Bergson has a number of far-reaching consequences:

(1) It suggests that a distinction between extensive and intensive is more useful than any opposition between the "literal" and the "figural" if what we are interested in is change. Extensive space, and the arrested ob-

jects occupying the positions into which it is divisible, is a back-formation from cessation. The dynamic enabling the back-formation is "intensive" in the sense that movement, in process, cannot be determinately indexed to anything outside of itself. It has withdrawn into an all-encompassing relation with what it will be. It is in becoming, absorbed in occupying its field of potential. For when it comes to a stop in the target, it will have undergone a qualitative change. It will not just be an arrow. It will have been a successfully shot arrow. It is still the same thing by definition, but in a different way, qualitatively changed by the passing event. But if it is qualitatively changed, isn't it only nominally the "same"? Shouldn't we assert, with Leibniz, that all the predicates that can be stated of a thing—all the "accidents" that might befall it (even those remaining in potential)—are of its nature?⁴ If so, "nature" changes at the slightest move. The concept of nature concerns modification not essence (chapter 9).

(2) The emphasis is on process before signification or coding. The latter are not false or unreal. They are truly, really stop-operations. Or, if they have movement, it is derivative, a second-order movement between back-formed possibilities (a kind of zero-point movement that can be added back, against all odds). The models criticized earlier do not need to be trashed. They are not just plain wrong. It's just that their sphere of applicability must be recognized as limited to a particular mode of existence, or a particular dimension of the real (the degree to which things coincide with their own arrest). Einstein's theories of relativity did not prove Newton's laws wrong. It showed them to be of limited applicability: accurate, but only at a certain scale of things (where the law of entropy holds). The same goes for the Bergsonian revolution. Cultural laws of positioning and ideology are accurate in a certain sphere (where the tendency to arrest dominates). Right or wrong is not the issue. The issue is to demarcate their sphere of applicability—when the "ground" upon which they operate is continuously moving. This "limitation" does not belittle the approaches in question. In fact, it brings wonder back into them. From this point of view, the operations they describe are little short of miraculous. Like multiplying by zero and yielding a positive quantity. "Miraculation" should figure prominently in the semiotic vocabulary.⁵

(3) The Bergsonian revolution turns the world on its head. Position no longer comes first, with movement a problematic second. It is secondary to movement and derived from it. It is retro movement, movement residue. The problem is no longer to explain how there can be change given

positioning. The problem is to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process. This is akin to late-twentieth-century problematics of “order out of chaos.”

(4) Another way of putting it is that positionality is an emergent quality of movement. The distinction between stasis and motion that replaces the opposition between literal and figurative from this perspective is not a logical binarism. It follows the modes by which realities pass into each other. “Passing into” is not a binarism. “Emerging” is not a binarism. They are dynamic unities. The kinds of distinction suggested here pertain to continuities under qualitative transformation. They are directly processual (and derivatively signifying and codifying). They can only be approached by a logic that is abstract enough to grasp the self-disjunctive coincidence of a thing’s immediacy to its own variation: to follow how concepts of dynamic unity and unmediated heterogeneity reciprocally presuppose each other. The concept of field, to mention but one, is a useful logical tool for expressing continuity of self-relation and heterogeneity in the same breath (chapters 3 and 6). Embarrassingly for the humanities, the handiest concepts in this connection are almost without exception products of mathematics or the sciences.

(5) It is not enough for process concepts of this kind to be ontological. They must be *ontogenetic*: they must be equal to emergence.

(6) If passage is primary in relation to position, processual indeterminacy is primary in relation to social determination (chapters 2, 4, 9). Social and cultural determinations on the model of positionality are also secondary and derived. Gender, race, and sexual orientation also emerge and back-form their reality. Passage precedes construction. But construction does effectively back-form its reality. Grids happen. So social and cultural determinations feed back into the process from which they arose. Indeterminacy and determination, change and freeze-framing, go together. They are inseparable and always actually coincide while remaining disjunctive in their modes of reality. To say that passage and indeterminacy “come first” or “are primary” is more a statement of ontological priority than the assertion of a time sequence. They have ontological privilege in the sense that they constitute the field of the emergence, while positionings are what emerge. The trick is to express that priority in a way that respects the inseparability and contemporaneousness of the disjunct dimensions: their ontogenetic difference. The work of Gilbert Simondon is exemplary in this regard.

(7) As Simondon reminds us, it is important to keep in mind that there is a contemporaneous difference between social *determination* and sociality.⁶ The approach suggested here does not accept any categorical separation between the social and the presocial, between culture and some kind of “raw” nature or experience (chapters 1, 8, 9). The idea is that there is an ontogenesis or becoming of culture and the social (bracketing for present purposes the difference between them), of which determinate forms of culture and sociability are the result. The challenge is to think that process of *formation*, and for that you need the notion of a taking-form, an inform on the way to being determinately this or that. The field of emergence is not presocial. It is *open-endedly social*. It is social in a manner “prior to” the separating out of individuals and the identifiable groupings that they end up boxing themselves into (positions in gridlock). A sociality without determinate borders: “pure” sociality. One of the things that the dimension of emergence is ontogenetically “prior to” is thus the very distinction between the individual and the collective, as well as any given model of their interaction. That interaction is precisely what takes form. That is what is socially determined—and renegotiated by each and every cultural act. Assume it, and you beg the whole question (chapter 3). Not assuming it, however, entails finding a concept for interaction-in-the-making. The term adopted here is *relation* (chapters 1, 3, 9).

(8) That there is a difference between the possible and the potential needs to be attended to (chapters 4, 5, 9). Possibility is back-formed from potential’s unfolding. But once it is formed, it also effectively feeds in. Feedback, it prescripts: implicit in the determination of a thing’s or body’s positionality is a certain set of transformations that can be expected of it by definition and that it can therefore undergo without qualitatively changing enough to warrant a new name. These possibilities delineate a region of nominally defining—that is, normative—variation. Potential is unprescripted. It only feeds forward, unfolding toward the registering of an event: bull’s-eye. Possibility is a variation *implicit in* what a thing can be said to be when it is on target. Potential is the *immanence* of a thing to its still indeterminate variation, under way (chapters 3, 4, 5, 8, 9). Implication is a code word. Immanence is process.⁷

(9) If the positional grid feeds back, then the success of that operation changes the field conditions from which the determinate positions emerged. The distinction between potential and possibility is a distinction

between conditions of emergence and re-conditionings of the emerged. Conditions of emergence are one with becoming. Re-conditionings of the emerged define normative or regulatory operations that set the parameters of history (the possible interactions of determinate individuals and groups). History is inseparably, ontogenetically different from becoming. But if feedback from the dimension of the emerged re-conditions the conditions of emergence, then it also has to be recognized that conditions of emergence change. Emergence emerges. Changing changes. If history has a becoming from which it is inseparably, ontogenetically different, then conversely becoming has a history (chapter 9).

(10) The difference between the actual stopping that occurs when a continuity exhausts itself and reaches a terminus and the logical stopping that goes back over what then appears as its path, in order to cut it into segments separated by plottable points, is not as great as it might seem at first. The retrospective ordering enables precise operations to be inserted along the way, in anticipation of a repetition of the movement—the possibility that it will come again. If the movement does reoccur, it can be captured (chapters 1, 2, 3, 9). It comes to a different end. At that terminus, its momentum may be diverted into a new movement. The back-formation of a path is not only a “retrospection.” It is a “retroduction”: a production, by feedback, of new movements. A dynamic unity has been retrospectively captured and qualitatively converted. Space itself is a retroduction, by means of the standardization of measurement (chapters 7, 8). Before measurement, there was air and ground, but not space as we know it. Ground is not a static support any more than air is an empty container. The ground is full of movement, as full as the air is with weather, just at different rhythm from most perceptible movements occurring with it (flight of the arrow). Any geologist will tell you that the ground is anything but stable. It is a dynamic unity of continual folding, uplift, and subsidence. Measurement stops the movement in thought, as it empties the air of weather, yielding space understood as a grid of determinate positions. The practices enabled by the spatialization of ground convert it into a foundation for technological change. This is not simply a “cultural construction.” It is a becoming cultural of nature. The very ground of life changes. But it remains as natural as it becomes-cultural. This becoming-cultural of nature is predicated on the capture of processes already in operation. Putting up a new target to stop an arrow connects with forces of mass and inertia. The arrest of the arrow prolongs

a tendency toward stoppage belonging to the ground, converting it into a cultural function—the foundation, say, for an archery competition. The anticipation of a next arrow prolongs powers of repetition also incumbent in nature, converting them into a basis for scoring. The point is that the “natural” and the “cultural” feed forward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense. It is necessary to theorize a *nature-culture continuum* (chapters 1, 9). Logical operations prolong and convert forces already in nature, and forces of nature divert into cultural operations normatively regulated (ruled) by the logical conversion. Nature and culture are in mutual movement into and through each other. Their continuum is a dynamic unity of reciprocal variation. Things we are accustomed to placing on one side or another of the nature-culture divide must be redistributed along the whole length of the continuum, under varying modes of operation, in various phases of separation and regrouping, and to different degrees of “purity.” (As was suggested for sociality, note that “pure” sociality is found at the “nature” end of the continuum, in culture’s just-becoming, “prior to” its separations; chapter 9.) On the list of distinctions it becomes difficult to sustain in any categorical way are those between artifact and thing, body and object—and even thought and matter. Not only do these relay in reciprocal becomings; together they ally in process. They are tinged with event.

(11) The status of “natural law” (the normative self-regulation of nature; nature’s self-rule) becomes a major theoretical stake, as does the naturalizing of cultural laws with which cultural theory has more traditionally been concerned. The problem has been that the concern for “naturalization” was one-sided, only attending to half the becoming. Of tremendous help in looking at both sides is the concept of *habit*. Habit is an acquired automatic self-regulation. It resides in the flesh. Some say in matter. As acquired, it can be said to be “cultural.” As automatic and material, it can pass for “natural.” Sorting out the identity or difference between law and habit (chapter 9), and distributing the result along the nature-culture continuum, becomes a promising direction for inquiry. Of course, a preoccupation with precisely this question accompanied the birth of *empiricism* (with Hume). “Incorporeal materialism” has a date with empiricism (chapter 9).⁸

(12) The kinds of codings, griddings, and positionings with which cultural theory has been preoccupied are no exception to the dynamic

unity of feedback and feed-forward, or double becoming. Gender, race, and orientation are what Ian Hacking calls “interactive kinds”: logical categories that feed back into and transform the reality they describe (and are themselves modified by in return).⁹ Ideas about cultural or social construction have dead-ended because they have insisted on bracketing the *nature* of the process.¹⁰ If you elide nature, you miss the becoming of culture, its emergence (not to mention the history of matter). You miss the continuum of interlinkage, feed-forward and feedback, by which movements capture and convert each other to many ends, old, new, and innumerable. The world is in a condition of constant qualitative growth. Some kind of constructivism is required to account for the processual continuity across categorical divides and for the reality of that qualitative growth, or ontogenesis: the fact that with every move, with every change, there is something new to the world, an added reality. The world is self-augmenting. Reality “snowballs,” as William James was fond of saying. Perhaps “productivism” would be better than constructivism because it connotes emergence. “Inventionism” wouldn’t be going too far, for even if you take nature in the narrowest sense, it has to be admitted that it is inventive in its own right. There is a word for this: evolution. There is no reason not to use the same word for the prolongation of “natural” processes of change in the emergent domain of “culture.” Is a constructivist evolutionism conceivable? An evolutionary constructivism (chapters 4, 9)?

(13) If you want to adopt a productivist approach, the techniques of critical thinking prized by the humanities are of limited value. To think productivism, you have to allow that even your own logical efforts feed-back and add to reality, in some small, probably microscopic way. But still. Once you have allowed that, you have accepted that activities dedicated to thought and writing are inventive. Critical thinking disavows its own inventiveness as much as possible. Because it sees itself as uncovering something it claims was hidden or as debunking something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificatory *modus operandi*. However strenuously it might debunk concepts like “representation,” it carries on as if it mirrored something outside itself with which it had no complicity, no unmediated processual involvement, and thus could justifiably oppose. Prolonging the thought-path of movement, as suggested here, requires that techniques of negative critique be used sparingly. The balance has to shift to *affirmative* methods: tech-

niques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagerly) to reality. There is a certain hubris to the notion that a mere academic writer is actually inventing. But the hubris is more than tempered by the self-evident modesty of the returns. So why not hang up the academic hat of critical self-seriousness, set aside the intemperate arrogance of debunking—and enjoy? If you don’t enjoy concepts and writing and don’t feel that when you write you are adding something to the world, if only the enjoyment itself, and that by adding that ounce of positive experience to the world you are affirming it, celebrating its potential, tending its growth, in however small a way, however really abstractly—well, just hang it up. It is not that critique is wrong. As usual, it is not a question of right and wrong—nothing important ever is. Rather, it is a question of dosage. It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting. You are that much less fostering. There are times when debunking is necessary. But, if applied in a blanket manner, adopted as a general operating principle, it is counterproductive. Foster or debunk. It’s a strategic question. Like all strategic questions, it is basically a question of timing and proportion. Nothing to do with morals or moralizing. Just pragmatic.

(14) The logical resources equal to emergence must be limber enough to juggle the ontogenetic indeterminacy that precedes and accompanies a thing’s coming to be what it doesn’t. *Vague* concepts, and concepts of vagueness, have a crucial, and often enjoyable, role to play.

(15) Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness in play. Strangely, if this procedure is followed with a good dose of conviction and just enough technique, presto!, the paradox actually becomes a well-formed logical operator. Thought and language bend to it like light in the vicinity of a superdense heavenly body. This may be an example of miraculation. (As if lucidity itself could be invented.)

These are just some of the directions that the simple aim of integrating movement into the account gets going: a lot of leverage for a small amount of applied conceptual pressure. A lot of new problems.

This is without even mentioning the associated problem of sensation. Briefly: sensation also presents a directly disjunctive self-coinciding (how’s that for vague?). It’s simply this: sensation is never simple. It is always doubled by the feeling of having a feeling. It is self-referential. This is not necessarily the same as “self-reflexive.” The doubling of sensation

does not assume a subjective splitting and does not of itself constitute a distancing. It is an immediate self-complication. It is best to think of it as a resonance, or interference pattern (chapters 1, 9). An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonance is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its complex patterning. That patterning is not at a distance from itself. It is immediately its own event. Although it is complex, it is not composed of parts. It is composed of the event that it is, which is unitary. It is a complex dynamic unity. The interference pattern arises where the sound wave intersects with itself. The bouncing back and forth multiplies the sound's movement without cutting it. The movement remains continuous. It remains in continuity with itself across its multiplication. This complex self-continuity is a putting into relation of the movement to itself: self-relation. The self-relation is immediate—in and of itself, only its own event—even though it requires distance to occur. The best word for a complicating immediacy of self-relation is “intensity” (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4). Resonance can be seen as converting distance, or extension, into intensity. It is a qualitative transformation of distance into an immediacy of self-relation.

With the body, the “walls” are the sensory surfaces. The intensity is experience. The emptiness or in-betweenness filled by experience is the incorporeal dimension of the body referred to earlier. The conversion of surface distance into intensity is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an *event* (chapters 2, 3, 6, 8). It is a relay between its corporeal and incorporeal dimensions. This is not yet a subject. But it may well be the conditions of emergence of a subject: an incipient subjectivity. Call it a “self-.” The hyphen is retained as a reminder that “self” is not a substantive but rather a relation. Sorting out “self-reflexivity,” “self-referentiality,” and “self-relation” and, in the process, distributing subjectivity and its incipency along the nature-culture continuum, becomes another major theoretical stake.

The feeling of having a feeling is what Leibniz called the “perception of perception.” That raises another thorny issue: the identity or difference between the terms “sensation” and “perception” (chapters 2, 4, 5).¹¹ It gets thornier. Leibniz notes that the perception of perception “occurs without characters and therefore that memory does also.”¹² Add memory to issues of sensation and perception. Then pause. Memory, sensation, perception occurring without “characters”? In other words, without

properties? Without determinate form or content? What is a memory without content? One answer might be that it is just pastness, a pure pastness that would be the condition of emergence for determinate memory. But that would make the past contemporary to the present of sensation and perception. Leibniz goes on to say that although the perception of perception is without characters, it does carry a “distinguishing sense of bodily direction.” Distinguishing bodily direction without a determinate form? (chapter 8). In other words, without distance? That could only be *tendency*, pure tendency (chapter 4).¹³ Tendency is futurity: pure futurity. So there is a futurity that is contemporary with the past's contemporaneity with the present.

All of this is to say that feedback and feed-forward, or recursivity, in addition to converting distance into intensity, folds the dimensions of time into each other. The field of emergence of experience has to be thought of as a space-time continuum, as an ontogenetic dimension prior to the separating-out of space and time (adopting the same approach as with nature-culture; chapters 2, 8).¹⁴ Linear time, like position-gridded space, would be emergent qualities of the event of the world's self-relating.

Leibniz's allusion to tendency brings up one more issue and also points to a way of making the link between movement and sensation developed in the work of Spinoza. Spinoza defined the body in terms of “relations of movement and rest.”¹⁵ He wasn't referring to actual, extensive movements or stases. He was referring to a body's *capacity* to enter into relations of movement and rest. This capacity he spoke of as a *power* (or potential) to affect or be affected. The issue, after sensation, perception, and memory, is *affect*. “Relation between movement and rest” is another way of saying “transition.” For Spinoza, the body was one with its transitions. Each transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event and how readily addressable they are—or to what degree they are present as futurities. That “degree” is a bodily intensity, and its present futurity a tendency. The Spinozist problematic of affect offers a way of weaving together concepts of movement, tendency, and intensity in a way that takes us right back to the beginning: in what sense the body coincides with its own transitions and its transitioning with its potential.

The link to sensation comes in with the added remark that the variation in intensity is *felt*. This brings us back to where we just were, at self-relation: the feeling of transition by nature stretches between phases of a

continuing movement. The sensed aspect of intensity doubles the affect understood as pure capacity: we are back at self-multiplication. And we are back at emergence, because the sensation is the first glimmer of a determinate experience, in the act of registering itself as itself across its own event. A first glimmer of definable self-experience: back at incipient subjectivity. We have looped, taking an affective shortcut across many of the salient problems raised by the question of the body's passing powers of "concreteness."

Where we might loop into shortly is empiricism, at the other end of its history. William James made transition and the feeling of self-relation a central preoccupation of his latter-day "radical" empiricism. "The relations that connect experiences," he wrote, "must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system."¹⁶ If incorporeal materialism is an empiricism it is a radical one, summed up by the formula: *the felt reality of relation*. A complication for radical empiricism is that the feeling of the relation may very well not be "large" enough to register consciously. It may be what Leibniz termed a "small perception," or microperception (chapter 8). The vast majority of the world's sensations are certainly nonconscious. Nonconscious is a very different concept from the Freudian unconscious (although it is doubtless not unrelated to it). The differences are that repression does not apply to nonconscious perception and that nonconscious perception may, with a certain amount of ingenuity, be argued to apply to nonorganic matter (chapters 1, 8, 9). Whereas the feeling of the relation may be "too small" to enter perception (it is *infraempirical*), the relation it registers, for its part, is "too large" to fit into a perception since it envelops a multiplicity of potential variations (it is *superempirical*). A radical empiricism, if it is to be a thorough thinking of relation, must find ways of directly, affectively joining the *infraempirical* to the *superempirical* (chapters 2, 6). "Actualization" does this.

Affect, sensation, perception, movement, intensity, tendency, habit, law, chaos, recursion, relation, immanence, the "feedback of higher forms." Emergence, becoming, history, space, time, space-time, space and time as emergences. Nature-culture, matter, feeling, matter feeling. Event, capture, possible, potential, power. Not all the concepts in this crowd figure in each essay, of course. And when they do come up, it is often to different emphasis, in different constellations. Other concepts slip in like uninvited guests (image, effect, force, new, openness, sin-

gularity, situation, belonging). The concepts appear and reappear like a revolving cast of characters, joining forces or interfering with each other in a tumble of abstract intrigues—at times (I admit) barely controlled. (Or is it: with miraculous lucidity? I might as well also admit that my prose has been compared to a black hole.) The first chapter, "The Autonomy of Affect," sets the stage. It begins by following a long-standing engagement with the work of Deleuze, Guattari, and Deleuze/Guattari back to some of their inspirations, in particular Bergson, Spinoza, and Simondon. It is in the concluding essay, "Too-Blue: Color-Patch for an Expanded Empiricism," that incorporeal materialism meets up with radical empiricism. Bergson, Spinoza, and Simondon make way for James, who tumbles onto A. N. Whitehead and Isabelle Stengers. The intervening chapters bring together the usual conceptual suspects in varying combinations. At times, under the pressure of the uncouth company they find themselves keeping, they undergo a bit of a personality change or may even assume a pseudonym.

The reason for the constant reconstellation of concepts, and the differences in their casting when they make repeat appearances, is that I have tried to take seriously the idea that writing in the humanities can be affirmative or inventive. Invention requires experimentation. The wager is that there are methods of writing from an institutional base in the humanities disciplines that can be considered experimental practices. What they would invent (or reinvent) would be concepts and connections between concepts. The first rule of thumb if you want to invent or reinvent concepts is simple: don't apply them. If you apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts' systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system. This is all very grim. It has less to do with "more to the world" than "more of the same." It has less to do with invention than mastery and control.

One device for avoiding application is to adopt an "exemplary" method. Logically, the example is an odd beast. "It holds for all cases of the same type," Giorgio Agamben writes, "and, at the same time, is included in these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all."¹⁷ An example is neither general (as is a system of concepts) nor particular (as is the material to which a system is applied). It is "singular." It is defined by a disjunctive self-

inclusion: a belonging to itself that is simultaneously an extendibility to everything else with which it might be connected (one for all, and all in itself). In short, exemplification is the logical category corresponding to self-relation.

As a writing practice, exemplification activates detail. The success of the example hinges on the details. Every little one matters. At each new detail, the example runs the risk of falling apart, of its unity of self-relation becoming a jumble. Every detail is essential to the case. This means that the details making up the example partake of its singularity. Each detail is like another example embedded in it. A microexample. An incipient example. A moment's inattention and that germ of a one-for-all and all-in-itself might start to grow. It might take over. It might shift the course of the writing. Every example harbors terrible powers of deviation and digression.

The essays in this volume work through examples. The writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn't think you thought. Letting examples burgeon requires using inattention as a writing tool. You have to let yourself get so caught up in the flow of your writing that it ceases at moments to be recognizable to you as your own. This means you have to be prepared for failure. For with inattention comes risk: of silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity. But perhaps in order to write experimentally, you have to be willing to "affirm" even your own stupidity. Embracing one's own stupidity is not the prevailing academic posture (at least not in the way I mean it here).

The result is not so much the negation of system as a setting of systems into motion. The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system. For the writing to continue to belong in the humanities, it must take into account and put into use already established concepts drawn for one or another humanities discipline, or better, from many all at once (philosophy, psychology, semiotics, communications, literary theory, political economy, anthropology, cultural studies, and so on). The important thing, once again, is that these found concepts not simply be applied. This can be done by extracting them from their usual connections to other concepts in their home system and confronting them with the ex-

ample or a detail from it. The activity of the example will transmit to the concept, more or less violently. The concept will start to deviate under the force. Let it. Then reconnect it to other concepts, drawn from other systems, until a whole new system of connection starts to form. Then, take another example. See what happens. Follow the new growth. You end up with many buds. Incipient systems. Leave them that way. You have made a systemlike composition prolonging the active power of the example. You have left your readers with a very special gift: a headache. By which I mean a problem: what in the world to do with it all. That's their problem. That's where their experimentation begins. Then the openness of the system will spread. *If* they have found what they have read compelling. Creative contagion.

As mentioned earlier, in this project scientific and mathematical models are often foregrounded. The concept of field was mentioned. Concepts from chaos theory come in time and again (chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 9). And, given all the doublings back and foldings over on itself that characterize the body's dynamic unity, models from topology take on increasing emphasis (chapters 5, 8). Given the touchiness surrounding the issue of thefts from science for the humanities, it is probably wise to say a word about it. Defenders of the disciplinary purity of the sciences consider it shameless poaching. I wholeheartedly agree. It's not science anymore, they say, once those silly humanities people get their hands on it. It's all "wrong."

As well it should be. Getting it "right" could only mean one thing: applying the results of science to the humanities. If carried out systematically, this simply annexes the target area to the sciences, in what amounts to a form of imperialist disciplinary aggression. The success of this approach would erase whatever specificity or singularity a humanities discipline might have. Sociobiology and its younger cousin evolutionary psychology are prime examples. This kind of wholesale application is usually practiced by scientists without training in the humanities (and often with a great deal of animus toward trends in the humanities of the last few centuries). People in the humanities, for their part, tend to take a piecemeal approach to application. They will isolate an attractive scientific or mathematical concept and add it to the repertoire of their own disciplinary system, like an exotic pet. Scientists might rightly object that the concept has ceased to have anything remotely scientific about it and is just functioning as a metaphor. Statements like "James Joyce's *Finnegan's*

Wake is a chaotic system” too often and too easily translate as: “the rhetorical form of the text is ‘like’ a chaotic system.” A more deliberate “chaos” you could not find. Is it really chaos, a scientist might be forgiven for asking. An even worse case scenario, however, is when “chaos” is treated as a theme. This boils down to the banal observation that the novel might be illustrating a scientific concept, representing it on the level of its content.

The optimal situation would be to take a scientific concept and use it in such a way that it ceases to be systematically scientific but doesn’t end up tamed, a metaphorical exhibit in someone else’s menagerie. This might be done by treating the scientific concept the way any other concept is treated in the approach advocated here. It was said that a concept could be severed from the system of connections from which it is drawn and plopped into a new and open environment where it suffers an exemplary kind of creative violence. This is only half the story. A concept is by nature connectible to other concepts. A concept is defined less by its semantic content than by the regularities of connection that have been established between it and other concepts: its rhythm of arrival and departure in the flow of thought and language; when and how it tends to relay into another concept. When you uproot a concept from its network of systemic connections with other concepts, you still have its *connectibility*. You have a systemic connectibility without the system. In other words, the concept carries a certain residue of activity from its former role. You can think of it as the rhythm without the regularity, or a readiness to arrive and relay in certain ways. Rhythm, relay, arrival and departure. These are relations of motion and rest: *affect*. When you poach a scientific concept, it carries with it scientific affects. Thus the transmission is two-way. The activity of the example is transmitted to the scientific concept, and affects of science are transmitted to the example. A kind of conceptual struggle ensues, producing a creative tension that may play itself out in any number of ways (depending in part on how much the importer of the concept actually understands of the system left behind—or cares). However it plays out, it is certain that the humanities project into which the concept has been imported will be changed by the encounter. This is the kind of shameless poaching from science I advocate and endeavor to practice: one that betrays the system of science while respecting its affect, in a way designed to force a change in the humanities.

The point, once again, is not to make the humanities scientific. The

point is to borrow from science in order to make a difference in the humanities. But not only that. The point is not just to make the humanities differ, but also to make them differ from the sciences in ways they are unaccustomed to. In other words, part of the idea is to put the humanities in a position of having continually to renegotiate their relations with the sciences—and, in the process, to rearticulate what is unique to their own capacities (what manner of affects *they* can transmit). This imperative to renegotiate adds an element of diplomacy to the piracy. Although it is unlikely that the sciences for their part will feel much inclination to negotiate. Having an immeasurably more secure institutional and economic base gives them the luxury of isolationism. The fact of the matter is that the humanities need the sciences—entirely aside from questions of institutional power but rather for their own conceptual health—a lot more than the sciences need the humanities. It is in this connection that the issue of empiricism takes on added importance. Reopening the question of what constitutes empiricism is perhaps one way to get the attention of the sciences (chapter 9).

Scientists shouldn’t feel threatened by these respectful betrayals. If it is any consolation, concepts from humanities disciplines undergo similarly “diplomatic” treatment. Aside from that, poaching a scientific concept in no way prevents it from continuing to function in its home environment. It’s not a zero-sum game. It’s additive. The concept still belongs to the culture of science but has also been naturalized into the humanities. If I were a concept, I could emigrate *and* stay behind in my home country. (I have tried this, but it didn’t work.)

Which just leaves the title. The genre of writing most closely allied with the logical form of the example is the *parable*. A word for the “real but abstract” incorporeality of the body is the *virtual*. The extent to which the virtual is exhausted by “potential,” or how far into the virtual an energeticism can go, is a last problem worth mentioning. For only “an insensible body is a truly continuous body”: there’s the rub.¹⁸ There’s the ultimate paradox of the dynamic unity of movement and sensation: the unity is purely virtual. For the virtual to fully achieve itself, it must recede from being apace with its becoming. This problem (of the void) is not entirely absent from the “parables for the virtual” that follow (chapters 4, 6). But a thorough grappling with it will have to wait for a next project, whose own problems are perhaps already just beginning to be felt in these essays.

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 resonance 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: resonance 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, resonance. 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 resonance 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 0.3 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. Resonance 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, automatically 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 incipiences 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 *intension* as opposed to extension; the continual doubling of the actual body by this dimension of intensity, understood as a superlinear, super-abstract 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 bounded 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-sidedness *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 resonance 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 resonance 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 resonance. 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 turn-over 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 overflow 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