DISSEMINATION RHIZOME: HOW TO DO (POLITICAL) THINGS WITH AFFECT

Alexander Paul Monea

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Committee:
Dr. Ellen Berry, Advisor
Dr. William Albertini
Dr. Clayton Rosati
This thesis sets out to articulate a theory and method for criticism of ethico-politico-aesthetic conjunctions in what has been termed a ‘post-hegemonic’ and ‘post-modern’ ‘digital age’. It begins by making the case for the use of affect theory by demonstrating the capacity for political agency in affective transductions to, from, and amongst the masses. While many declared the death of rationality and linguistic communication, and from this declaration concluded that the inertia of the masses would eventually lead to an implosion, I argue that politics is alive and well at the level of affective transduction, and thus operative below, between, or alongside linguistic and rational exchanges. I further argue that the need for a rigorous theory and methodology for affect is made more urgent by the catalysis of affective transduction brought about by the rise of the digital. As such, I set out to develop a methodology for criticizing such affective transductions and then to apply this theory and methodology to concrete cases. In particular, I attempt to correct the current trajectory of scholarly appropriation of affect theory by pointing out ontological misconstructions. Having developed an ontologically sound articulation of affect, I set out to apply it to the case of the revolutionary and the capitalist. In the case of the revolutionary, I attempt to provide a rigorous defense of the popular assertion that affective production must always occur externally to capital, and can only then be appropriated afterwards. I show that the necessarily fiscally damaging and unscrupulous aspects of affective engineering defy commodity fetishism, the operative logic of capital, and thus that capital, even if it were capable of engineering
affects, would have no interest in doing so. For capital, I trace the way in which affective refrains are continually systematized, rigidified, and deployed by capitalist structures in a normative fashion. In particular, I look at the case of Google search to demonstrate the ways in which control structures disseminate refrains in such a way that bodies become increasingly stratified and bounded. In closing, I suggest theoretical and practical areas of affect in need of future development.
For my mother, Mary Therese Monea, who paid our piper.
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INTRODUCTION

Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived.

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, 1994, p. 164

Walter Benjamin first examined the blurring of the distinction between aesthetics and politics in his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. There he argues that the aestheticization of politics lends itself to fascism. This is particularly evident in the case of Fillipo Marinetti’s Futurism’s collusion with Benito Mussolini’s (or perhaps more so Roberto Farinacci’s) Blackshirts, and was even more apparent later in the case of Joseph Goebbels’ (more direct) collusion with Adolf Hitler and his Sturmabteilung (a.k.a., the ‘brownshirts’).1 He closes the piece by arguing that communism’s only response is to politicize aesthetics. Fascism’s (perhaps) strongest move is to veil a highly mobilized and intense politics behind a seemingly, or at least purportedly, apolitical aesthetic, and in turn, communism must at once both unveil the inherent politics (and ethics!) of any aesthetic, as well as deploy overtly politicized aesthetics in its own ideological campaigns.

This location of aesthetical-politics in fields and flows of fascism and communism is as significant today as ever. Gilles Deleuze (1995) has pointed out that the individual has been splintered and dispersed into a subjective cloud that he calls the ‘dividual’, which is newly open to the infinite calculation and manipulation of societies of control. Deleuze argues that control operates through a modulation, which he describes as a “self-transmuting modeling continually

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1 It also was exemplified to some extent in Sergei Eisenstein’s historical epics in Stalinist Russia.
changing form one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another” (p. 178-179). Deleuze writes, “Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded” (p. 181). He further notes that control operates through digital codes that are capable of parsing both the individual and the masses, turning the individual into the aforementioned ‘dividual’ and the masses into vast stores of data, markets, and banks to be navigated by algorithmically enhanced methods of demography, psychography, and other metrics of applied statistics (p. 180). Further, Félix Guattari (1995) has shown that the formation of subjectivity itself is a battleground in these societies of control and that the schematism of subjectivity is largely dependent on conjunctions of ethics, aesthetics, and politics.

In closing his “Postscript on Societies of Control,” Deleuze argues that “We ought to establish the basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms as their age dawns, and describe in these terms what is already taking the place of the disciplinary sites of confinement that everyone says are breaking down” (1995, p. 182). A wide swath of scholars are currently in the process of just such investigations, largely looking into the function of power and force in what Scott Lash has argued to be a ‘post-hegemonic’ age (2007). Lash argues that power has become more sinister post-hegemony and now “penetrates your very being” (p. 59). He argues that this ‘vitalization of power’ (p. 69) makes power a part of our very being, a living force that grows with us. Lash writes that here “power, previously extensive and operating from without, becomes intensive and now works from within” (p. 59). This is largely achieved through what David Beer, in an exposition on Lash, describes as “dynamic interfaces and virtual spaces of engagement where users are involved in acts of invention or content creation (both actively creating content and passively generating informational traces as they go about daily routines)” (2009, p. 992).
John Cheney-Lippold argues that the digital codes through which control is able to modulate “are cultural objects embedded and integrated within a social system whose logic, rules, and explicit functioning work to determine the new conditions of the possibilities of users’ lives” (2011, p. 167). It is precisely this sociotechnological mediation of the masses, now turned into data-sets, that produces an ‘algorithmic identity’. Cheney-Lippold describes this ‘algorithmic identity’ as, “an identity formation that works through mathematical algorithms to infer categories of identity on otherwise anonymous beings,” and further notes, “It uses statistical commonality models to determine one’s gender, class, or race in an automatic manner at the same time as it defines the actual meaning of gender, class, or race themselves” (p. 165). It is through these rapidly parsed data-sets that the individual is parsed into sub-individual units, and thus becomes the ‘dividual.’ Cheney-Lippold writes, “When we situate this process within questions around digital identity, dividuals can be seen as those data that are aggregated to form unified subjects, of connecting dividual parts through arbitrary closures” (p. 169).

While I find the work of the aforementioned scholars to be groundbreaking in many respects, I do think some pieces to the puzzle are missing. If we are truly to heed Deleuze’s call to “establish the basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms as their age dawns” (1995, p. 182), it is imperative that we adequately ground ourselves in a rigorous ontology. While many authors extol this new articulation of power that operates directly on the body of the dividual and its particles, they often neglect the very ontology and forces that gave rise to such an articulation, which are, namely, the Deleuzian philosophy of immanence and the transductions of pre-subjective/pre-objective, a-linguistic affects. And further, too many

\[2\] And it is important to note here that any author describing modulation’s operation directly on the body must either subscribe to an affect theory of sorts, as affect is the only articulated concept that can account for such a movement of forces, or they must provide some alternative ontology and force. As many, if not all,
critiques sit somewhere between theory and practice, not quite providing a fully derived ontology, and yet also not providing any detailed practical application of this ontology. In large part, the hope of this project is to further articulate and embed such an ontology in affect theory and criticism, so that when we get to our examinations of the actual techniques of control and modulation, we don’t hit the dead ends that are predestined for us upon letting our ontology slip. As such, this thesis will begin by articulating the need for affect theory in contemporary political critique. It will then move to articulate a notion of affects and their refrains rigorously grounded in a Spinozan/Deleuzian ontology. And finally, it will apply these articulations to two specific cases, one potentially revolutionary and the other profoundly limiting, in hopes of providing a base example of how an ontology of affect can be practically applied in (potentially) fruitful criticism.

In my first chapter I provide an extended defense of the timeliness of affect theory for a critical understanding of today’s ethico-politico-aesthetic conjunctions. I argue that in a world proceeding the dissolution of Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere, and the very capacity for rationality to stand in as the grand arbiter of radically democratic politics, there is still a politics to be found. I address both Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio’s arguments about the implosive stasis of the masses in an age of rapidly accelerated simulacra, and show that despite the breakdown of rational and linguistic politics, there still lies a politics of affective transduction flowing into, amongst, and out of the masses. I further demonstrate the timeliness of this mode of critique by overviewing the capacity of the digital to act as a staunch catalyst on these flows of affective transduction.

authors refrain from providing any sort of alternative to the ontology and theory of force contained in Spinozan/Deleuzian affect theory, I find it safe to assume that they are, whether intentionally or not, operating within the realm of affect theory.
In the second chapter I attempt to elaborate a methodology, or, perhaps more appropriately, an ontology, for the examination of affective politics.\(^3\) I begin by examining the different types or modes of affect that are often conflated in affective criticism, with a particular eye to affect theory’s understanding of the body and the ways in which affect interacts with bodies. I then move on to critique both Nigel Thrift and William Connolly’s applications of affect theory in order to demonstrate some of the most common misconstruals of the Spinozan/Deleuzian ontology of affect. In particular, I show that they often subscribe to a model of affect in which affects can be directed teleologically and employed for the purposes of total and perfect control. Underneath such assumptions is also a misunderstanding of the body in relation to affect, chiefly by its silent construction as a Hegelian *organic totality*. Instead, I show the ways in which an understanding of the ‘dividual’ subverts the very notion of body-as-totality, and further use the ontology of affect to break the dichotomies of perfect control vs. total freedom and teleological direction vs. chaotic direction. In closing, I articulate a notion of affects and their refrains that prepares the reader for the subsequent chapters.

In my third chapter I attempt to flesh out a more rigorous defense of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s assertion that affective production must occur outside of the circuits of capital, and only afterwards can be appropriated and mobilized by capitalist structures. Here I look at Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) description of the engineering of new affects in the realm of philosophy-art. After demonstrating the process by which the philosopher-artist is capable of engineering a new affect, I move to show how this process of engineering interacts with capitalist circuits. After quickly deriving Karl Marx’s definition of the commodity fetish as the central operative logic of capital, I use the work of Pierre Bourdieu to show how and why

\(^3\) N.b. Affect is always already ethical, aesthetical, and political.
philosophy-art and the engineering of new affects must always take place outside of capital. In essence, I attempt to show that by its very ontology, the engineering of new affects is always a task at large with the commodity fetish, since this engineering is by necessity a risky and long-term endeavor that must always be financially imprudent. In closing, I look at the potential meaning of the defensibility of Hardt and Negri’s earlier argument for contemporary revolutionary movements. After having shown that capital will not engineer new affects – even if it could – I then close by asking who can perform philosophy-art in the future and to what purpose(s).

Deleuze notes that societies of control are fully capable of appropriating, modifying, and re-deploying (i.e., (de-)(re-)territorializing) the tactics of both disciplinary and sovereign societies. In my fourth chapter I examine one such way in which the algorithmic modulation of affective and noological flows taking place in Google Search works to stratify masses, populations, and individuals and to reify the pre-existent stratifications of race, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, sexuality – and more broadly subjectivity itself – that currently cut across and bound their bodies. Here I argue that the modulation of refrains (i.e., the algorithmic way in which Google serves up search results) tends toward hegemony at its limit, and operates hegemonically on the subindividual or micro particles of Deleuze’s ‘dividual’. This chapter is but one imagining of the potentially nefarious employment of affective refrains, but, hopefully stands as a model for the more pragmatic (read: less dichotomous) critique of post-hegemonic or post-disciplinary control structures.
CHAPTER 1
DISSEMINATING AFFECTS:
THE MASSES AS TRANSDUCERS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The inanimate is merely a derogatory term used by those who read only appearances; those who perceive transparence know well that nothing is immobile, that everything is always moving, that SENSE circulates among things like blood in the veins, in the forms of the frozen object.

Paul Virilio, 2008, p. 24

Introduction

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri developed their conception of multitude in order to demonstrate that “our political alternatives are not limited to a choice between central leadership and anarchy” (2004, p. 222). Much of the debate on political strategies and tactics over the past hundred years have operated explicitly within this polarization, which is perhaps what lent such force to Hardt and Negri’s new theorizations. They presented an alternative that (very publicly) broke the binary circuit of unified/totalized sovereign body and complete anarchy and lawlessness. Following their lead, in this chapter I attempt to examine the problems with traditional public sphere theory in order to illuminate the necessity for theorizing mass politics. Consequently, I attempt to address some of the criticisms leveled against the political agency of the masses, and use a theory of affective transduction to demonstrate the masses’ political movements, which, I argue, are catalyzed by the current trajectory of the digital.

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1 A segment of this paper has been published in my article “Lomo-Fl (v).” (Monea, 2012).
2 In another essay titled “The Public Sphere,” Habermas writes: “Citizens act as a public when they deal with
This chapter begins with a critical introduction to the Habermassian public sphere. There I make the case for moving beyond the notion of a unified Public or People operating through rational protocols in favor of an affective politics rooted in the masses. I then move on to address some of the most common criticisms of mass politics, and show how the notion of affective transduction can illuminate the politics of the masses after the breakdown of (protocologically) rational communication. Lastly, I examine the ontological structure of the digital in order to further demonstrate the importance of affective transduction amongst the masses. I argue that the digital catalyzes affective transduction amongst the masses by operating as a dissemination rhizome. In closing, I overview some of the political ramifications of mass-based affective practice.

Mourning the Public Sphere

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas traces how the public sphere emerged and peaked in mid-nineteenth century England, France, and Germany as a site of rational political debate amongst the bourgeoisie that was then reflected in national policy decisions and accurately represented by elected officials. For Habermas, this bourgeois public sphere was “the sphere of private people come together as a public” (1989b, p. 27), and was a unique instance of private citizens electing to enter into rational discourse about their private lives, which extended to commodity exchange and social labor (p. 27-28). While the bulk of the original discourse was focused on culture (i.e., ‘the world of letters), it soon shifted to

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2 In another essay titled “The Public Sphere,” Habermas writes: “Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. [...] Public opinion [...] can be formed only if a public that engages in rational discussions exists” (1989a, p. 231-232).
more directly political topics (p. 30-31). It was through this discourse that the ‘bourgeois reading public’ was able to learn its own cultural and political opinions and eventually to represent them (p. 85), in order to finally “put the state in touch with the needs of society” (p. 31).

This shift from literary to political discourse and representation was largely congealed in the coffee houses of Great Britain and the salons of France (p. 30-32). Despite the dominant female presence in salons, and their complete absence (by decree) from coffee houses, not to mention the absence of the un-propertied, the under-educated, the many other Others\(^3\), Habermas argues that these coffee houses and salons “preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” (p. 37). Habermas does include some caveats, for example, he writes: “Not that this idea of the public was actually realized in earnest in the coffee houses, the salons and the societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realized, it was at least consequential” (p. 36). However, his caveats are just that, caveats, and he largely overlooks the exclusive practice of the public sphere, in favor of its theoretical inclusivity, or, what he describes as the public sphere’s “principle of universal access” (p. 85).

Even if we bracket the practical exclusivity in historic public spheres, it is easy to uncover the theoretical exclusivity immanent to the Habermassian conception of the public sphere by probing Habermas’ understanding of ‘rationality’ and its proper function in discourse, and thus also in the public sphere and its self-representation through the formation and dissemination of ‘public opinion’. Habermas argues that rationality and knowledge are intimately intertwined, but rationality has more to do with the acquisition and deployment of knowledge

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\(^3\) All of which Habermas is aware of, noting that economic status was essential to one’s inclusion, he writes: “formal education at that time was more a consequence than a precondition of social status, which in turn was primarily determined by one’s title to property” (1989b, p. 85).
than with its mere possession (1984, p. 8). We can assess the rationality of both constative claims and teleological actions by assessing the states of affairs in the objective world or by assessing the effectiveness of an intervention in the world given those same states of affairs respectively. Both actions make fallible claims about the world that are grounded in reasoning, and thus can be criticized and/or argued for (p. 8-9).

For Habermas, “The world gains objectivity only through counting as one and the same world for a community of speaking and acting subjects,” and “Through this communicative practice they assure themselves at the same time of their common life-relations, of an intersubjectively shared lifeworld” (1984, p. 12-13). It is important to note though, “This lifeworld is bounded by the totality of interpretations presupposed by the members as background knowledge” (p. 13, emphasis mine). The goal, then, of communicative action, rationality, and argumentation is “communicatively achieved consensus” (p. 13). The function of the argument is to further solidify the boundaries of the lifeworld, or to bring something new into the lifeworld by adjusting those same boundaries. Habermas notes that the central experience of rationality is:

The unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld. (p. 10).

Habermas extends this rationality to normatively regulated actions and expressive self-presentations, both of which make validity claims capable of critique or argumentation, given their legitimacy and sincerity respectively (1984, p. 15-16). This he holds true even for
evaluative expressions that relate solely to subjective experience, but these expressions can only be rational if the subjective experience they describe is recognizable to other members of their lifeworld who can equate them to their own reactions in similar situations (p. 16-17). Habermas writes, “Anyone who is so privatistic in his attitudes and experiences that they cannot be explained and rendered plausible by appeal to standards of evaluation is not behaving rationally” (p. 17). And this is exactly the case when it comes to the new in art, which can only be subject to aesthetic criticism, seemingly the least grounded and most contestable form of argumentation (p. 20).

The problem with Habermas’ articulation of rationality and his employment of it as the protocol for a successful public sphere is that it operates through negation in order to build, sustain, and renew consensus, and through this consensus can speak with a unified voice over and against the masses held silent. As Michael Hardt notes, at its most basic level, the critique of negativity, and thus Hegelian dialectics, results from the fact that it must always remain both contingent and abstract (1993, p. 8). The subject of politics in the public sphere is always an abstracted unity – the People – and it is always contingent, as it does not produce itself, but instead is produced by the police function of the State. To refuse the notion of the People and the public sphere in favor of the masses, then, is the first step away from the primacy of the State

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4 The public sphere's system of rationality protocols ensures this, as the rabble of the discourse is slowly negated, piece by piece, by the argument that best meets them, until nothing is left but the 'unanimous consent' of those involved – won through battle with rationality as weapon – and the unified/total voice that is public opinion.

5 Habermas writes: “Actions regulated by norms, expressive self-presentation, and also evaluative expressions, supplement constative speech acts in constituting a communicative practice which, against the background of a lifeworld, is oriented to achieving, sustaining, and renewing consensus – and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims” (1984, p. 17).

6 This is precisely what Jacques Rancière has termed the police function, which is the force utilized by power structures to build and maintain consensus. For Rancière, politics is exclusively a dissensual endeavor. See esp. Rancière 1995, but also Rancière 2010.

And, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) have shown at length, Marxist movements dependent on a unified Public are folly, as they ignore the multiplicitous motivations and subject-positions of those disaffected with capital, and thus forgo potential allies, as well as the internal heterogeneity in terms of objectives and positions within the working class itself (see esp. p. 84-87).

According to Habermas, the public sphere was appropriated, infiltrated, and nullified by capital and the social welfare State (1989b, p. 155-159), to the detriment of both rational debate and political representation. Here the public is transformed “from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public,” (p. 159) that neatly and passively consumes (largely) de-politicized media and no longer engages in rational debate. One quickly gleans from his nostalgia and mourning, that Habermas would prefer a return to rational debate in a public sphere (albeit preferably one less exclusive). However, the stench of phallogocentrism sticks to his privileging of “rational” debate, and hangs from his every assumption that a “public” can be fully formed (i.e., unified) and accurately represented (i.e., speak with one voice and be heeded), especially while women, lower classes and castes, and various ethnic, racial, and religious minorities are silenced and policed.

Further, as Aradhana Sharma (2008) notes in her book *Logics of Empowerment*, the State system has shifted away from the social welfare model, and has begun to privatize social welfare under the new title of “empowerment.” In his introduction to *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, Thomas McCarthy notes that Habermas’ public sphere is no longer “socio-politically feasible,” and asks in what ways can a new public sphere be reconstituted under the conditions of postmodernity (Habermas, 1989b, p. xii).

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*This issue has been extensively explored by critics like Joan Landes (1988), Mary Ryan (1990), Geoff Eley (1992), and Nancy Fraser (2007).*
In her article “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” Nancy Fraser goes to great lengths to rearticulate the notion of a rational public sphere in what she believes to be a less hegemonic way. Fraser posits a plurality of public spheres – a hegemonic public sphere as well as subaltern counter-publics – that are in constant negotiation with one another. The problem with her argument is twofold. The first problem is that Frazer preserves Habermas’ Enlightenment notions of rationality, which means that those who enter a public sphere must consent to an axiomatic modus operandi. While these people may make themselves heard during discussion within the sphere (provided they follow the proper axioms and protocols), the public sphere demands eventual consensus. Here consensus means that people must eventually be silent; the public sphere must speak with one voice. And that voice is not so much determined democratically, as it is fascistically, by the very axioms of rationality underlying the sphere itself.

The second problem with Frazer’s plurality of public spheres is that it seems to either posit a unified and univalent identity or a perfectly divided or dissociative identity. Things are never quite so clean as she would lead us to believe though. If we fragment the Public or the People, we never get these clean divisions. People are never perfectly distributed into hegemonic publics and subaltern counter-publics, nor are their identities able to be so cleanly divided that they might rationally participate in multiple (and perhaps antagonistic) public spheres. If we were to conceive of a true plurality of public spheres, we would have to accept that people would be split along multiple axes. They would get cut this way and that way, and their particles would split and recombine as they were pulled from an indeterminate number of directions by varying degrees of force. The people would be dispersed. There would be only a cloud of publics, a mass. Pushed to its limits, Fraser’s plurality of publics becomes the masses and her rationality collapses, replaced instead by the ebb and flow of bodies expressing themselves through their
emissions of particle flows. While investigations into the possibility for future democracies are important, it is fruitless to invest in forging the (Habermassian) public sphere anew. Instead, it might be more useful to look towards other theorizations of democratic and revolutionary agency. In particular, we need a way of conceiving of the potential political efficaciousness of the masses.

**The Political Efficaciousness of Masses**

In his book *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Jean Baudrillard captures one of the most popular arguments lodged against the potential agency of the masses. This argument is an important one to address because the abandonment of the exclusionary and negative politics of *the* people, *the* public, and *the* public sphere leaves us with nothing left aside from the *masses*, and further because the construction of affective transduction as impotent⁹ and semiotic communication as potent is widespread. Like Habermas, Baudrillard champions the mid-nineteenth century, in particular constitutional America and England as well as the French bourgeois state, as the apex of popular representation in government (1983, p. 17-18). For both Habermas and Baudrillard, this time period saw the public engage in rational conversation and meaningful discourse, which was then adequately represented on the national stage. Today the masses are a silent majority (p. 20), a nothingness, an empty signifier with no sociological referent¹⁰, a “spongy referent” whose strength lies in its inert capacity to absorb and neutralize all “radiation from the outlying constellations of State, History, Culture, Meaning” (p. 1-3).

Political power still attempts to claim that it represents the masses, but the mass is no longer a

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⁹ And affect is impotent. It is not familial, sexually reproductive. It is virulent. It is contagion. Infection. It is a pack of what will always appear to the structuralists as *pathogens*, or, more aptly, *pathos-gens*.

¹⁰ Baudrillard writes: “To want to specify the term ‘mass’ is a mistake – it is to provide meaning to that which has none ... The mass is without attribute, predicate, quality, reference. This is its definition, or its radical lack of definition. It has no sociological ‘reality.’ It has nothing to do with any real population, body or specific aggregate” (1983, p. 5-6).
class or group of people, it is an empty signifier and thus cannot lend authority to any body (p. 22). As Baudrillard sees it, this inertia of the masses, this total indifference to truth, revolution, repression, reason and meaning, this lack of both consciousness and an unconscious, constitutes “the end of revolutionary convictions” (p. 22). Despite the desperate attempts of power to survey and test the masses, in order to feign legitimate representational authority, political power is now null; an empty simulacrum (p. 27-28).

This rendering of events is problematic though, and for a few reasons. First, as Brian Massumi\(^{11}\) (1987) argues in his article “Realer Than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari,” the notion that we have moved into a phase of empty simulacrum implies that in another phase – precisely the mid-nineteenth century for Baudrillard – there was accurate representation, an objective (re)production that maintained fidelity to an original or a model. But Nietzsche told us, nearly a century before Baudrillard, that truth is nothing more than an agreement to lie consistently or according to fixed standards\(^{12}\). The question of the reality of the model, however, is something that Baudrillard glosses over. Massumi follows Nietzsche, and argues that there is no model, only hidden simulacra consenting to feign originality (p. 92). Massumi further notes that, even if there were a true original or model, the simulacrum’s agenda is not perfect reproduction. Instead, the simulacrum’s aim is to turn against the model, to affirm its difference and proliferate differenciation. For Massumi, and arguably for Deleuze and Guattari, the end result is not implosion, but differentiation and a galactic-level expansion (p. 91).

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\(^{11}\) Here, of course, extrapolating from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

\(^{12}\) In the ultimate line of the piece, Nietzsche writes: “What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins” (2006, p. 117).
becomings that spread and grow in strength like a contagion, until every bit of normativity is infected, and eventually the entire grid of resemblance and replication is overturned and replaced by a new earth that privileges unabashed and unrepressed difference and multivalence (p. 95-96).

A second problem with Baudrillard’s articulation of the masses is his assertion that the masses have no capacity to affect, but only the capacity to be affected (1983, p. 2-3). There is no denying that in Baudrillard’s articulation the masses are subject to affect. The masses conduct flows, rather than meaning, and they absorb radiation and electricity (p. 1-2). This silent majority also subverts all meaning, dispels it, in favor of the spectacle (p. 10). It implodes the sign for fascination (p. 36). The question quickly becomes what is spectacular? What is fascinating? Massumi makes a very strong case in Parables for the Virtual for the notion that the most pleasing and memorable things (read: spectacular and fascinating) are the most intense things, or, more aptly put, those things with the most affective force (2002, p. 23-24). Baudrillard’s masses are also good conductors for information and norms, but they fail to differentiate between different bits of information and different norms (read: they are radically open to everything, without conscious discrimination between things) (1983, p. 28). This again harkens back to Massumi’s argument that the skin and the brain resonate and blur the differentiation between inside and outside, creating a body that is radically open to affect and that absorbs impulses so quickly that the entire process cannot but remain outside of both consciousness and the unconscious (1987, p. 28). So, the masses, albeit closed to linguistic and phallogocentric

13 Baudrillard writes that the masses “have no virtual energies to release, nor any desire to fulfill” (3).
14 Massumi writes: “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” (28).
meaning, are open to all sorts of affects and in fact seem to differentiate *between* levels of affective intensity, always craving more, more, more affect.

The final problem with Baudrillard’s articulation of the masses is an extension of the previous problem. In his article “Fashioning a Stave, or Singing Life,” Greg Seigworth argues that a body’s capacity to be affected is necessarily intertwined with that body’s capacity to *affect* \(^\text{15}\) (2003, p. 92). There cannot be one without the other. It would seem that the mass’ capacity to be affected necessarily disproves the notion that it is inert. Baudrillard’s analysis overlooks these movements of intensities to, from, and within the masses. As Seigworth notes, affect always moves outside and alongside language while remaining a-signifying and a-representational (p. 87). Affect can still function in areas where linguistics break down or cease to exist\(^\text{16}\). If we accept the position that the masses are receptive to and capable of affective transduction, rather than being totally inert and on the verge of instituting a global implosion, a new set of questions emerges: What sort of politics are possible when affect, and consequently aesthetics, are privileged? In what ways can (bio)power unfurl in such a system? And, what new revolutionary potentials are created by such a system?

\(^{15}\) And this seems to be a common position among Spinozans.

\(^{16}\) This is also indicated in Daniel Stern’s construal of vitality affects and affective links between mother and infant in his book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. For Stern, affective communication precedes symbolic communication, which would associate it with Lacan’s notions of the real, and would also make affective communication primary. This bears further resemblance to Žižek’s construal of Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the real is irrupts into the symbolic, much like affective intensities can irrupt into the actual. These, however, are mere speculations that warrant much more extensive research.
Mass Movements Post-Information Bomb

It is not the medium which is the message, but merely the velocity of the medium.

Paul Virilio, 2000, p. 141

Politics has largely become an aesthetic, affective endeavor. This is nothing new.
Baudrillard noted nearly thirty years ago that “the political has long been the agent of nothing but spectacle on the screen of private life” (1983, p. 37). This is largely due to what Paul Virilio has termed the information bomb in his same-titled book. Virilio argues that the rapidly accelerating flow of information is leading to a loss of orientation. He calls this a “tragedy of knowledge” that leads to the “Babelish confusion of individual and collective bodies of learning” (2000, p. 107). By this, Virilio means that it becomes more and more difficult to separate representation from reality, and simulacrum from representation, and thus meaningful communication becomes impossible (2001, p. 24). In the wake of this hyper-acceleration of communication, this sheer flood of messages moving about at incredible speeds, Virilio argues that the audience becomes inert and its movements become sterile (2000, p. 122). And further, in its inertia, the audience’s power to act is alienated in favor of its power to react (p. 123). Virilio writes: “But also, in the generalized violence of acceleration, we can envisage suffering passing without complaint; horrors going unbewailed, not that there would be anyone to hear the wailing; and anxieties going without a prayer – and without even an analysis” (p. 72).

This articulation of events is problematic for nearly the same reasons as Baudrillard’s: (1) it posits an initial “real” reality, one of manageable speeds; it posits something other than simulacrum; (2) it misreads the agenda of the simulacrum; (3) it also tends to construct the virtual as a transcendent plane, when it is instead immanent and chismatically intertwined with
the actual\textsuperscript{17}; but most importantly, (4) it misconstrues the masses and their agency. Virilio is correct in assuming the failure of semiotic potency in communication with or between the masses, but, much like Baudrillard, he fails to take into account affective transduction.

Tiziana Terranova begins her book \textit{Network Culture} by attempting to dispel some misconceptions about the term information, the most important of which is the common misconception that information is synonymous with the content of communication (2004, p. 3). In early experiments, communication scientists were looking for ways to distinguish signals from noise and thus preserve the content of the message. This became a huge problem as the signal was relayed through multiple channels. Simply amplifying the signal (i.e. transmitting more forcefully) did nothing to combat the problem. Claude E. Shannon came up with a solution by considering the signal as a separate entity from the noise\textsuperscript{18}, which led to the development of methods for distinguishing between the two and filtering out the noise at the receiving end of transmissions. Shannon had to change the form of the message, had to digitize it according to a specific informational milieu, in order for it to be a distinguishable enough pattern at the receiving end for noise to be filtered out (Terranova, 2004, p. 10-15).

Terranova uses this piece of information theory history to explain why people who still confuse information with the content of the message are behind the times. Any ethics of communication still based on the accuracy or relevance (i.e. truth-value and meaningfulness) of the message has set itself up to fail in our twenty-first century network culture. These tactics don’t take into account the enormous amounts of noise, the sheer abundance of \textit{other} messages, all of which make the world appear deeply entropic to anyone looking to filter it (Terranova,

\textsuperscript{17} For more information on this see Deleuze's posthumously published “The Actual and the Virtual.”

\textsuperscript{18} In a 1948 paper, Claude E. Shannon defined information in two key ways: as the relation of signal to noise, and as the statistical measure of the entropy of a system (Terranova 9).
2004, p. 17). And, as noted earlier, it is not enough to simply amplify the signal. You cannot expect a rational message to transmit successfully by virtue of the soundness of its content, and, when it fails, despite all amplification of the strength of the signal, you cannot assume that information can no longer move from place to place or that the audience/receiver is inert. Those who, instead, focus all of their energy on combatting noise and making their signal distinguishable are more in line with the informational milieu of the current network culture. Terranova writes, “what counts is the preservation of the message/signal through all the different permutations and possible corruptions which such a message/signal is liable to undergo” (p. 17).

This is where the strength of the sound byte, the slogan, and the logo prevail\(^{19}\). Perfecting a small packet of information, making it as distinguishable as possible, is the only way to forge a path through the post-information bomb entropy. As evidence, Terranova points to successful political candidates and advertisers, both of whom have largely abandoned the attempt to persuade an audience with logical argumentation. They instead focus on bypassing the noise of our communication environment and establishing a connection with an audience, even if that connection lasts for only a moment. That very ability to connect for even just a moment, to pulse into an audience’s body, its skin, and signal your product or your policy’s existence, is significant because it is better than most will achieve. Most signals will be lost to entropy. It is affects, and particularly intense affects, that are able to clear a channel and move without disruption by noise. While signifiers are so abundant in hyperreality that they become entropic, affects are still distinguishable, if not by our minds, then always by our bodies. It is their very intensity that clears a channel and transducts affects across and in between subjects and objects.

\(^{19}\) Virilio concurs with this. He writes: “The hurried presentation of events by the media of mass communication [...] favors the ‘scoop’ and the ‘sound-bite’ over the narrative and its unbearable ‘longueurs’” (2000, p. 126).
And, as Sara Ahmed argues in her article “Affective Economies,” these affects, like capital, grow in strength as they circulate and are refrained.

This is something that Virilio acknowledges in his own way; he writes, “Whether it be speed of acquisition, transmission or computation, *information is inseparable from its acceleration in energy terms* – slowed-up information being no longer even worthy of that name, but mere background noise” (2000, p. 141). He argues that the accelerated, high-energy message, the new message of political supermodels, will be ‘hard’, imagistic, and impactful (p. 75). Virilio further argues:

> Digital messages and images matter less than their instantaneous delivery; the ‘shock effect’ always wins out over the consideration of the informational content. Hence the indistinguishable and therefore unpredictable character of the offensive act and the technical breakdown. (p. 143)

And here it becomes apparent that what Virilio is really talking about is affective transduction. He is interested in particularly *intense* messages, messages whose very intensity is their medium, as it is only their intensity that makes them distinguishable from the background noise in which they are awash. He is interested in a-representational, a-signifying, a-subjective, and a-objective forces moving between bodies. All of this is agreeable, outside of his misunderstanding of the ontological structure of affect, which has led him to render the masses as inert and reactive. Both Baudrillard and Virilio are mistaken in their assumption that we are at the state of implosive inertia; both of their analyses misconstrue and overlook the power of affect, and thus misinterpret the current potential for politics.
Affective Transduction in the Digital

As Friedrich Kittler famously declared, “The general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media” (1999, p. 1). In this post-mediatic state, not only is the difference between the media of photography, painting, music, film, etc. rendered superficial, but so too is the difference between the contents of any of these media. Thus, from Kittler’s perspective of digitality there is only a superficial difference between media and between specific texts. This is a line of argument that Lev Manovich (2001) furthers by bringing our attention to the digital image, now made up of individual pixels each of which can be infinitely manipulated by whim. Manovich goes further though, and explains that the digital image is also produced by sequential scanning or radar (rather than indexically, as was the analog image) that in fact continually and processually realizes the information so quickly that humans see only a static image (p. 100). According to Manovich, this combination leads to a new kind of image that turns its viewers into ‘active users’: “The new media image is something the user actively goes into, zooming in or clicking on individual parts with the assumption that they contain hyperlinks” (p. 183).

Mark Hansen corrects the trajectory of these theorizations of the digital and the digital image by at once maintaining the flexibility of the image in a post-mediatic environment and drawing our attention to the inevitable framing of the image by the human body (2004, p. 10-12). In fact, it is precisely the post-mediatic condition of the digital that enhances the prominence of the body’s role in processing information (p. 21-22). Hansen notes, “the body now operates by filtering information directly and, through this process, creating images” (p. 11), and further explains that “human perception takes place in a rich and evolving field to which bodily
modalities of tactility, proprioception, memory and duration – what I am calling affectivity – make an irreducible and constitutive contribution” (p. 101).

This flexibility of the digital image that results from the explosion of its frame combined with the relocation of the framing function to the body leads to an image with an incorporated virtuality. This digital image contains within itself “an infinite number of potential alternate framings – a limitless generation of other images from any part of itself” capable of being continually (and differently) actualized by the human body (Hansen, 2004, p. 75). Hansen shows that Jeffrey Shaw, Miroslaw Rogala, and Tamás Waliczky’s ‘postphotography’ pieces – usually highly technological installations that demand audience participation – all foreground this infinite variability (i.e. virtuality) of the digital image as well as the body’s privileged role as the selective actualizer of these virtual capacities.

Habermas’ public sphere eventually decayed during the development of – and its adoption by – what could be termed dissemination hierarchies, where an official (be he writer, editor, creator, printer, or broadcaster) is given access to a top-down hierarchy used for unilateral communication with a receiver (i.e. a larger audience)\textsuperscript{20}. It was largely due to the dissemination method of traditional popular media that capital and the welfare State were able to render mass audiences (more or less) passive, and short-circuit political debate. This model stands in contradistinction to that of the original bourgeois public sphere, which manifested itself as a dissemination series or chain. The public sphere disseminated messages (largely) orally between bodies, each of which was a chink in the dissemination chain and each of which was capable of forking (i.e., one body could direct the message to multiple other bodies). The public sphere

\textsuperscript{20} In his shorter essay, “The Public Sphere,” Habermas blatantly fixates on the printing press as the essential tool for his privileged public sphere of the Enlightenment (233-235).
operated as a dissemination series because of the physical limitations of sound, space, and bodies – one person could only be heard by a finite number of others – but also because of its exclusivity, both in terms of its denial of access to certain bodies and its protocols for transmission (i.e., rationality). As we’ve seen above though, because of its emphasis on rationality as protocol, the public sphere was always left as a series or chain at best, even at the theoretical and/or virtual level.

There is yet a third dissemination schema that I will term the *dissemination rhizome*, which operates as a smooth space that transducts²¹ affects through a cloud in which every point is virtually connected to every other point. In its actualized dissemination, the dissemination rhizome can function arborescently or fascicularly. In each transduction, affects can find a single point of entry into the cloud and rapidly disseminate in a hierarchical or serialized pattern. However, quick as it lit up, this arborescent or fascicular pathway fades, leaving only the cloud of virtual connectedness. The dissemination rhizome can transduct affects from the plane of immanence into multiplicities, as well as between multiplicities themselves²², and thus always serves as a potential line of flight. As Deleuze and Guattari stress, “affects are becomings” (1987, p. 256), and becomings are ways to break habit, to subvert the grid of normativity, to deterritorialize by taking lines of flight. The dissemination rhizome is essentially a realm of affective transduction between a mass of people, where intensities housed in short thoughts, images, little turns of phrases, music, videos, speech, etc. are in constant circulation, flowing to, from, within, and between bodies. And these affects can institute becomings and bifurcations,

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²¹ Here I am following Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphie's argument that affect communicates through a process of transduction (or transformation) as opposed to signs, which communicate by a process of transmission (139). For more on the differentiation between affects and symbols see Greg Seigworth's (2003) "Fashioning a Stave, or Singing Life," and Brian Massumi's (2002) *Parables for the Virtual*, particularly the first chapter, "The Autonomy of Affect."

²² Anyone familiar with Spinoza will immediately recognize these as *affectio* and *affectus*, respectively.
can initiate change, which makes them both fundamentally political and essential to any political project. We need to begin probing the notion of affective democratic spheres and, simultaneously, seek out potential dissemination rhizomes that conduct and/or catalyze affective transduction, and thus facilitate these ebbs and flows of bodies and their particle emissions. As Mark Hansen shows, the digital is one such dissemination rhizome, transducing affects between the masses.

Conclusion

Deleuze and Guattari make an important point worth remembering when they write that “affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war” (1987, p. 356). But whose weapons of war? In their article “An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers,” Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphie (2011) argue that it has largely been conservatives across the globe that have used affective weaponry to their advantage. Bertelson and Murphie trace the ways in which the failing Howard government in Australia used the looming and indeterminate threat of a red ship full of refugees to spur conservative regroupings, and rally support for a president who had been radically declining in popularity. A campaign of ostracism was carried out against any and all dissenters while radical reforms were pushed through, always with a refrain of a looming red threat on the horizon. Brian Massumi (2011) traces the same politics across the new right in his article “The Political Ontology of Threat,” and Stuart Hall (1988) located a similar politics at the base of Thatcherism in his book Hard Road to Renewal more than two decades earlier. It is clear that affects are flowing, that people are demanding affect, and that it has largely been conservative coalitions that have heard and taken advantage of that call.
That being said, there is also a potential for revolutionary agency among the masses, and grass-roots activists in particular. This agency can manifest itself both negatively and positively. Terranova focuses on the negative manifestation of this agency when she talks about the potential for subverting hegemonic affect. Activists can disrupt signals, jam circuits, and create noise, particularly by modifying logos and shifting them from monoglossia to heteroglossia; the same can be done with advertisements, sound bytes, and any other refrains that dominant powers are attempting to harness (Terranova, 2004, p. 17-18). This is akin to the idea of creative (and subversive) consumption that Michel de Certeau (1988) terms *bricolage* in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

There is also a positive manifestation of this agency, particularly in the wake of the dissemination rhizome. In order to transduct affect, to initiate a transduction along a channel cleared of noise, one no longer needs access to the top of a dissemination hierarchy, nor does one need a huge amount of free time to initiate as many dissemination chains as possible. The dissemination rhizome marks a time when, at least potentially, every disseminator has equal and perfect access to every node and user in the web. Every user can serve as the launching point for a transduction, and we are all now awash in affects that are more powerful for their circulation. And because affects are becomings, they serve as a threat to all of normativity.

All of this serves to reconstitute a dissemination rhizome. A realm of affective circulation and transduction. A rhizomatic cloud of inter-subjective connections continually pulsing with the flare and clap of affective transductions, momentary fascicular and arborescent light tricks that fade back into a murky cloudiness. A catalyst in the production and movement of the 21st century’s arms of war. The masses are not an inert body on the brink of implosion. They are exploding and imploding, both with affective force. They hunger for affect, consume and absorb
it almost as quickly as they refract it between themselves and back out into the world. The
information bomb’s ground zero appears to have been the Enlightenment and its privileging of
post-Socratic *philosophia* taken up by scientism. Affective transduction is alive and well,
perhaps stronger than ever, and, with digital media, continually forges new forms, methods,
strategies, and tactics of biopower, both for hegemony and for subalterns, grass-roots activists,
and guerilla agents. The need for dynamic mappings of ethico-aesthetic and politico-aesthetic
paradigms has never been more pressing.
CHAPTER 2
THE COMPLEXITY OF AFFECTIVE POLITICS: TWO CRITIQUES

Experience is not strictly amenable to a mode of thought or any image of thought based upon resemblance, representation, or (re)cognition, but is more non-representational and affectual, belonging to neither subject nor object (neither inside nor outside). The conditions of experience are then reconceived as an immanent and open field of intensities, banal affectivities and sensations that can come to engage with faculties of knowing but without necessarily being replayed, realized, synthesized or somehow completely subsumed in the process.

Gregory Seigworth, 2003, p. 116

Introduction

Explorations of ethical, aesthetic, and political conjunctions are at the heart of much of the affect theory that has been gaining such traction lately in academe. It is perhaps the very rate of acceleration of the study of these intersections that has led to some reductionisms and oversights, some ontological misconstructions and mishaps, which put certain trajectories of the field at risk of becoming practically and theoretically unsustainable. In this chapter, I will begin by differentiating between different types or, better, modes of affect whose widespread conflation tends to obfuscate affect theory and degrade its practical application.

I will then move on to examine two problematic employments of affect: Nigel Thrift’s (esp. that of Non-Representational Theory) and William Connolly’s (esp. that of Neuropolitics). My examinations will largely draw on the work of Manuel DeLanda in order to make the case

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1 A small segment of this paper was published in my article “Guattari’s on Facebook?! Affects, Refrains, and the Digital Cloud” (Monea, 2011).
My examinations will largely draw on the work of Manuel DeLanda in order to make the case that the ‘hypodermic needle’ model to which both Thrift and Connolly subscribe betrays a continued devotion to teleology, fully dystopic notions of total control, and to Hegelian organic totalities. These positions are untenable, given the very ontology they wish to derive a theory of affect from. Further, I argue that their attempts to account for Benjamin Libet’s experiments still cling to causality and consciousness, and reveal a deeply rooted humanism and anthropocentrism within their mobilization of affect theory. These positions are hardly confined to Thrift and Connolly, so these critiques ought to be taken more broadly, and, at the same time, I hope to offer more ontologically sound ways of examining affect in terms of societies of control and individual agency.

In closing, I articulate a notion of affects and refrains largely derived from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ontology and their appropriation of Spinozist ethics. To do so, I draw on the works of Gregory Seigworth, Manuel DeLanda, Sara Ahmed, and Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphie. Through this articulation, I will indicate those best suited to affective production and those best suited to the (re-)production and modulation of refrains. These initial indicators will then be explored at length in the third and fourth chapters respectively.

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2 These are the experiments that recorded a half-second delay between the body’s movement and the conscious willing of that very same movement. They were popularized in the humanities largely through Tor Nørretranders’ (1998) book The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size and by Brian Massumi’s (2002) use of the experiments in his 1995 article “The Autonomy of Affect,” later published as the opening chapter of Parables for the Virtual.
Articulating Affect

Baruch Spinoza made a distinction in the first editions of The *Ethics* between different modes of affect, specifically delineating *affectio* and *affectus* as different manifestations of affective intensity. This distinction was long lost through the rendering of all such words in both French and English as ‘affection,’ a flattening detrimental to the ontological underpinnings of The *Ethics*, and also an overture towards the pathologization or emotionalization (and thus, *anthropomorphization*) of affective force. There is also a third notion of affect or affectivity outside of its manifestation. This is a purely virtual affect\(^3\) that makes up the ontological foundation of Deleuze’s immanant plane. Lawrence Grossberg notes, “In this sense, affect is universal, the fundamental being of reality, the singularities or lines of becoming that, ontologically speaking, are the real, each constituting a pure capacity or potentiality to affect or be affected” (2010b, p. 193). This is what Gregory Seigworth refers to as “a multitudinous affectivity beyond number (a plane of immanence)” (160). It is from here that both *affectio* and *affectus* emerge.

Seigworth describes *affectio* as “the transitive effect undergone by a body (human or otherwise) in a system – a mobile and open system – composed of various, innumerable forces of existing and the relations between these forces,” or, as “the state of a body in as much as it affects or is affected by another body” (2005, p. 161). Here then we have *affectio* as the affective interaction between two bodies. Grossberg similarly writes,

Affect describes bodies in motion (*affectio*), the materiality of mediation. Here affect describes the effectivities of bodies on one another, including importantly

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\(^3\) What Deleuze sometimes refers to as a ‘quasi-cause,’ or a purely virtual force.
the modalities of incorporeal effects or causality at a distance (e.g., forms of
discursive effects). It may appear – and many writers certainly seem to assume –
that such affect is instinctual and unmediated, but it is crucial to recognize that it
is not. (2010b, p. 193-194).

*Affectus*, on the other hand, is “a body’s continuous, intensive variation (an increase-diminution)
in its capacity for acting,” it is a “lived intensity that is simultaneously neutral, or, impersonal (an
intimate exteriority)” (Seigworth, 2005, p. 162). This is the immanent pattern of becoming, the
efficient cause, the desire driving the actualization of an individual, which is continuous
throughout that body’s variation and movement from one state to another (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49).

Grossberg writes:

> The third dimension of affect [*affectus*] refers to the multiplicity of regimes,
> logics, or organizations of intensities or passions (*affectus*) which define the
> affective tonalities and modalities of existence, behavior, and experience. […]
> This third dimension, then, refers to those expressive regimes which mobilize and
> organize affect as the habitual, the lived, and the imagined. But they are effective
> only within larger articulations, in what we can call the discursive formations or
> apparatuses of the cultural. Such formations are themselves comprised not only of
> the discursive and affective elements of expression, but of the nondiscursive
> elements of content as well. (2010b, p. 194).

All three of these modes of affect interact with one another, as a body’s own *affectus* interacts
with *affectio* in complex ways, all of which alter and co-determine the effects of each particular
affective encounter. As we’ll see, the complexity of these interactions make them very difficult to even theorize, and nearly impossible to apply in a scientific fashion to practice.

**Affect contra (Hegelian) Humanism**

Like Thrift’s spatial politics of affect, Connolly’s critical account of the neuropolitics of affect presents ‘the media’ as an instrumental medium for doing groundwork on the political dispositions of massified subjects. These dispositions are subsequently re-energised for macropolitical mobilisation. This argument is attached to a neuro-ontology centred on a rhetorical construction of the pre-cognitive visceral priming of subjects’ feelings and emotions. The combination of appeals to scientific authority and ontological claims of layering and priority reduces the question of ‘the political’ to a consideration of the ways in which various technologies enable monadic preceptors to be assembled into blocks of more or less willing, more or less recalcitrant voters or consumers.


Thrift and Connolly seem to share two sets of interlinked and deeply embedded assumptions in their work that are contrary to the very ontology they wish to operate within. The first pair consists of: (1) a persistent Humanism, in the sense that both believe that only a rational actor with full, conscious knowledge of his or her choices can exercise free will; and (2) an assumption that human individuals function as organic totalities, which cannot operate with splintered, heterogeneous, and even antagonistic parts. I hope to articulate a more complex and probabilistic model in which both non-conscious (dynamic) determinism and free will can interact, and in which the body itself and its non-conscious functions might actually be a part of free will, rather than a hindrance.
Connolly paints a picture in which “thinking and judgment are already well under way before they enter the picture as conscious processes” because pre-conscious “affective charges help to move thinking and judgment in some directions rather than others” (2002b, p. 27). He explains that we cannot consciously process all of our sensations and associate them with activated memories fast enough to structure our own perception (p. 25-35). We achieve this through unconscious processes that filter sensations and begin to build associations between them for us. This is achieved through a system of what Connolly calls ‘proto-thoughts’ (p. 64) and ‘infraperception’ (p. 26), which employs fast and unconscious synaptic circuits to process sensations that only later work their way into consciousness. What Connolly is primarily concerned with is the messages, signals, and sensations, and thus the neurological (or, more broadly, bodily) effects of affect, that never make their way into consciousness because they either move too fast or they are filtered out (p. 85). We are particularly vulnerable to affect because it is directly operative on the body between proto-thought and thought, infraperception and perception (p. 66). While he asserts a commitment to a more complex model (p. xiii, 52), it is implicit that in his model, like a driver reacting to an emergency on the road, we can only (re-)act bodily and become aware of our (re-)actions afterwards (p. 25-26).

Thrift begins *Non-Representational Theory* by articulating a commitment to investigating the “largely involuntary process of encounter” (2007, p. 8), and wants to correct a model of bodies as agents to one in which “bodies can and do become overwhelmed” and where “the unchosen and unforeseen exceed the ability of the body to contain and absorb” (p. 10). He writes, “We should … pay more attention to the pre-cognitive. This roiling mass of nerve volleys prepare the body for action in such a way that intentions or decisions are made before the conscious self is even aware of them” (p. 7). For Thrift, the vast majority of neurological and
bodily activity is unconscious, and because of this *free will is not possible* (p. 62). He even goes so far as to posit that “people have little or no agency over their bodies or environments but are under the control of affective force” and notes that the body is a mere conduit for affect “without any conscious volition” (p. 240). It is in this ½ second delay in consciousness and free will that Thrift locates his articulation of affect, and argues that it is capable of working directly on *zoé* (i.e., ‘bare life’) (p. 60, 243). Thrift describes affect as follows:

Generally speaking, affect is a semiconscious phenomenon, consisting of a series of automatisms, many of them inscribed in childhood, which *dictate bodily movement*, which arise from *suggestion*, and which are not easily available to reflection … These automatisms may often feel like willful action *but they are not*. (p. 239-240, emphasis mine).

This understanding of the human as a set of homogeneous and unified parts that is either fully manipulated (i.e. absolute determinism) or absolutely free to consciously will his or her own actions is untenable given the desire to operate within a (largely) Deleuzian ontology of affect. The reason for this is that it preserves the Hegelian notion of the *organic totality*, in which the human individual is conceived of as the sum of its parts and these parts can exist only relationally within the whole (i.e. they are *homogenized*). Under this conception, the totality acts in *unison*, and thus the exertion of control over its *parts* is the equivalent to the exertion of control over the *whole* individual. But to understand the human as an organic totality within the ontology of affect is, strictly speaking, to ignore the conception of the human articulated alongside affect.
In the *Ethics*, Baruch Spinoza articulates a notion of the human individual that fundamentally contradicts the notion of organic totalities. Spinoza conceives of the human individual as of a single substance, but with two attributes, thought and extension (a.k.a., mind and body). These two attributes operate heterogeneously to one another⁴, but at the same time co-function in an *assemblage* together. Further, Spinoza tells us that this model not only escapes the notion of the homogeneous human through its conception of singular substance with multiple attributes, but it also escapes the humanist model, which presupposes free will and determinism as an absolute dichotomy in which *rational thought* and *deliberative choice* are necessary for free will to operate. Spinoza does so by arguing that the action of the individual when considered from both of its attributes is at once deliberative *and* determined⁵ (1996, p. 279-281).

The means by which an individual can at once be determined and deliberative are best explained through DeLanda’s articulation of Deleuzian assemblage theory. In DeLanda’s conception, “It may be argued … that a whole may be both analyzable into separate parts and at the same time have irreducible properties that emerge from the *interactions* between parts” (2006, p. 10). An assemblage thus has specific characteristics, traits, capacities, etc., all of which DeLanda terms ‘emergent capacities,’ which result from the interactions between its constituent parts but *aren’t reducible to them*. The assemblage is not reducible to the sum of its parts because it is the combination of the actual exercise of those parts’ capacities that forms the assemblage, and is not the combination of *their capacities themselves*. These constituent parts can operate heterogeneously, and even antagonistically towards one another, can be moved and replaced, without necessarily destroying or short-circuiting the assemblage, and are assembled in

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⁴ Spinoza tells us in Part III, Proposition 2 of *Ethics* that, “The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else)” (279).

⁵ This is a point sometimes lost in translation, as *determination* has at times been translated as determined, and at others as ‘a physical state’.
a contingently obligatory fashion (largely through the inertia of historical co-functioning and coevolution) (p. 10-12, 18-19).

For DeLanda, as for Deleuze, the human individual is an assemblage of sense impressions and bodily responses, thoughts built on the complex association of those sense impressions, genes, cells, and organs, energy and attention, habit, capacities, technē, and language. And further, that assemblage is caught in feedback loops with all of the assemblages that it has been, is, or plans to be a part of. These assemblages of which the human individual is a part can range anywhere from the most fleeting bouts of interpersonal communication, to families, workplaces, career fields, schools, religions, states, cultures, etc. Within this dense network of feedback loops, in which each and every assemblage has the capacity to affect and the capacity to be affected by the human individual, free will and determinism are no longer mutually exclusive. DeLanda writes:

The subject or person emerging from the assembly of subpersonal components … has the right capacities to act pragmatically (i.e. to match means to ends) as well as socially, to select ends for a variety of habitual or customary reasons that need not involve any conscious decision. (2006, p. 52)

Within this conception, a human individual can exercise a constrained free will, because the assembled parts that make up the individual do not exercise free will and are not determined as a totality. Further, decisions do not always need to be consciously or rationally decided, but instead can be accommodated by the implementation of dense feedback loops among both the constituent parts of the individual and the larger assemblages of which it is a part, as well as the
mechanization of populations of component parts\(^6\) (p. 21). DeLanda tells us that “a space with multiple attractors [i.e., determining forces] breaks the link between necessity and determinism, giving a system a ‘choice’ between different destinies, and making the particular end state a system occupies a combination of determinism and chance” (2002, p. 38).

While there is an opportunity here for power structures to condition habitual associations, responses, and synaptic relays (and this is precisely the opportunities realized in Deleuze’s articulation of ‘societies of control’), it is not nearly so simple as Thrift and Connolly indicate. The dissemination of a single, or even a series of affects through spatial planning, design, film, or TV to a human individual is always processed through these dense webs of feedback. While these media practices are no doubt influential, they are not nearly as determinative as they are sometimes theorized to be. There are vast opportunities for deterministic influence, but such actions never fully exclude the possibility of chance and choice.

**Affect contra Teleological Control**

Because affect refuses to follow the slope of reflective and self-interiorizing thought, it works to short-circuit any kind of overly rigid demarcation of conscious-unconscious.

Gregory Seigworth, 2003, p. 76

The second pair of interlinked assumptions that Connolly and Thrift share become apparent during their political critiques of power structures’ use affect as a control mechanism. This pair consists of: (1) a clinging to teleology in their models of affect; and (2) a buying into

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\(^6\) This is what DeLanda is getting at when he speaks about nonlinear, catalytic, and statistical causality (2006; 18-22).
the dystopic pole in a polarized model of affect, in which mechanisms of control can perfectly, predictably, and continually harness affect. I will argue that affect must be considered as but one determining (intensive) force in a virtual constellation of attractors. Not only must an affect contend with the force of the constellation of attractors internal to the multiplicity it is impinging upon (i.e., affectus); it must also contend with any and all other affects from the myriad feedback loops between all of the assemblages which the affected individual has entered into or emerged from (i.e., affectio).

In Neuropolitics, Connolly asks, “What if many messages flowing between multiple brain regions of differential capacities in the same person are too small and fast to be identified by consciousness, but are, nonetheless, amenable to some degree to cultural inscription, experimental research, and technical intervention?” (2002b, p. 85, emphasis mine). He suspects that while these affects operate non-/pre-consciously, they in fact are amenable to some amount of “cultural inscription” and “experimental tactics of intervention” (p. 86). For Connolly, TV and film in particular are the perfect media for this mobilization of affect (2002a, p. 3). He speculates that there is something about the immobility of the audience, and the dark rooms we watch films in, which affords films an amplified affective intensity that operates below “the level of explicit attention” (Connolly, 2005, p. 880). Connolly argues that the micropolitical registration of these mass disseminated affects is capable of ‘priming’ audiences to be receptive or unreceptive to macro-political actions (2002a, p. 3).

Thrift first constructs a teleological notion of affect in his article “Intensities of Feelings,” where he argues, “affective response can be designed into spaces” (2004, p. 68). He writes, “the discovery of new means of practicing affect is also the discovery of a whole new means of manipulation by the powerful” (p. 54), and one such new practice of affect is this designing of
affective responses directly into spaces themselves (p. 68). Thrift further elaborates these notions in *Non-Representational Theory*, where he argues that “it is relatively easy to promote in populations feelings of responsibility over events for which they could not possibly have had any responsibility at all” through the “series of highways of imitation-suggestion” that is affect (2007, p. 239-240). The reason for this, he argues, is that the generally docile and disengaged cultures of the West are very receptive to affect, and can be “‘switched on’ by particular issues with high affective resonance” (p. 240).

There has been a recent surge of scholars trying to formulate an ontologically sound, or, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s words, an ‘anexact yet rigorous’ (1987, p. 367) conceptual framework for affect studies. It has been a fairly common trend to articulate affect as a non- or even anti-teleological force, or, in other words, a force that can *never* even be fully known, *let alone predictably directed towards certain ends* (see: Anderson, 2010, p. 165-167; Bertelson & Murphie, 2010, p. 138; Grossberg, 2010a, p. 316, 2010b, p. 195-197; Guattari, 1996, p. 158; Highmore, 2010, p. 135; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 4; Stewart, 2010, p. 340). Regardless of whether you agree with this ontological construction, it is readily apparent that it cannot be used for theoretical analysis capriciously. Such use draws heavy criticism for studies into affect in general⁷, and rightly so, as an already dense and dynamic system requires a commitment to as much consistency and lucidity as possible on the part of those theorizing affect or putting affect theory into practice. In hopes of articulating a more accurate model, I’d like to first assume that affect might be harnessed, and examine a single affective event in the abstract in order to illuminate its possible effects. I will show that even if affect were subject to perfect control, it could never be employed or directed teleologically.

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Before examining a single affective event, I must set the stage a bit. Deleuze’s philosophy provides an understanding of the world that is basically broken into three ontological dimensions: the virtual, the intensive, and the actual (DeLanda, 2002, p. 51). The virtual is populated by multiplicities, which DeLanda argues, “specify the structure of spaces of possibilities, spaces which, in turn, explain the regularities exhibited by morphogenetic [i.e., intensive] processes” (2002, p. 10). Drawing from the work of Henri Poincaré on phase space and degrees of freedom, DeLanda views multiplicities as a virtual, vector field of all of an individual’s possible movements and trajectories of actualization, as well as the bifurcation points at which the individual mutates into a different individual corresponding to a position in a different multiplicity (p. 19-20, 32). Because these multiplicities are virtual agglomerates of all possibilities, they themselves are never actualized (p. 32). And because the actualized individual represents only one possible actualization, it bears no resemblance to the multiplicity itself, and in fact might not bear much resemblance to another actualization of that same multiplicity (p. 22). DeLanda tells us that, “This lack of resemblance is amplified by the fact that multiplicities give form to processes, not to the final product” (p. 22). The realm of the actual is this world of actualized individuals, or, more accurately, individuals that are continually actualizing themselves and also mutating into new individuals. It is important to note though that these two realms are only separated in theory, and in fact the virtual is there alongside the actual in the world we experience, and is present as trace in every individual (p. 33).

The intensive is alternately referred to as the ‘intensive process,’ ‘process of actualization,’ ‘morphogenesis,’ ‘becoming,’ and sometimes as ‘emergence.’ The intensive process is that which fuels the trajectory of an actualization of a virtual multiplicity, and often becomes obscured or hidden in the actualized individual (p. 59). While DeLanda gives many
examples of such processes, what is important for our purposes is that “differences in intensity … can drive fluxes of matter or energy” (p. 60). Intensive processes are affected in the actual by the environmental factors surrounding their actualization, and virtually by what DeLanda terms ‘attractors,’ or, alternately, ‘singularities’. Attractors are points of density in the vector fields of multiplicities that exert a force on trajectories of actualization. DeLanda tells us that:

The trajectories in this space always approach an attractor asymptotically, that is, they approach it indefinitely close but never reach it. This means that unlike trajectories, which represent the actual states of the objects in the world, attractors are never actualized, since no point of a trajectory ever reaches the attractor itself. It is in this sense that singularities represent only the long-term tendencies of a system, never its actual states. (2002, p. 31-32)

It is important to note that trajectories do not approach attractors linearly, but instead move towards them in spirals that reach indefinitely close orbits, circular and elliptical orbits, and in what have been termed ‘strange’ and ‘chaotic’ patterns.

Finally, each individual has what is called a ‘diagram’, which is basically the map of its virtual multiplicity and all of its attractors, and its trajectory and all of its intensive processes, which would “structure [its] space of possibilities” (2006, p. 30). While it is possible that an individual diagram could contain only one attractor, and thus appear relatively simple, that is an atypical case. The vast majority of diagrams contain actualizations moving through dense clouds
or constellations of attractors that collectively and progressively determine their trajectories (2002, p. 38; 2006, p. 29). These constellations of attractors are usually large and populous enough that they remain quite stable, which accounts for the relative stability of the actual world as well as the recurrence of certain attractors across different systems and multiplicities (2002, p. 32).

Within this system, Deleuze and Guattari frequently argue that affects are becomings (1987, p. 256; 1994, p. 196), or, in the language I gave earlier, they operate as intensities that influence the trajectory of actualizations. For the time being, let’s assume that it is possible to perfectly engineer and control an affect. What can you really do with that affect? It will of course exert a force that will enter into complex relationships with an individual trajectory, but in every scenario in which that affect plays out, there is no way that it could be directed teleologically. Let’s examine three basic ways that an affect could influence a trajectory.

The first possibility is relatively simple. As I noted before, the majority of these trajectories are already being influenced by a whole constellation of attractors. In order to alter the trajectory, the affect would need to be intense enough to change the balance of force in the trajectory’s current constellation. It is reasonable to assume, given the sheer number of affective encounters that make up the everyday, that a number of affects simply fizzle. The second possibility is relatively similar. Some affects may be just intense enough to cause a minor disruption to the current trajectory, but one not strong enough to initiate any sort of bifurcation. In this case, soon after the affective event, the trajectory would return to its stable state (DeLanda, 2002, p. 32). I would posit that the vast majority of affective encounters are of this variety. I would also argue that both of these interactions contradict an idea of teleological manipulation of
affect because the end aimed for must be different in some way from the moment in which the aiming took place.

The last possibility is that the affect is intense enough to initiate a new becoming, or, in other words, to force the previously stable system to bifurcate into a new and different one (DeLanda, 2002, p. 32). In such an instance, the new trajectory would be influenced by both the previous constellation of attractors as well as the affect that was introduced. The persistence of the previous constellation of attractors’ force as co-determining of the new trajectory makes a teleological employment of affect impossible in this instance. As DeLanda notes, even the most advanced biological and social scientific modeling systems are incapable of mapping the diagrams of the individuals they study (2006, p. 29). So, the path of becoming that the affect would initiate is unknowable, at least until we find ways to model the entire constellation of attractors in the diagram of a human individual (not to mention the assemblages of which they are a part). But further, even if we could model a human’s diagram and predict the way an affect would interact with the entirety of their constellation of attractors, we could not account for the vulnerability of an unstable system on the verge of bifurcation. There would be no way to prepare for other, new affects that might be introduced during the bifurcation (unless we could model the interactions and feedback loops between each and every individual assemblage in the world). And finally, it is at this very juncture, the point of mutation, that determinism cedes the most ground to chance and choice (DeLanda, 2002, p. 38).

**Affects ; Avant-Garde :: Refrains ; Bourgeoisie**

Affect has no meaning, per se. In his article “Fashioning a Stave, or Singing Life,” Greg Seigworth (2003) argues that affects are both a-objective and a-subjective, and both a-signifying
and a-representational. Affect exists outside of the realm of the symbolic, but is capable of irrupting into that realm. It can flow through objects, subjects, signs, and representations without ever being captured by them. It is for this reason that Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) write about the indeterminateness or the never-quite-fully-determined-ness of affect in *The Affect Theory Reader*. Seigworth and Gregg distill much of affect theory into the first few pages of their introduction. They note that affect can be an impingement or extrusion, or a sustained and everyday state, as well as the passage of all of these. It is a force or intensity that works alongside, behind, and in-between the actual. At its most anthropomorphic, affects are all of those forces outside of both consciousness and unconsciousness that can drive us toward specific movements, thoughts, and extensions, but can also suspend us or overwhelm us. Affect is a body immersed in the world and all of that world’s ebbs and flows (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1).

Manuel DeLanda (2002) attempts to explain the science that Gilles Deleuze somewhat silently put to work in his texts. DeLanda makes the case that affect functions similarly to information in that both effect a pattern or a shift in pattern. When we look at abstract (read: virtual) affects or information, both can be theorized as effecting pattern shifts (or as creating differential relations) without any need to reference a channel or mode of communication. Affect and information both behave strikingly similar to the particles in Einstein’s “spooky action at a distance,” or in subsequent quantum entanglement schemas (DeLanda, 2002, p. 75-81). This version of affect operates purely in the realm of the virtual. The instituted pattern that arises in the virtual does, however, come to affect the ‘real’ world, but only by altering the trajectories of actualizations. This process of actualization works through refrains (which are, somewhat paradoxically, captured affects and empty husks or crystallizations from which affect has slipped away). Deleuze and Guattari refer to refrains as “essentially territorial, territorializing, or
reterritorializing” (1987, p. 300). Refrains fold the virtual changes into the real world, creating new territories at the same time that they deconstruct old ones. It is important to note here, however, that these new territories, and the refrains that institute them, do not necessarily bear any resemblance to the initial virtual affects they attempt to capture.

It is from this virtuality that affect derives its force in the real world. In her essay “Affective Economies,” Sara Ahmed notes that, “it is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies” (2004, p. 128). In other words, it is the virtuality of the digital cloud that affords it the intensity to institute existential, physical, and discursive (de-)(re-)territorializations. This is why Félix Guattari in particular was so interested in affects and refrains. He saw in this radical alterity and intensity the possibility to constitute a new societal/communitarian logic of subjective pluralism. Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphy (2010) similarly construct the affective event as a “looming-on-the-horizon-ness,” an indeterminate intensity, that works through its refrains to institute changes in the actual world that parallel (heterogeneously) the changes in the virtual.

This whole process is perhaps best described in Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphie’s article “An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers,” where they argue that affects are unqualified intensities that are at work in us through refrains and modulation, affecting even those who cannot consciously detect their effects (2010, p. 148). In this article, Bertelson and Murphie are reworking the idea of the refrain (or ritornello) articulated by Guattari (1996) in “Ritornellos and Existential Affects.” In that article Guattari developed the notion of existential affects looming outside of the actual and the symbolic realm, but affecting that realm as they are reconstituted, looped, revamped, and remixed by their refrains. It is through these refrains that
affective (re-)(de-)territorializations\textsuperscript{9} are instituted and that new strata and lines of flight are established.

As we shall soon see, the engineering of new affects (a process that falls somewhere between production and discovery) and construction of refrains that facilitate their transduction is largely left to those operating outside of capitalist production, be they defecting or disaffected bourgeois artists or multitudinous masses. This engineering process defies the dominant logic of the commodity fetish, because, as we’ll see, newly engineered and first-refrained affects make poor commodities. These affects are arrived at through a process of (de-)(re-)territorialization, of philosophy-art, whose intensity may leave them less palatable to the majority of ‘the People,’ which by necessity is heavily invested in rigid stratification and policed boundaries. The general lack of economic viability in the commodification of freshly engineered affects and refrains thus conflicts with capital’s operative logic, and their engineering is left to artists and multitudes.

This, however, is not to say that affects and refrains are alien to systemic capitalism. Rather, it is to say that systemic capital is selective in the affects and refrains that it courts and employs. Refrains that are continually developed and disseminated tend to grow in both significance and fixity. They become more and more territorialized, stratified even, to the point that they can be employed more and more predictably. To put it simply, they become \textit{safe … safe for consumption}. This is the case with many of the dominant Western affects and their refrains (e.g., the troubadour’s courtly love, the autarky so prized in American mythos and memorialized by Emerson as ‘self-reliance,’ etc.). Take, for an extended example, Ann Cvetkovich’s treatment of Lisa Kron’s performance piece 2.5 \textit{Minute Ride}. In the piece, Kron wrestles with her experience of visiting Auschwitz with her survivor father, noting the myriad

\textsuperscript{9} And here these (de-)(re-)territorializations can be the construction, deconstruction, or reconstruction of institutions, biopower/grids of normativity, ideologies, discourses, etc.
affective tonalities she was awash in during an experience that she had been trained to believe ought to be rigidly fixed to but a single affective and emotional register. Cvetkovich writes:

Kron stresses the challenge of addressing an audience that comes already equipped with a huge repository of Holocaust representations, which are the product of successful efforts to create a culture around this historical trauma. She painstakingly attempts to avoid some of the affects frequently prompted by such representations, including empty sentimentality and its not-so-distant relation, incapacitating awe. Can a trip to Auschwitz be something other than another version of a trip to an amusement park, where history’s terrors are domesticated into safely consumable artifacts and emotions? By juxtaposing stories of these two kinds of visits, Kron forces scrutiny of the limits and inadequacies of the quest for an encounter with trauma, testimony, and the Holocaust that are implicit in trips to both Auschwitz and the theater. (2003, p. 20-21)

Here, we can see the difference between an attempt to artistically (de-)(re-)territorialize the affects surrounding the Holocaust as opposed to the safer mobilization of pre-existing refrains, such as the Holocaust museum, the Auschwitz tour, and cinematic tragedy like Schindler’s List.

In essence, pre-existing affects and refrains are appropriated by capital, and perhaps this is even limited to those affects and refrains that were already fully developed, territorialized, and predominant in dissemination channels prior to their appropriation. Or, in short, capital prefers an effective practice to an affective practice. This mobilization makes up a large part of hegemonic exercise of noo- and biopower, of the policing of boundaries, and the stratification of the subject. Affective practices proliferate under the catalysis of digital media, for which affects and refrains constitute the predominant strategy for effective transduction. Thus, the issues of
affective ontologies, artistic engineering of affects and refrains, and the capitalist mass
mobilization of pre-existing affects and refrains are all invested with paramount political, ethical,
and economic importance.
CHAPTER 3

UTOPIC PAROXYSM: WHY CAPITALISTS AREN’T INTO PHILOSOPHY-ART

The literary and artistic fields attract a particularly strong proportion of individuals who possess all the properties of the dominant class minus one: money.

Pierre Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 165

Capitalism only ever produces capitalism.

Jacques Rancière, 2010, p. 82

Introduction

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in their book Commonwealth that the engineering of new affects cannot be contained or managed by public or private mechanism, because this mode of production is operative wholly outside the logics of both public and private property (2009, p. 272). They argue that affective production ceaselessly flees from the capitalist and state authority logics of property, and the modes of production that they ensue. For Hardt and Negri, the production of the common requires horizontal and multitudinal organizational structures of cooperation and communication that allow individual singularities to work socially without ever entering into homogeneous or hierarchical distributional systems. This is an organization that facilitates the creation of assemblages, feedback loops, and change; it is also one that avoids dialectical binaries and organic totalities. While Hardt and Negri’s theories of the common (and affect in particular) are profoundly useful, they provide little in the way of a

1 A segment of this paper has been published in my article “Lomo-Fi (ν)” (Monea, 2012).
rigorous proof that affective engineering must operate – and operates best – outside of capital and regimes of public/private property. In short, the aim of this chapter is to investigate one possible proof for such a claim.

In this chapter I will begin by outlining Deleuze’s conception of philosophy-art, drawing particularly from his writings on Francis Bacon. I will then quickly overview Karl Marx’s conception of the commodity fetish, which I argue is the operative logic of capital. Having developed a working conception of both philosophy-art and the commodity fetish, I will look to the work of Pierre Bourdieu to show how and why philosophy-art is operative outside the capitalist mode of production. I will show that new philosophy-art is always outside the current circuits of capitalism by mandate of the commodity fetish. Finally, I will look at the implications of this articulation of philosophy-art for potential revolutionary movements. In particular, having investigated how philosophy-art can be performed, I will close by asking who can perform it and to what purpose.

**Philosophy-Art**

Before we can understand how or why capital appears to have a difficult time producing new affects, we must examine the function of art and philosophy for Deleuze, two key areas for the production of affective intensity². Ian Buchanan (2000) argues that the primary task of Deleuze’s oeuvre is finding a way to move from inadequate to adequate ideas, which might best be considered a use of the empirical to account for the abstract, immanent, or transcendental

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² While music certainly rivals – and probably trumps – both philosophy and visual art in its affective intensity, I find the description of Bacon’s process to be Deleuze’s most detailed and accessible case study of affective production, and its easy parallels to philosophy make it particularly useful for my purposes.
without falling into dualism, dialectical synthesis, or idealism. Deleuze and Guattari as much as say so, when they argue for a hyper-abstract and “anexact, yet rigorous” philosophy (1987, p. 367). As Buchanan demonstrates, such a philosophy is comprised of three elements: philosopher, plane of immanence, and concepts (2000, p. 47).

The philosopher is a conceptual persona put on by the person philosophizing through the development of an original style\(^3\), who employs concepts to allow for an unmediated experience of what Deleuze alternately terms the ‘event,’ or ‘haecceity,’ that exists on the plane of immanence. In the everyday, or what Deleuze terms the actual, we only ever experience these things through the mediation of the body, which serves as a framing device and organizes sensation into perception for our contemplation. For Deleuze, this mediated experience of haecceities through perception constitutes an ‘inadequate idea,’ and the unmediated experience of them through concepts constitutes an ‘adequate idea.’ But, more than simply being ‘adequate ideas,’ concepts are our means of moving from inadequate ideas to adequate ideas, and thus represent a process of raising an ‘amalgam of perceptions’ to a ‘higher power’ (Buchanan 2000, p. 61). This unmediated experience of the concept makes the ‘mediatedness’ of our everyday perception more apparent to us, and affords us the potential to mediate differently, to change, or even to set off on a path of becoming. Before we can understand how this process of conceptualization works though, we must first take a look at haecceities and perception.

**Haecceities**

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a notion of what exactly it is that fills the plane of consistency. In short, their answer is: haecceities. Haecceities have their own

\(^3\) For more information on this see Buchanan (2000), pp. 49, 52-55. Also, see the discussion of Francis Bacon later in the paper, who uses a method he calls the ‘diagram,’ as well as the Figure, the structure, the contour, attendant-figures, and certain relations of color.
perfect mode of individuation separate from (but not contrary to) that of the subject, thing, substance, or person. Deleuze and Guattari describe haecceities as consisting “entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected” (1987, p. 261). They go on to note that in the realm of the virtual, everything is haecceity (1987, p. 263). So, for example, a date, a city, a multitude, a person, a painting, a season, a minute, a life, are all haecceities in their virtuality.⁴ Each has a specific relation of movement and rest between particles, involves a specific trajectory influenced by its singularities, and each has the capacity to be affected (have its trajectory altered or be pushed into a bifurcation) and to affect (similarly, to alter another haecceity’s trajectory or push it into a bifurcation) (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 261-263).

Haecceity then is the part of a multiplicity in the virtual realm that corresponds to a particular actualization (although this correspondence is isomorphic at best, and of course the virtual multiplicity remains heterogeneous to its actualization). Haecceity carries the multiplicity’s reserve of virtual potentiality and all its capacities to affect and be affected, at once alongside an actualization. It is a way of going, a rhythm, which can be thought of as having a frequency (speed/duration) and amplitude (intensity/affect).⁶ In the actual world haecceity is a way of unfolding and extending, a process of assemblage, and sometimes stratification and segmentation, or intensive subjectivization, as well as the subsequent introduction of lines of flight from which the whole stitch-work can be untied, destratified. In the virtual world,

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⁴ It is important to note here that Deleuze and Guattari do distinguish between two varieties of haecceities: assemblage haecceities (which, obviously, gives rise to concrete actualizations, and which Deleuze and Guattari describe as “a body considered only as longitude and latitude” (1987, p. 263)) and interassemblage haecceities (which are more purely immaterial affects, or forces, that serve as points of potential becoming within assemblages — Deleuze and Guattari describe these as “the milieu of intersection of the longitudes and latitudes” (1987, p. 263)).

⁵ Here singularity stands for what Manuel De Landa (2002) calls attractors, which can be whole, periodic, or chaotic.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari prefer the terms latitude and longitude, respectively (1987, p. 260-261).
haecceity can exists as an attractor (i.e. singularity), or a constellation of such attractors, that influences the productive processes of desire. And finally, in the realm of the actual, haecceity is that trace of virtuality persisting in and alongside every actualization, which can be teased out and pursued by the groping hands of the philosopher’s haptic eye.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the body, in its longitude and latitude, is “the only practical object of schizoanalysis” (1987, p. 203); or, to put it differently, schizoanalysis must uncover the frequency and amplitude of a haecceity, and only then will it have any idea of a particular actualization’s thisness, its way of going or unfurling, its ebb and flow, the (de-) (re-)territorializations it entails, and its capacities to affect, be affected, and transduct affects. Further, it is only through a process of uncovering haecceities that we can move towards the Body without Organs. The line of flight always runs past haecceity towards the absolute deterritorialization that reveals the Body without Organs.8

_Percepts as Inadequate Ideas_

Deleuze draws heavily on Henri Bergson’s arguments in his *Cinema* books to develop a theory of perception. He distills this theory well when he writes:

The thing and the perception of the thing are one and the same thing, one and the same image, but related to one or other of two systems of reference. The thing is the image as it is in itself, as it is related to all the other images to whose action it completely submits and on which it reacts immediately. But the perception of the thing is the same image

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7 Schizoanalysis is roughly equivalent to what Deleuze and Guattari (1994) would later articulate as Philosophy.
8 It is important here to remember what Deleuze and Guattari write of the BwO: “You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit” (1987, p. 150). One must keep this in mind during schizoanalysis, but also remember that haecceity serves as a road sign along the line of flight, letting us know that we are moving toward pure virtuality, pure immanence.
related to another special image which frames it, and which only retains a partial action from it, and only reacts to it mediately. In perception thus defined, there is never anything else or anything more than there is in the thing: on the contrary, there is ‘less’. We perceive the thing, minus that which does not interest us as a function of our needs. (Deleuze 1986, p. 63)

Before looking at one of the key elements of this theory – determining interest as a function of needs, or the motivation for the subtraction – it is important to understand just how this subtraction works. For Deleuze this subtraction of the elements that interest us from the image in its entirety is just the first step. Next, all of the unselected elements of the image are “incurved and reorganized so as to surround the subjective image, or perception proper” (Buchanan 2000, p. 62). This image then is presented to us with limited zones that hold our attention, while remaining surrounded by the rest of the image elements. The result of this is that we consciously perceive only the selections that have been deemed interesting, while the rest are preserved unconsciously and operate on the body through affect (p. 62).

While it is becoming clearer how this could result in an inadequate idea or a mediated perception (only a select few elements of the image are consciously perceived), the picture becomes fully clear when we better understand this ‘interest’. According to Deleuze, we are only able to perceive in a reliable way through the specialization of our ‘receptive organs’. This specialization though comes at a cost, since this very specialization (intended to provide reliability and homogeneity) also relegates these organs to rigidity. We are no longer able to consciously choose how to determine interest, since the process has become fully automated and standardized. This ensures that we will always only perceive a subtraction from the image, and
further, this element of the image will be, if not always the same, then at least always selected by the same process. Finally, this same process leaves our body constantly open to a barrage of affects from the elements of the image that never quite make it into conscious perception (Deleuze 1986, p. 65-66). This leaves us constantly reacting to the image unconsciously, which by Spinoza’s very definition can only beget an inadequate idea.

**Haecceities as Adequate Ideas**

Brian Massumi tells us that there are two programs for getting at haecceity. The first is that of the philosopher, who traces lines of segmentarity, sniffs out traces of the virtual, and follows lines of flight back to the haecceity on the plane of consistency to discover its conduction of desire, its frequency and amplitude. The course of philosophy is a movement from the actual to the virtual, an investigation of intensity. The second program is that of the artist, who, rather than moving from the actual to the virtual, does the opposite. The artist is meant to uncover a haecceity, to feel it out with the groping hands of her haptic vision, and then engage in a process of (re-)actualization that will contain as large of a trace of the virtual as possible as a “contextual excess or remainder” (Massumi 2002, p. 252). It is through this excess of virtuality that the audience or reader will be lead to the haecceity, and the more intense it is, the better chance there is for the audience or reader to be able to follow.

It is precisely this (different and re-)actualization of a haecceity that Deleuze means by the term ‘concept,’ as well as by ‘art’. Buchanan tells us that sense is ‘aliquid,’ that “it has no physical or mental existence” (2000, p. 78). It is an impassive element that exists only in use or conjunction; “it does nothing, and can only inferred” (p. 78). It ‘inheres’ or ‘subsists’ in an expression without ever merging with it, all the while bearing no resemblance to it, and operating
on the level of bodies and things, rather than language. It can be extracted through the
delineation of singularities, and it is this that is the first step to producing a concept. The
delineation of a constellation of singularities, or a haecceity, is the goal of the concept. However,
the concept’s ultimate goal is to raise the process of delineating the haecceity from a passive to
an active process (p. 78). Rather than experiencing the haecceity solely through its unconscious
affect on the body, the concept means to bring us to a conscious experience of the haecceity, and
thus to an adequate idea of it.

Here, the goal of the concept and the goal of the work of art are the same. It becomes
apparent that the artist is always a philosopher first, in that she must get back to a haecceity
before actualizing it anew, and, similarly, a philosopher is always an artist, in that she must build
a new concept linked to the recovered haecceity (Massumi 2002, p. 248-252). It in this way that
Deleuze blurs the distinction between the two practices and leaves us with the ‘philosopher-
artist’. There is ample evidence of this in the literature, as Deleuze holds up writers (Melville,
Kafka), painters (Klee, Bacon), musicians (Messiaen), and film auteurs (Eisenstein) as often as
philosophers as examples for this process. However, for expediency we will here treat
philosophy as the practice of getting to haecceity and art as the practice of leading others back to
it, knowing full well that they are only two sides of the same process (philosophy-art).

Perhaps the most instructive example of the process of philosophy-art that Deleuze gives
for our purposes is the program that Deleuze isolates in Francis Bacon’s work. Deleuze readily
praises Bacon as an exceptional philosopher-artist, perhaps more thoroughly than any other save
Kafka. As I will argue below, Bacon’s is a very similar program to the one Lomography employs
in order to practice philosophy-art.
Bacon first plays the part of the philosopher in his use of what Deleuze calls the ‘Diagram’ to expel all of the clichés that invest his canvas, or, to put it differently, as Bacon creates his Diagram he is following a line of flight that deterritorializes his canvas. This is what Deleuze means when he says that the canvas is invested with clichés (2003, p. 12): it is already continually coded and overcoded, (de-)re-territorialized by artistic institutions, bodies of artistic knowledge, language and affect, by the painter’s own psychological and subjective stratification, etc. By ridding his canvas of clichés, Bacon is deterritorializing it. Throughout his construction of the Diagram, he follows a line of flight that eventually leads him to the haecceity of his painting. Bacon refers to this process as drawing the Figure out of the figurative.  

In allotting such an important role to the Diagram, which for Bacon represents the task of philosophy in its entirety, it is important that we look at the specific methods of deterritorialization that Bacon employs and how they function. Deleuze describes Bacon’s creation of the diagram as the expression of manual traits, as the introduction of a bit of chaos. “It is here that the painter works with a rag, stick, brush, or sponge; it is here that he throws paint with his hands,” Deleuze writes (2003, p. 82). The creation of the diagram constitutes the injection of the “irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random,” and the “nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 82). The diagram is an a-signifying and synesthetic sensation. It is a violent chaos from which (and only from which) the most perfect order and immense information can arise10, a chaos that already contains the germ of order or rhythm (Deleuze, 2003, p. 83). This construction of the diagram is thus doubly necessary. It

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9 Deleuze tells us that “Roughly speaking, the law of the diagram, according to Bacon, is this: one starts with a figurative form, a diagram intervenes and scrambles it, and a form of a completely different nature emerges from the diagram, which is called the Figure” (2003, p. 125).

10 For more information on how entropy increases the amount of potential information see Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers’ (1984) Order Out of Chaos.
perform the task of the philosopher by dispelling the actual (i.e. clichés) and relocating a
haecceity in virtuality, and it sets in motion the development of that germ of rhythm into a full
actualization. This actualization will eventually create a refrain (or grouping of refrains into a
complex refrain) capturing as much of the haecceity’s affect as possible (i.e. a large trace of the
virtual).

It is important to note that the diagram does not proceed by total chaos. It requires a
controlled chaos and an intimate knowledge with the figurative clichés that fill the canvas at the
process’s start. When Deleuze and Guattari specifically mention the creation of a diagram in A
Thousand Plateaus, they argue that it only comes about through “a meticulous relation with the
strata” (1987, p. 161). It is only by becoming intimately familiar with the lines of segmentarity
on a strata that a philosopher can tease out a line of flight, de-conjugate flows, uncover the
affective intensity beneath the actualization, emanating from the Body without Organs. They
further note though that this is not a wild destratification. You can botch your line of flight and
set a corrupted Body without Organs as your limit if you move too fast or if you are unfamiliar
with the strata you are deterritorializing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 160-161). They write, “If
you free it [the BwO] with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking
precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or
even dragged toward catastrophe” (1987, p. 160-161). This is the danger of 20th century art,
particularly abstract expressionism, which Bacon knows all too well. You must mix chance with
control, you must ride chaos to create potential, but you must maintain your grip, keep at a speed,
and get off at the right stops. If you give over to wild destratification and chaos you will botch
the whole project, plug up all your intensive flows, and produce a dead nothingness that inspires
only resentment and bad conscience.
For Deleuze, as for Massumi, the fundamental task of the artist is expressed best by Paul Klee’s famous formula: “Not to render the visible, but to render visible” (qtd. in Deleuze, 2003, p. 48). This dictum essentially means that true art must render a haecceity (the invisible) visible. This is largely done through the construction of refrains. These refrains have two key functions: First, they are territorializing forces, which means they work to capture a particular affect and fold it into the actual world. The refrain is the actualization of an affect into a concrete and repeatable territoriality and/or singularity, which is also capable of (de-)(re-)territorializing other refrains and territorialities. Second, the refrain is also a presentation of an absolute deterritorialization. It is the site of an irruption of the virtual into the actual, a site of affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 300, 312, 317).

What Bacon actually paints, or captures in a refrain, is the movement from a structure, which for Bacon is a field of color, towards a Figure, along with a subsequent movement from the Figure towards the structure, which all together creates a certain tension in the painting. Finally, a contour is introduced that alters the form of both the Figure and the structure. The Figure is then contracted or dilated as it slips through a black hole, and engages in a series of becomings or ‘screaming transformations’. The Figure then returns through the contour and finally fades out to infinity (Deleuze, 2003, p. 28-29). One interpretation of this articulation

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11 Lone Bertelson and Andrew Murphie trace the different designations that Guattari assigns affects, refrains, and their aggregates. There are first simple affects and simple refrains, which are things like little turns of phrases or short songs. However, we most frequently experience the next level, which consists of problematic affects and complex refrains. These agglomerated affects are problematic because they constitute the merging of diverse affects into a single affective event, which makes it difficult to pin down the exact force and quality of the affective event. This ambiguity also creates important room for interpretation. Problematic affects are captured in complex refrains, which form an actual event of the merging of several refrains. A typical example is watching television, in which the body is bombarded with moving pictures, visions of objects, subjects, places, and events, music, sound effects, voices, language (perhaps both written and spoken, or even multiple languages), gestures, facial expressions, colors, textures, etc. Add to that everything that surrounds the television, is occurring during the viewing, is in immediate memory (happened just before the viewing), is in triggered memory (old memories of refrains triggered by and added to the new ones), and plans for the future, both short term and long term. And finally there are hypercomplex affects and refrains, which constitute singular worlds, examples being things like mathematical systems or even cultures (Guattari, 1996; Bertelson & Murphie, 2010, p. 149).
might be that the Figure and the structure are in mutual presupposition, are territorialized and stratified. Bacon puts them into a series of becomings, or, a series of deterritorializations and reterritorializations, that eventually allude to a limit at which an absolute deterritorialization and full flight to the Body without Organs is achieved.

Cézanne tells us that the Figure is really a refrain for sensation, or, as Deleuze calls it, “the sensible form related to a sensation” (2003, p. 31). And sensation itself is nothing other than a delivery-mechanism for affect. Deleuze notes this when he writes that sensation “acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh,” (2003, p. 31). Theorists like Massumi and William Connolly have similarly (and extensively) written on the ways in which affects are at work directly on our bodies non-, pre-, or infra-consciously (Massumi, 2002; Connolly, 2002b). We also know from Deleuze that the color system is directly active on the nervous system, which again hints that colors are similarly co-intensive with affects (2003, p. 45).

What all of this means is best summed up by Deleuze himself, when he writes that in Bacon “there are nothing but affects” (2003, p. 35). In short, Bacon is rendering a haecceity visible by capturing its affective resister in a series of refrains. These affects move through simple refrains (actual sensations and colors isomorphically linked to virtual affects), which are then gathered into complex refrains (the Figure, the structure, and the contour).

The Commodity Fetish

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12 Deleuze’s word for haecceity in *Francis Bacon* is Rhythm. For Deleuze, the sensations/colors Bacon employs are in contact with a vital virtual force that exceeds them (i.e. escapes full capture or representation) and traverses them (2003, p. 37). This rhythm is a way of going, an event, a style, a frequency and an amplitude, a *haecceity*. 
Before moving on to examine the differences between capitalist and artistic interaction with affective engineering, we need to take a moment to sketch out a basic understanding of capital’s operative logic – the commodity fetish. Amaryta Sen describes commodity fetishism as the movement from understanding commodities as being valuable as means to the end of well-being to understanding these goods as having an inherent value in and of themselves, or, put differently, as the ends themselves (1987, p. 19). As Clayton Rosati argues, “[commodity fetishism] is frequently read as mystification or worship of commodities. This is often construed just as ‘false needs,’ which could, in the weakest interpretation, just be changed with a change of mind: fetishism as a psychological issue” (forthcoming). This is a sentiment echoed by Marx himself (1992, p. 79), and also by Deleuze, who writes: “fetishism is indeed an absurdity, an illusion of social consciousness, so long as we understand by this not a subjective illusion born of individual consciousness but an objective or transcendental illusion born out of the conditions of social consciousness in the course of its actualization” (1994, p. 208).

Rosati further explains that “the ultimate expression of the objective conditions of the fetishism of commodities” (forthcoming) is Marx’s formula: “M → M₁, money which begets money” (Marx, 1992, p. 153). Rosati elaborates, and describes this movement as “the growth of the demand of money to increase itself, to grow as an independent force,” which “is not just a pseudo-need – a self-referential mediation of human use – but a ‘pseudo-use of life’ in its inversion of live labor and dead labor, dead labor which imposes its will on the living” (forthcoming). Or, as Marx succinctly explains it, “The relations of capital assume their most externalized and most fetish-like form in interest-bearing capital. We have here M → M₁, money creating more money, self-expanding value, without the process that effectuates these two extremes” (1993, p. 515). What we can take from this is the notion that capital’s operative logic
is that of the commodity fetish, whose very heart is the actualized, machinic process of accumulation, extraction, and appropriation of (surplus) value. The driving force behind capital as an abstract machine is this desire to continually produce and capture value, to grow more money from money.

**The Field of Philosophy-Art and Commodity Fetishism**

As a rule those richest in economic, cultural and social capital are the first to move into the new positions (and this seems to be true in all fields: economic, scientific, etc.)

Pierre Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 68

Now that we have looked at the specific process of affective engineering (predominantly) through art and derived the operative logic of capital, we can now employ Pierre Bourdieu’s articulation of artistic fields to better understand the relation between artists, capital, and affective engineering. In his articulation of the artistic field, Bourdieu is most interested in the (largely invisible) structural relations between the social positions and dispositions of individuals, groups, and institutions that give rise to art (1993a, p. 29). According to Bourdieu, “the fundamental law of the field [is] the theory of art for art’s sake” (p. 62). Bourdieu writes:

This explains the inability of all forms of economism, which seek to grasp this anti-economy in economic terms, to understand this upside-down economic world. The literary and artistic world is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness. […] A heretical break with the prevailing artistic traditions proves its claim to authenticity by its disinterestedness. (p. 40)
The proponents of ‘art for art’s sake’ “tend to identify with degree [sic] of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise” (p. 40). Instead of compromising with the audience’s attachment to passé and/or cliché norms of production, these artists engage in a “prophetic refusal” of the audience’s preferences and instead prefer mass incomprehension as a sign of true originality (p. 50). The movement from old to new, cliché to original, is brought about by artistic heresy that flies in the face of cultural orthodoxy\(^1\) (p. 53).

The fact that the artistic field places value according to the law of art for art’s sake in no way negates the very real economic conditions that influence artistic production. As Bourdieu explains, “There are economic conditions for the indifference to economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation” (1993a, p. 40). These dispositions essential to artistic merit – disinterestedness, daring, originality, etc. – must necessarily be coupled with other (external) conditions, such as a private income (p. 62-63). The very newness of avant-garde art, and its complete disregard for the outmoded preferences of its audience, by necessity make it economically unsuccessful, and the best substitute for sales is a private income. The precarious economic situation of the avant-garde in terms of sales is only

\(^{13}\) It is important here to note that Bourdieu envisions this movement as a dialectical one, in which each new generation asserts itself over and against the previous one through a process of negation (1993a, p. 60). Bourdieu notes that “being determined relationally, negatively, [the new] may remain virtually empty, amounting to little more than a parti pris of refusal, difference, rupture” (p. 59). Taking this as one point of departure, I’d instead like to posit this shift as one of (de-) (re-)territorialization, (de-) (re-)coding, or differenciation. Deleuze describes differenciation as “the actualization of that virtuality [i.e., the virtual multiplicity] into species and distinguished parts,” and notes that the negative never appears in the process of differenciation (1994, p. 206-207). Instead, Deleuze envisions an ontology in which “difference and repetition in the virtual ground the movement of actualization, of differenciation as creation” (p. 212). Here, “differenciation is always simultaneously differenciation of species and parts, of qualities and extensities” (p. 210), and is synonymous with actualization, integration, and solution (p. 211). This is precisely the process we traced above by examining the work of Francis Bacon.
furthered by the indeterminate positions in its social structure, which is filled with poorly defined posts that must be created and maintained by their occupiers themselves, and career paths with uncertain trajectories and dispersed requirements.

While many are attracted to avant-garde positions and to valuing art according to its logic, Bourdieu notes that those most likely to be successful are those who can forgo an academic career and manage to maintain an income during their (economically) profitless artistic endeavors (1993a, p. 43). Bourdieu writes:

The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them (a condition for all avant-garde undertakings which precede the demands of the market), even when they secure no short-term economic profit, seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital. (p. 67-68)

And further, it is those individuals with more (specifically economic) capital that are best able to resist “the seduction of the powers that be,” the call to produce preferable (and thus passé and cliché) works of art (p. 41).

What we can gather from this is that the new and affectively intense – that art itself – comes from the outside of our current stratifications and territorializations, that it runs counter to an audience’s preferences in its relentless progressivity. It is by this very nature that the new in the artistic field is, as a rule, economically unsuccessful. The very fact that it is so disconcerting and displeasing to those demanding more of the same makes it a very difficult thing to commodify, or, at least, a useless thing to commodify. The displeasure with which it is met stunts its very circulation, which as Marx noted is the essence of capital’s ability to move from
M → C → M₁, for it is in the circulation of the commodity that money is able to grow itself, or, put differently, that surplus value is able to be accumulated (1992, p. 248). As such, we can see that even if capital were able to engineer new affects, *it would choose not to do so*, as such a move defies its operative logic (i.e., to grow money into more money). It is more than happy to employ refrains of passé and cliché affects already folded into the popular imaginary, already developed into a stable presence in the artistic field, because these are tried and true, proven to be capable of satisfying capital’s operative logic. Setting out to develop the new, though, is the riskiest of ventures, because the most probable outcome is always that the new will fail to materialize, and, even if it does, the only thing its producer is guaranteed is prolonged economic failure.

**Do We Need Some Semi-Bourgeoisie?**

Revolution is the social power of difference, the paradox of society, the particular wrath of the social Idea. Revolution never proceeds by way of the negative.

Gilles Deleuze, 1994, p. 208

Bourdieu argues that it is the bourgeois defectors, the “‘poor relatives’ of the great bourgeois dynasties, aristocrats already ruined or in decline, members of stigmatized minorities like Jews or foreigners” (1993b, p. 165), albeit *moneyed* minorities, or what Jean-Paul Sartre described as *the idiots of the bourgeois family*¹⁴, who are most likely to come to occupy dominant positions in the literary, artistic, and philosophical fields through the production of revolutionary philosophy-art. It is they who hold a decisive advantage in a field that demands the production of works that provide no immediate profits, because it is they who can best hold out

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and continue to produce new philosophy-art without need of profit. Bourdieu writes: “In short, it is still (inherited) money that assures freedom from money. In painting as in literature, the most innovative enterprises are the privilege of those who have inherited both the boldness and the insurance that enable this freedom to grow...” (p. 170).

These proponents of art for art’s sake also must occupy an ambiguous, centrist position in relation to both the bourgeois and the people. As Bourdieu notes:

Dividing up the social worlds according to criteria that are first of all aesthetic, a process that leads them to cast the ‘bourgeois’, who are closed to art, and the ‘people’, imprisoned by the material problems of everyday existence, into the same scorned class, they can simultaneously or successively identify with a glorified working class or with a new aristocracy of the spirit. (p. 167)

Here we can see the philosopher-artist’s dilemma, as she is immediately caught between the dichotomous demands of two audiences, each of which begs satisfaction. The bourgeois audience wants ‘high’ art, but high art that has already been tamed, folded into the current field and rendered cliché and passé. The bourgeois audience wants art, or, more aptly, the social capital that comes with its consumption, but not too much art. They desire the same old formulas once more refrained. Similarly, the people, as a bounded and policed, highly stratified body, disciplined and/or coerced into homogeneity and the feigned function of an organic totality, demand ‘low’ art. They demand low art that is easily consumed at their

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15 Bourdieu develops many of these ideas through his examination of the work of Flaubert. It is precisely the aforementioned concept that Gautier notes in his letter to Feydeau, where he writes: “Flaubert was smarter than us. He had the wit to come into the world with money, something that is absolutely indispensable to anyone who wants to get anywhere in art” (qtd. in Bourdieu, 1993b, p. 170).
leisure, a time divested of energy, all of which must instead be given over to labor. The people demand the old, in all its comfortable familiarity, its easiness. They demand a reification of their unity, their homogeneity. In response to these dual demands, whose very satisfaction quashes the capacity for the production of the new, Bourdieu envisions a bourgeois defector, or a semi-subaltern, with the economic and social capital to hold fast against her audience’s interests. But can we really see no other champion than the archetypal Author, a Christ-like figure, single-handedly sacrificing herself on the altar of philosophy-art in the name of the production of the new?

In revolution, the philosopher-artist reigns, but the masses are always in a privileged position to give rise to the new. To be fair, Bourdieu seems to ascribe this authorial position only in retrospect. The entrance of the new into artistic fields seems to be brought about by a whole host of agents, who, with time, are pared down through competition with one another and the force of the larger fields which subsume that of the artistic field, and only in the end are we left with the handful who occupy the dominant positions they have constructed for themselves. Bourdieu’s understanding of ‘the People’ – the mass audience – is a bit confused. Bourdieu too easily buys into the construction of the People as an organic totality, singularly demanding more and more of the same. This constructed binary of individual agent and homogeneous collective, however, misses the mark and neglects other schemas for assemblage.

In particular, Bourdieu misses the concept of the masses (alternately termed the multitude). As Hardt and Negri note, contrary to the People, the multitude preserves social differences, forming an assemblage that refrains from unifying its constituents into a totality, and instead remains plural and multiple. For them, the singularities that compose the multitude are utterly different, and wholly irreducible to sameness (2004, p. 99). They note that the People is
produced through a hegemonic power structure that places itself in a transcendental position over and above the plurality of the social field, whereas the multitude is less stratified, instead arising from virtual interactions on the plane of immanence (2009, p. 169). The multitude emphasizes multiplicity and difference, while seeking to coordinate common actions in a radically democratic practice through horizontal organizational structures. It privileges autonomy, equality, and interdependence amongst its constituent parts, while wielding the emergent power of their assemblage (p. 111-112). And further, this is an assemblage that is in constant flux. Hardt and Negri write:

Multitude should be understood, then, as not a being but a making – or rather a being that is not fixed or static but constantly transformed, enriched, constituted by a process of making. This is a peculiar kind of making, though, insofar as there is no maker that stands behind the process. Through the production of subjectivity, the multitude is itself author of its perpetual becoming other, an uninterrupted process of collective self-transformation. (p. 173).

Finally, for Hardt and Negri, it is only the multitude that can engineer new affects (p. 303).

This is a sentiment that Deleuze and Guattari voiced much earlier, when they argued that the production of new art and literature – and of a truly transformative and revolutionary movement in art and literature – is always the result of a collective action, a multitudinal practice, never attributable to some ‘master,’ but instead to a series of repeated variations produced in

\[\text{16} \text{ Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker note: “The multitude has a focus, a direction, but its actions and decisions are highly distributed. The ‘One’ of the multitude is less a transcendent ‘One,’ serving to homogenize a collectivity, and more like an immanent ‘One’ (we would do better to say a ‘univocity’) that is the very possibility of collective organization” (2007, p. 150). Paolo Virno also writes: “The multitude does not clash with the One; rather, it redefines it. [...] This unity is no longer the State; rather, it is language, intellect, the communcal faculties of the human race. The One is no longer a promise, it is a premise” (2005, p. 150).}\]
common (1986, p. 17). These series of singular iterations catalyze one another until a new form or style of philosophy-art congeals and crystallizes, and must be continued even after this actualization in order to fold this new philosophy-art into the fields of everyday life. For practical reasons, this is an impossible task for a single person, but not for a multitudinous assemblage. The multitude preserves the capacity for invention and creation in its non- or de-stratified form, its horizontal organizational structure, and its privileging of difference, but also provides the catalysis, the momentum and energy, needed to foster changes in philosophy-art. One might also reason that in this particular distribution, which relies on a multiplicity of singular interactions to build a new style, a new affect, the need for a bourgeois defector is lessened, since the economic necessities are highly distributed (as might be the labor of the new philosophy-art’s production).

**How to Get Out of This Place**

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that it is precisely by leaving the plane of capital, by ceaselessly exiting from it, that a mass becomes fully revolutionary and destroys the dominant equilibrium of denumerable ensembles (1987, p. 472, 589). They further tell us that “[productive] desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object” (1983, p. 26). Instead, it is only in social production, in conditions engineered by a dominant class that a lack is installed that fuels a negative and insatiable desire (p. 27-29). It is only by changing the process, by altering production and consumption, that desire can be unknotted, un-repressed, and allowed to plug back in to its object. This initiation of positive desire, this freeing up of becoming, would be the letting loose of a dammed force, that is by its very ontological nature autopoietic and in a circular circuit that ceaselessly constructs and exits conditions of repression. It is in desire then,
in its reunion with its object, in its autopoietic force and its ceaseless exeunt from the plane of capital that there is some small glimmer of hope.

Capital ceaselessly attempts to flow around and subsume the potential obstacles posed to commodity fetishism through its own processes of (de-)(re-) territorialization and (de-)(re-) coding, which Deleuze and Guattari tell us are “the very fabric of [capitalism’s] existence” (1983, p. 33). It is for precisely this reason that the new becomes of utmost importance. Following Flaubert, Bourdieu notes, “The more artists affirm their autonomy and produce works which contain and impose their own norms of evaluation, the greater their chances of pushing the ‘bourgeois’ to the point where they are incapable of appropriating these works for themselves’ (1983b, p. 168-169). Bourdieu further notes that, “At the limit, pure art, like pure love, is not made to be consumed” (p. 169). Hardt and Negri would agree with such an assertion, as for them the engineering of new affects is deeply linked with their conception of communism (2009, p. 273), and is always the product of a positive desire that utterly annihilates desire-as-lack (p. 180).

But further, for Hardt and Negri, this expression of positive desire in the form of (affective) art is one that gathers momentum and grows in strength as it accelerates (p. 283), and institutes revolutionary force at both ontological (i.e., virtual) and social/economic/political (i.e., actual) levels. This system becomes autopoietic and self-perpetuating, as each instance of both production and consumption expands bodily capacities to produce (p. 302-304), while at the same time each act of production and consumption increases, rather than diminishes, the amount of affects available in a radically democratic fashion (p. 283-284). From this perspective, we can assume that any encounter with the common can return us to utility, quality, intensive properties, and the concrete relations between both the individual and the object, and the collective and the object; and further, this network of common wealth can’t but perpetually accelerate, continually
amassing wealth that is made available in a radically democratic fashion, and continuously expanding bodily capacities, its mode of production, and its rate of consumption all at once. While it is possible for capital to circumscribe this, and try renting access to certain sections of common wealth, this is always an expropriation of the common destined to wither and die in the foreign soil of capital.

As Guattari noted, it is impossible to know just which margins are recoupable by capital and which are capable of igniting true revolutions. We must always ask whether the phenomenon, whether each instance of affective engineering, despite its scale, is capable of putting the capitalist system “radically into question” and introducing “an irreversible aspiration for new spaces of liberty” (2007, p.108-109). Guattari writes:

Only the appearance of new ways of relating to the world and to society will alter the individual’s ‘libidinal fixation’ to capital and to its various crystallizations of power. This power can prevail only to the extent that an overwhelming majority of individuals not only participate in it, but also unconsciously adhere to it. (p. 109)

These are things that we must continually investigate, always preserving the tension in our models, rather than straying immediately towards the dystopia/utopia binary, as we investigate digitally catalyzed movements in aesthetico-politico-socio-economic fields.
CHAPTER 4
DYSTOPIC PILOERECTION: ALGORITHMIC NOO- AND BIO-STRATIFICATION

Introduction

The abundance of new opportunities for self-expression offered by contemporary technologies must be considered alongside the lessened control we have over information and models in distant computer systems. Data shadows or ghosts based on tangents of personal information (stripped of context) increasingly affect life chances. Individuals often have little knowledge of the existence or consequences of these databases and of how their identity is constructed or might be challenged.

Gary Marx, 2006, p. 46
Spinoza once wrote: “For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone […] For no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he [sic] could explain all its functions” (1996, p. 71-72). This is essentially the point that Manuel DeLanda makes when he argues that the most advanced social scientific modeling systems are incapable of mapping the diagrams of the individuals they study (2006, p. 29). While these claims certainly still hold true, they perhaps hold less true given recent technological advances in computation capacity, algorithms, and their employment in processes of data solicitation, retention, mining, and indexing. Google’s efforts to build a stable, scalable, and speedy navigation system for web surfing, first through the analysis of the hyperlink structure of the web itself, and second through the analysis of each person’s interaction with that web, are a particularly strong example of these new trends. While these efforts are largely kept in the darkness of secrecy, jargon, and technological complexity, and while they appear to many as harmless, if not a necessity, it is precisely for these reasons that they bare further investigation and criticism.

In this paper, I hope to take some of the basic theoretical concepts that have emerged from new media studies and apply them to the case of Google. In particular, I will look at the algorithmic structure of Google’s search (i.e., PageRank) and its advertising program (i.e., AdWords). I will begin by taking a look at the recent literature, especially the concepts of ‘post-hegemony’ and ‘control’ that have been emerging as the new dominant paradigm for studying digital power relations. I will speak briefly about methodology, before moving into a detailed analysis of how Google generates its organic and non-organic search results. I will then analyze these processes in order to show that Google has traditionally operated as a hegemonic and normative structure, reifying existent digital topographies heavily weighted in the favor of
educated, white, wealthy, cultural elites. In closing, I will take a look at Google’s recent moves towards the personalization of search, and their implications for Google’s digital power relations.

**Modulation in Societies of Control**

The target of control is not the production of subjects whose behaviors express internalized social norms; rather, control aims at a never-ending modulation of moods, capacities, affects and potentialities, assembled in genetic codes, identification numbers, ratings profiles, and preference listings, that is to say, in bodies of data and information (including the human body as information and data). Control ... is a biopolitics that works at the molecular level of bodies, at the informational substrate of matter.

Patricia Clough, 2007, p. 19

The popular introduction of the internet into the American public in the early ‘90s led to a flood of utopian discourse predicting that the world had irreversibly progressed into a new age of radical democracy, egalitarianism, liberty, public wealth and information, art, ad inf. By the late ‘90s and early 2000’s, people had already become disillusioned, and, hungover on the digital soma they’d been sipping for nearly a decade, began to decry the horrors of the digital dystopia. Popular themes of perfect surveillance, disruption of privacy, openness to thieves, hackers, spammers, scammers, extortion of money and time, and the blackboxing of most technical processes (highly guarded and the source of continuous litigation) came to dominate discourse on the digital. Current writing in new media studies is still grappling with this binaristic and technologically determinist discourse on the digital, and in fact a vast number of progressive scholarship in the field still takes the time to rebut this discourse in favor of adding some gray scale between the dichotomies of free will and determinism, utopia and dystopia, agency and slavery, etc. (see Chun, 2006, 2011; Mackenzie & Vurdubakis, 2011; Galloway & Thacker, 2007; Cheney-Lippold 2011; Munster 2011).
The vast majority of these theorists insert this gray scale by taking up Gilles Deleuze’s (1995) thinking on ‘Societies of Control’. A large portion of this majority follows the work of Scott Lash, who traces a movement from hegemony to post-hegemony. Lash describes post-hegemonic power as an immanent and sinister force that “penetrates your very being” (2007, p. 57). He writes, “power, previously extensive and operating from without, becomes intensive and now works from within” (p. 59), and further notes that “if the hegemonic order works through a logic of cultural reproduction, the post-hegemonic power operates through a cultural logic of invention, hence not of reproduction but of chronic production of economic, social and political relations” (p. 56). David Beer notes that Lash “advocates a vision of dynamic interfaces and virtual spaces of engagement where users are involved in acts of invention or content creation (both actively creating content and passively generating informational traces as they go about their daily routines)” (2009, p. 992). Here, “power is a part of our ‘being’, it lives with us and reacts to us” (p. 993).

This is an understanding that is echoed by Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker’s notions of protocol, which is also an immanent, post-hegemonic force. They write, “Abstracted into a concept, protocol may be defined as a horizontal, distributed control apparatus that guides both the technical and political formation of computer networks, biological systems and other media” (2007, p. 29). For them, “Protocol is a technology that regulates flow, directs netspace, codes relationships, and connects life-forms” (p. 30). They further note that “protocol is less about power (confinement, discipline, normativity), and more about control (modulation, distribution, flexibility” (p. 31). In their particular interpretation of control, “bodies are consonant with more distributed modes of individuation that enable their infinite variation (informatics records, databases, consumer profiles, genetic codes, identity shopping, workplace
biometrics)” (p. 40-41). For Galloway and Thacker, protocological control has no interest in hegemony or discipline: “Network control is unbothered by individuated subjects (subjected subjects). In fact, individuated subjects are the very producers and facilitators of networked control. Express yourself! Output some data! It is how distributed control functions best!” (p. 41).

While this is not to say that Galloway and Thacker don’t provide a significant contribution, their hasty acceptance of the notion of control and post-hegemony as inherent to the very logic of protocol is a mistake. This mistake is perhaps accidental, though, as they seem to contradict this understanding at points in their book. They note that the development of protocol results in “an opt-in, total world system” (p. 58). To which, I would ask, what is an ‘opt-in’ and ‘total world system’ to which *there are no other options*, if not a hegemonic structure? As I’ll shortly show, the human body cannot hope to navigate the web in a practical or purposive fashion without employing some variety of search engine. They further note that “the protological nature of networks is as much about the maintenance of the status quo as it is about the disturbance of the network” (p. 78), and since they themselves describe networks as diachronic structures, this maintenance can’t but come about through a continual reproduction and reification.

**Strata and Methods**

As Galloway and Thacker note, protocols always operate dynamically on an ever-shifting and heterogeneous aggregate of nodes and edges, and thus any counterprotological practice must similarly operate by way of constant de- and re-codings. For them, these new codings must occur at once in discipline, methodology, and praxis (2007, p. 100). I tend to agree with them as such,
and thus will take the risk of refusing (respectfully) the pressure to adopt a tried and true ‘methodology’. I will, however, be drawing on a number of theoretical concepts in my attempt to sort out the current and potential power relations behind Google’s Search, a case study which is only bracketed into a qualitative analysis by necessity, as Google is intensely secretive about the vast majority of their data, technology, and practices. These concepts will obviously include those which I have reviewed in the previous section, but I would like to make one important addition that might better help us understand digital power relations in a more practical way (i.e., a way that privileges continuity over binaries, paradigm shifts, and unbridgeable ruptures).

As we’ve seen above, in an attempt to escape the early reductionism of the digital into the utopia/dystopia binary, many critics have turned to Deleuze’s extension of Foucault. They near unanimously draw upon a short piece by Deleuze titled ‘Postscript on Societies of Control,’ often without mention of the bulk of Deleuze’s other work. Deleuze spent decades and thousands of pages developing an ontological framework from which he eventually came to (offhandedly) theorize about the society of control and its processes of modulation. As such, it would greatly benefit the conversation about digital power to familiarize ourselves with at least a few key concepts from Deleuze, which I argue will also help us to develop a more practically useful and nuanced understanding of said power relations. The primary concepts that we must forge a base familiarity with are becoming, (de-)(re-)territorialization, and stratification.

Deleuze’s ontology rests on a notion of becoming, similar to the Heraclitan flux, in which all things have an internal impulsion to continually change, develop, mutate, etc.¹ This state of

¹ This is a concept that can – and has – taken up whole volumes. For the sake to time and space, I’ve given the barest bones of the ontological framework. For a more specific summary, see Cliff Stagoll’s definition in the Deleuze Dictionary. For detailed work on the topic, see Massumi, 1992; Hardt 1993; Buchanan, 2000; De Landa, 2002. Also see Chapter 6 of Deleuze & Guattari, 1987.
flux is not uninterrupted though; the becoming of a particular thing moves in fits and starts, pooling or congealing into a semi-stable state for a period of time, or what Deleuze describes as a territoriality. Each territorialization has its own particular modes of egress, lines that can restart becoming with a jolt, in a movement of deterritorialization. So first we have this movement from flux into a territorialization, and a subsequent return to flux by a process of deterritorialization. Finally, each deterritorialization is coupled with a movement of reterritorialization, which is a movement back into territoriality, albeit a differently territorialized territoriality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 54-56, 174, 303-326). And this is how becoming operates in the actual world. Things pool into territories and codes, into dense webs of associations, habits, and cycles, all with distinct modes of egress, or deterritorialization, which are eventually followed. In a process of relative deterritorialization, these territories and codes, associations, habits, and cycles start to come undone, partially or wholly, and as they do, a subsequent reterritorialization occurs, in which the same thing is made manifest in a new and different territory and code, web of associations, habits, and cycles, etc.

Stratification is a process of thickening or hardening, like the compaction of sediment into rock, in which the territoriality and coding of a particular thing become rigid. The thing becomes trapped in its current instantiation, and is no longer free to enter into becomings through (de-)(re-)territorializations. Deleuze and Guattari write:

Strata are Layers, Belts. They consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy, or producing upon the body of the earth molecules large and small and organizing them into molar aggregates. Strata are acts of capture, they are like ‘black holes’
or occlusions striving to seize whatever comes within their reach. They operate by coding and territoriality. (1987, p. 40)

Strata are essential to the actual world; without them, our everyday experience of it would be totally unstable. They arrest the constant process of becoming, of (de-)(re-) territorialization, for a certain period of time, and provide a bit of consistency. Deleuze and Guattari note, “The principal strata binding human beings are the organism, significance and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection” (p.134). And so we can see that stratifications like organic systems, semiotics and language, and subjectivity are all essential and useful to human experience, but they are also limiting and potentially harmful. These stratifications give rise to a very specific perspective that is too easily totalized and objectified, resulting in profound philosophical errors, violence, hatred, prejudice, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, phallogocentrism, etc. Further, any coding or territoriality can become stratified, and we see this in various arenas: Monotheism, Standard Academic English, Nationalism, all forms of systematic bigotry, heterosexism (esp. with organic/biological evidence provided as backing), etc. These concepts of change and its constant arrest can help us better understand the hegemonic and post-hegemonic operations of power in the digital.

**The Case of Google Search**

When Larry Page and Sergey Brin first came to Stanford University to study Computer Science, all search was still conducted by
algorithmic content analysis following one of three main models: the Boolean Model, the Vector Space Model, and the Probabilistic Model. Despite their differing attempts to deal with polysemy and differently sized data sets, these models function relatively similarly\(^2\). In the case of Internet search, each engine employs a web *crawler module* or ‘spider’ that follows hyperlinks from website to website, and webpage to webpage, sending their content to what is called a *page repository*. The page repository is essentially a copy of the website (and the webpages it contains) that is maintained for a set period of time on the search engine’s servers. From the page repository, each site is sent to an *indexing module* that gathers relevant data and compresses it. In the case of content-based search, the indexing module would catalog the occurrence of specific words in each website. As search engines became more complex, the indexing module would also catalog how many times each word occurred in each site, and in which areas of the site (metatags, header, body, etc.). From that information, it would build an *index* – in this case a *content index* – that for each keyword contained a catalog of sites that contained that keyword, along with the number of times and locations of that keyword’s occurrence. All of these processes occur independently of any user interaction, and thus are labeled *query independent*. From this data, a *search query* would enter what is called a *query module*. The query module translates the keywords into the language of the indexes in order to locate all sites containing the keywords entered. These sites are then sent to a *ranking module* that organizes the results – in the case of content-based search – based on each site’s *content score*. The content score was based on how well the sites matched the keywords entered, how many times each keyword appeared on each site, and where the keywords appeared on the site (e.g., appearances in the header were often weighted more heavily than appearances in the body).

\(^2\) For more information on the differences between these three models, see Langville & Meyer, 2006, p. 5-8.
The first problem with content-based search was that it was unreliable, firstly because it was easily *bombed* or *spammed*. Web administrators who wanted their sites to show up higher in search results, or more often, could flood their websites with frequently searched keywords. Most often this bombing was confined to the metatags, which were invisible to people browsing the internet unless they opened up the page source and actually looked at the coding. Besides bombing and spamming, the sheer number of indexed pages on the web began to make content-based search less and less useful. The number of relevant pages to any keyword, even without bombing or spamming, became more than any user would sort through, as the average user only looks at the first 10 to 20 search results (Langville & Meyer, 2007, p. 10). Thus, a more reliable and efficient means of determining which search results to prioritize was desperately needed in the late ‘90s. The second problem with this type of search was that it had little ability to deal with polysemy (i.e., search engines had trouble determining which meaning users had in mind when they employed words with multiple meanings, and also in discovering websites that used different words to signify the same thing as the keyword). For example, users looking for information on bats would perhaps get flooded with pages about baseball, even if they had been looking for information about the animal species. Similarly, users that searched for information on bathroom plumbing would not get the relevant websites that chose to use the word restroom, water closet, toilet, or lavatory. This second problem is one that we will return to shortly, but for now we will focus on Google’s solution to the previous problem.

In 1998, Page and Brin introduced the world to a new type of ranking based on *link analysis*. They created an algorithm called *PageRank* that exploited the topography of the internet’s hyperlinks in order to add a supplementary weight to the ranking module (i.e., in addition to the content score) that is now referred to as the *popularity score*. In their book that
traces the origins of link analysis, and PageRank in particular, Amy Langville and Carl Meyer note, “PageRank’s thesis is that a webpage is important if it is pointed to by other important pages” (2006, p. 28). This pointing is done through hyperlinks, which can be broken down into *inlinks* and *outlinks*. Inlinks are links bringing traffic into a specific page, and outlinks are links within that same page that direct traffic outwards to other pages. Google’s PageRank begins by calculating how many inlinks each of the pages that it indexes has and storing that information in its *structure index* (a compliment to the aforementioned content index). Page and Brin considered each inlink a ‘recommendation,’ and thus used this new structure index to determine a popularity score in the ranking module.

Foreseeing how easily this new calculation could be bombed (all web administrators would have to do is generate inlinks for their page to improve its rank), Page and Brin instituted the most important part of the PageRank algorithm, which calculates the *quality* of each inlink. The more inlinks a ‘recommender’ has, the more valuable its outlink (or ‘recommendation’) is. As seen in the example illustration, B clearly has the largest PageRank. It has inlinks from three sites of tiny reputation, 2 of small reputation, and one of medium reputation. What is interesting though is that C, *which has only one inlink* (from B), receives the second highest PageRank *solely because of B’s reputation*. Also, based on the
number and quality of inlinks, combined with a dampening factor, PageRank determines the likelihood that a web surfer will end up on any of these pages (which is reflected in the percentages listed in each node). What is important to note here, then, is that not only is C given a higher PageRank based solely on B’s recommendation, but also web surfers have a 34.9% chance of landing on C, even though it only has one inlink (as opposed to E, which has six).

Langville and Meyer write, “PageRank has emerged as the dominant link analysis model, partly due to its query independence\(^3\), its virtual immunity to spamming, and Google’s huge business success” (2007, p. 26). But Google’s business success at once is and is not based on PageRank. While the new search engine shook up the world of search, and developed a steady following in the late ‘90s, Google was a typical start-up and was slow to generate revenues. It wasn’t until 2001, the first full year that AdWords – Google’s system that sold advertising spots alongside and on top of its search results – was in place that Google began to take off. In 2001 Google brought in over $86 million, with more than $10 million in the black, and a 400 percent increase from the previous year (Levy, 2011, p. 70). Since then, Google’s revenues have continued to skyrocket. Google netted $1.71 billion off of advertisement sales in the U.S. alone in 2011, and is set to net another $2.53 billion in 2012 (“Google Edges Closer to Facebook…”). Google reports its gross advertising revenue for 2011 at $36.5 billion, which is 96% of its total revenues (reported at $37.9 billion), and has already taken in another $10.2 billion in the first quarter of 2011 (“2012 Financial Tables”). It is thus advertisements – the non-organic search results – that are undeniably the most important part of the query process for Google. In fact, Google’s CEO, Eric Schmidt, echoed this sentiment rather nefariously during the 2006 Q2 earnings conference call when he said, “Ultimately our goal at Google is to have the strongest

\(^3\) As noted earlier, web crawling and indexing take place independently of users’ queries, and thus Google’s structural index actually contains calculated PageRanks for every webpage that it has crawled and indexed.
advertising network and all the world’s information, that’s part of our mission” (Bogatin, 2006). Not surprisingly, it is well-funded developments in advertising algorithms that are currently reshaping the organic search results. But first, let’s get the other half of the picture, as AdWords and AdSense work quite differently from PageRank.

Google’s AdWords has largely been developed by two of their earliest hires, Eric Veach and Salar Kamanger. The system places what Google calls ‘sponsored links’ along the right-hand side of the organic search results, which consist of short text-based advertisements, and what were originally called ‘premium sponsored links’ in a box at the top of the organic search results. Advertisers purchase the sponsored link spaces through a constant series of online auctions. Rather than charge advertisers per impression, previously sold in units of a thousand views, Google only charges advertisers when someone clicks on their ads. Advertisers select keywords and enter a bid for how much they are willing to pay for each click-through⁴. While the premium spots were initially only available by contract with larger corporations, Kamanger eventually convinced Google that it was more in line with

⁴ This also allowed Google to generate advertisements from large numbers of smaller, long tail businesses, as well as maintain larger clients. Steven Levy writes: “Google wanted something that would work on Internet scale. Since Google searches were often unique, with esoteric keywords, there was a possibility to sell ads for categories that otherwise never would have justified placement. On the Internet it was possible to make serious money by catering to the ‘long tail’ of businesses that could not buy their way into mass media. (The long tail is the term used to refer to smaller, geographically disparate businesses and interests. The Internet – particularly with the help of a search engine like Google – made long-tail enterprises easy to reach.) If you made the system self-service, you could handle thousands of small advertisers, and the overhead would be so low that customers could buy ads very cheaply. So in October 2000 Google launched a product catering to smaller operations that had not previously contemplated an online buy” (2011, p. 85).
their vision, more efficient, and more profitable to determine whose ads were placed in the premium positions in the same way that the rankings of the sponsored links was determined (Levy, 2011, p. 109-112). However, the price that advertisers bid per click-through on each keyword is only part of the ranking module that determines which positions the ads are placed.

From the beginning, Brin and Page only foresaw advertisement as making up a third of their business (Levy, 2007, p. 77-78), and they were determined to sell advertising space in their own way. Much like their initial goal of ridding search results of unwanted spam and delivering useful results, Brin and Page envisioned their advertisement program as one that would be valuable to their users (p. 78). Even Veach, one of two key developers working on the AdWords project, puts it rather simply. He says, “I hate ads” (qtd. in Levy, 2007, p. 83). But, since users were already searching for something, Google thought it might be in a unique position to provide relevant and helpful advertisements to its users. As Steven Levy, author of the most comprehensive history of all things Google, notes, Google had a different philosophy when it came to advertising as a whole, “Google ads were answers. They were solutions” (p. 112). Instead of selling spots for fixed prices or to the highest bidder, Google began to prioritize advertisements based on a set of criteria known as ad quality. Levy notes, “The new system instituted financial incentives for better ads. It lowered the price for effective ads and meted out monetary punishment and even an online ad version of the death penalty for bad ads” (p. 91).

Initially, ad quality was solely determined by each ad’s estimated and past CTR for the given keyword (i.e., the percentage of people that clicked in the past, and that Google estimated would click again, on the ad after searching for one of the ad’s keywords) (p. 85-86, 92). Google’s entire ad model depended on their ability to accurately calculate the past CTR and predict the future CTR for each advertisement’s individual keywords, and it needed to be able to
do so millions of times a day in a matter of half a second. Further, Google had very strict standards in terms of CTR. Any ad with less than a 1 percent CTR was immediately pulled, which was an exponentially higher bar than anywhere else in advertising (p. 111). As such, Google invested enormous amounts of effort, talent, and money into mastering these calculations (p. 116). Further, they used the resources at hand, namely the vast amounts of recorded data not only about how users interacted in the past with Google’s advertisements, but also how their users interacted with organic search results. In the end, Google became so adept at their predictions that they could calculate rather accurately both the CTR for any given ad as well as the number of sales those clicks would lead to. Qing Wu, a decision support analyst at Google, actually developed a series of dashboards registering information and calculating the shifts in patterns of queries based on season, time of day, climate, and even international news, events, and crises. Wu notes that he panics whenever his calculations are a bit off, but notes that they rarely are (p. 119-120).

While Google is very secretive about the precise number and functioning of the added quality content criteria, they do provide the following, rather vague and opaque, enumeration:

- **Your keyword’s past clickthrough rate (CTR):** How often that keyword led to clicks on your ad.
- **Your display URL’s past CTR:** How often you received clicks with your display URL.
- **Your account history:** The overall CTR of all the ads and keywords in your account.
- **The quality of your landing page:** How relevant, transparent, and easy to navigate your page is.
- **Your keyword/ad relevance:** How relevant your keyword is to your ads
- **Your keyword/search relevance:** How relevant your keyword is to what a customer searches for.
- **Geographic performance:** How successful your account has been in the regions you’re targeting.
- **Your ad’s performance on a site:** How well your ad’s been doing on this and similar sites (if you’re targeting the Display Network).
By far the most mysterious criterion is the ‘quality of the landing page,’ as the precise, algorithmic measurement of transparency and ease of navigation is unavailable. The relevancy of the page, the keyword to the ad, and the keyword to the search though all come out of Google’s research into Artificial Intelligence. Georges Harik, one of Google’s first ten employees, had an interesting idea about data compression. He thought that data compression was inherently linked to understanding data, and thus the key to indexing meaning in web pages might come from their very compression (Levy, 2011, p. 100).

Harik was paired with Noam Shazeer, and the two set off on an AI project that largely operated through linguistic practices of syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis. Levy writes:

Harik and Shazeer studied probabilistic models of things such as why people often use clusters of words in the same phrases. […] The secret to compressing web pages into themes, they discovered, turned out to be prediction: if you can predict what will happen next, you can compress the page. The payoff is that as you get better at predicting a page, you get better at understanding it. Since Harik and Shazeer had the benefit of many terabytes of data documenting the web and the way Google’s users interacted with it, they made good progress and developed ideas about identifying what clusters of words went together. Then, using machine learning, they trained the system to find more clusters and develop rules. (p. 101)

The project was eventually named Phil, and became a crucial part of their advertising model. It was Phil that was behind AdSense’s ability to match advertisements to the content of the websites hosting them, and to match advertisements to users data, specifically in Gmail. One can
also safely assume that it is Phil that calculates the relevance of your page to your ad, of your ad to your keyword, and of your keyword to a search. It is also safe to assume that the programs helping you complete your search terms, and circumscribing polysemy to deliver accurate results, also have their roots in Phil, and came about by way of advertising funding.

Stratification by Search

*PageRank*, in particular, describes the attention value of any object to such an extent that it has become the most important source of visibility and authority even in comparison with mass media. *PageRank* ultimately provides a formula of value accumulation that is hegemonic and compatible across different media domains: an effective diagram to describe the *attention economy* and the *cognitive economy* in general.

Matteo Pasquinelli, 2010, p. 155

Not including Google’s institution of personalized search, it is, quite simply, a hegemonic structure. As many critics have noted, the flood of information that the internet puts at your
fingertips is overwhelming (Virilio, 2000; Lovink, 2000; Wark, 2005; Chun, 2008, 2011; Langville & Meyer, 2006; etc.). The human body must enter into an assemblage with some sort of machine that radically enhances its ability to move quickly through the truly vast amount of information now available, or consign itself to the chance encounters of surfing. You have to choose a search engine, and Google, whose last estimates put its index at over 8 billion pages, is the most likely choice. And this is the first hegemonic aspect of search: it beckons to us. We have no alternatives if we want to move through the internet practically and purposively, and thus must heed the call.

You aren’t just choosing a search engine; you are also giving in to it. Each search engine constitutes a unique and highly specific perspective on internet topology, topography, and navigation; each search engine has a very particular method for determining what is and isn’t relevant for each query. In choosing a search engine, you are choosing to adopt a certain perspective on and mode of navigation through the internet. Google’s original perspective is that of PageRank, where link analysis is confined to inlinks, and sites are valued based on the quality of their ‘recommendations’. The problem with this system of recommendations is that it perpetually reifies previous internet topographies by facilitating traffic to sites that are already ‘highly recommended,’ and thus eventually generates more inlinks for those sites5. While there is room for change if sites can generate enough popularity and maintain it long enough for all of their new inlinks to be crawled, in general, the sites that were valuable remain valuable, and

5 And this happens in a number of roundabout ways, as a click-through is not the same as an inlink. First, web traffic is monitored, and sites that generate a lot of traffic also generate publicity and capital. High-traffic sites are paid attention to, both in the digital press and blogs, and by other sites looking for a reputable recommendation to link to. They also generate capital, which allows them to further market themselves through ad campaigns, and to further develop their own sites, services, and products. Both of these actions help to generate more inlinks, and, in particular, inlinks from high quality recommenders. Second, since these are the only sites that the majority of people are interacting with, it is likely that any links they post elsewhere on the web will be to sites with higher PageRanks.
those that break through do so only with a large amount of capital (venture or otherwise). The average search of a few keywords will almost always yield enough of a surplus of results that the top 10 to 20, which are the only ones the majority of users will ever see, will be dominated by sites with medium to high PageRanks. And further, these sites with high PageRanks have a vast normative dimension to them.

It is relatively obvious that these search results will be socio-economically normative, they will also be racially, ethnically, and culturally normative as well. Even in the U.S., where internet access is relatively cheap, there has been a statistical deviation based on race/ethnicity. From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of white people that use the internet on a daily basis has generally been 5-20 percent higher than that of blacks, and 1-10 percent higher than that of Hispanics (“Usage Over Time”). It is important to keep in mind here though that this is simply internet users, and not necessarily those that will directly create internet content that contains outlinks (‘recommendations’) for sites. In 2003, 77 percent of white internet users created content, while only 9 percent of both blacks and Hispanics that used the internet created original content. 75 percent of all content was created by people with some college or a college degree, with 46 percent coming from people with a college degree or higher. 31 percent of all content creation came from those with a household income over $75,000, and users that could afford broadband at the time were almost twice as likely to generate original content (“Demographics of Content Creators”). While this data is certainly outdated, the systematic preservation and reification of internet topography by PageRank’s link analysis preserves its relevance.

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6 There seemed to be only a negligible difference between self-identified males and females in all the studies I looked at, and large-scale demographic information on sexuality was unavailable.
The websites that became, and remain, popular were largely propelled to success by highly educated, wealthy, white people. While the extent to which this is reflected in Google’s search results certainly bears further investigation, there is no doubt that the hyperlink topography on the web contains a normative facet that is reified and disseminated through Google search. While Google is certainly dynamic, in the sense that its crawlers are constantly moving through the web and updating its index, it is also largely synchronic, as the index needs to be built and stored independently of the query and cannot be continually performed in real time because of search time constraints (a new web crawl and index for each query would currently be impossible, given the sheer number of queries, and even for an individual query would take much longer than the privileged half second or less that Google aims for). As a synchronic index, there is always a time gap between (large parts of) the index and the current hyperlink topography on the web, and during this delay Google results provide fresh traffic and inlinks to previously highly ranked sites, thus preserving their position of dominance. Sites without previously high PageRanks must persist, and generate new inlinks, independently of Google search until Googlebot (Google’s web crawler program) can index all of the new inlinks and adjust the sites’ PageRanks. Sites able to persist in such a fashion are usually well financed.

This traditional hegemonic and normative structure of Google search is only enhanced by its AI initiatives and AdWords program. Phil actively catalogs language usage through syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis, and thus reifies normative language usage in a number of ways. One key way is by serving up suggestions for search phrasings, first in the results (e.g., Did you mean...), and now in the search box itself. Another is by the pairing of particular ads with particular contexts, which at once reifies a particular usage and the non-linguistic connection between the impulse to buy particular products when in a particular mood or thinking
about, learning about, and/or looking at new things. Phil also helps AdWords to operate normatively, as advertisers are rewarded for using language (primarily keywords, but also the content of the landing pages of their advertisements) in the normative way that Phil derives from its analysis of the web at large. Advertisements’ quality content score is partially dependent on their ability to appropriately match their advertisement to their site, their advertisement to their keywords, and their keywords to the search. This normativity is also reflected in the CTR standards that Google holds, as it will only deliver ads with a significant CTR for the given keyword, and from advertisers that have built a CTR-based reputation for themselves.

Finally, AdWords operates largely in a black box. While Google provides tips and strategies to help advertisers improve their quality content scores, these tips are vague and the criteria kept rather opaque. And even though every advertiser has to purchase ads in the same way now, the ad sales staff traditionally responsible for selling premium space to larger corporations has been maintained. They now assume the role of “mediators between advertisers and algorithms” (Levy, 2001, p. 112), or, in short, they professional help larger clients to craft their advertisements to suit Google’s quality content standards and bidding practices. While the autodidacts among the smaller advertisers can work to achieve a similar quality of advertisement as those being professionally aided, the vast majority of successful ad campaigns (as well as the lowest prices) will certainly go to companies with the capital to invest in their successful development.

In short, Google produces both its organic and non-organic search results by algorithmically cataloguing the hyperlink structure of the web, the noological flows produced by web surfers’ navigational patterns, and abstracting them into an index in order to disseminate the proper refrains. This index constitutes a stratification of the digital noo-sphere. The refrains
disseminated are always plural, as the search results deliver refrains targeted to the keyword, but always coupled with the affective intensity of sites with descriptions and titles that draw clicks (i.e., visits), well-designed sites, highly trafficked sites (and thus sites ‘in the public eye’), sites that are easily navigated and user friendly, secure sites, and the non-organic search results offer up the affective intensity of desire-as-lack (i.e., the need to consume), of convenience and practical purchases (i.e., the products advertised are matched to your search), and etc. These refrains are employed in a process of modulation, as described above, but the key difference is that they are employed according to a particular operative logic that is hegemonic. This is because they are always determined according to an index, that, despite being continually updated, is by necessity a diachronic snapshot of past noological flows. But further, since these refrains are disseminated according to such a diachronic index, and the traffic they produce will influence all proceeding updates to the index, their dissemination works to reify and reproduce the same, dated noosphere. This I take to be a digital form of hegemony, which is only further embedded by its necessity (i.e., one cannot hope to navigate the internet effectively without entering into these circuits of reification and reproduction) and by the fact that those with the most agency to produce the noo-logical flows (esp. hyperlinks, but also click-throughs) are predominantly white, middle- or upper-class, citizens of advanced industrial nations, etc.

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7 I.e., the amount of data to be indexed, the sheer number of sites available online, prevent this entire index from being updated in real time.
In fact, it is likely that this collection of search terms, IP addresses, and cookies represents perhaps the largest, most sensitive single collection of data extant, on- or offline. Google may or may not choose to do the relatively easy work necessary to translate its collection of search data into a database of personally identifiable data, but it does have the data and ability to query personal data out of the collection at any time if it chooses (or is made to choose by a government, intruder, disgruntled worker, etc.).

Hal Roberts, Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University quoted in Stalder & Mayer, 2010, p. 102

As we have seen, Google has traditionally worked at a large scale as a hegemonic and normative machine. It is a *stratification-machine*, a conjunction apparatus, that affixes itself to the noological and affective flows of the internet, by developing a topology of link analysis. The digital topography that it both graphs and grafts itself onto is continually reified and disseminated. The delay in crawling and indexing preserves existing hegemony, and each new dissemination helps to further establish its power. Essentially, what Google does is stratify its own territorializations. It graphs the hyperlink topography of the internet, grafts itself onto that topography, and then through its constant disseminations and lag, it slowly reifies and cements that topography, or, in short, it stratifies noological and affective flows. This is initially troubling because it is at once a benefit to human users looking to make sense of the internet, and a hindrance to the very becoming (i.e. development, mutation, etc.) of the internet. However, the demographics of the web’s surfers and content creators turn this picture into one that is much more troubling, as the internet is not simply being stratified at the species level, but instead at the level of race, ethnicity, nationality, income, and education. The topology and topography that are being stratified are both the products of highly educated, white, wealthy elites.

In terms of PageRank, AdWords, and AdSense, Google’s power dynamics do not quite follow the articulation of post-hegemonic power that critics like Lash, Beer, Galloway, and
Thacker all endorse. There is a constant reproduction of the original hyperlink topography of the internet, as users are continually directed to initially strong or well-financed sites, and content generation that contain outlinks is still dominated by well-educated, white, wealthy elites, not to mention Americans, and to a lesser extent, Western Europeans. We do, however, see a movement in the direction of these articulations of post-hegemony in Google’s relatively recent moves to personalize search results. While any discussion of the personalization of search results is rather limited, as Google in particular is very secretive about just which pieces of data it uses and how it employs them to build a personalized index that is added to the ranking module, it does merit some discussion. And in fact, it is this operationalization of personalized data through mining, indexing, and ranking that has been the primary concern of most theorists (see Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Beer, 2009; Mackenzie & Vurdubakis 2011; Pasquinelli, 2010; Stalder & Mayer, 2010).

Drawing on old regimes of biopower and their employment of statistics, polling, demography, and psychography, the personalization of search similarly begins to build user profiles, but at the individual level, in order to better predict future behavior. This is in the interest, first and foremost, of its advertisers, who are particularly keen on targeting the individual bits of data that can be mined to make up a user profile (Stalder & Mayer, 2010, p. 98-99). For a long time Google has done click tracking based on log files containing basic details, like the IP address, location, date, time, time zone, language, operating system, and browser that interacted with its servers. But to this initial data set, Google has done nothing but add. As Steven Levy notes, “Google […] had been diving for data from day one. Brin and Page began with data mining” (2011, p. 119). Today Google uses these same log files to track user activity on every site employing its JavaScript programs and other web beacons, and installing cookies.
on the computers of everyone that visits sites containing AdSense (a multi-billion dollar program, spanning a vast number of otherwise unrelated sites), AdWords, DoubleClick, Google Analytics, or any other Google software. These cookies track movement and activity on sites unrelated to Google, and even log information that is input into digital forms.

Google also saves every search query, its language, the country code and domain, advanced search options, the search results, and the CTR of each of those results. It follows how users interact with websites, magazines, books, pictures, and commodities. It logs every character ever typed into the search box in Google Chrome, as well as financial and medical information, even that entered over a secure (i.e., https://) connection. It monitors the files that users keep on Google Desktop, the emails they send and receive with Gmail, the stories they read and sites that they bookmark, their discussion groups and chats. It records their translation requests, both the languages selected and the message being translated. It records personal information, like addresses, phone numbers, life events, social gatherings and interactions, and even facial recognition data through your photos and videos. It records places you’ve visited and/or want to visit. It records your schedule, meetings, appointments, and significant events. It records your shopping habits and your methods of payment, as well as your stock portfolio information. Google Health records your doctors appointments, medical history, conditions, treatments, prescriptions, procedures, test results, etc. It records what your house, neighborhood, town, city, state looks like. It records what videos you watch, what mobile carrier you use. Android phone users even provide Google with location updates, allowing Google to target them with geo-located ads (Stalder & Mayer, 2010, p. 101-105). It does all of this, first and foremost, to provide better fodder for its advertising campaigns, which make up the vast majority of its
total revenues, and secondly, to provide a satisfying user experience that will entice people to continually feed it more data by interacting with Google programs, servers, and affiliates.

The reason that this individualization of search is so problematic is that it is teleological, it extrapolates into the future from the past, and calculates the probability that the past you (the you of its index) will like the future result of your query. Here, Google is predicting what the you of the past already likes or has a high probability of liking, and also of liking at the very moment that the search result is returned to you (n.b. Google’s constant metric of CTR). What Google is not calculating is the results that you might come to like, with time and experience, with change, after having encountered. Google will not serve you anything you have yet to develop a taste for, and as such begins to reify all of the personal stratifications of habit and taste that you have already entered into. It is not the case that personalized search provides an infinite realm of open possibilities for the user to surf through on a voyage of discovery, on the initiation of becomings. In fact, Google will actively reach into your past in order to reify the stratifications of a static, synchronic identity profile that it has indexed of you.

While the system is purported dynamic and diachronic, it is instead a series of calculations, each one building a cemented index that is recalculated and re-cemented with the introduction of new data. If you introduce new data, perhaps by clicking on an unexpected link, this always happens externally to your interaction with Google’s algorithms. You change in your time away from the screen, and no longer prefer one thing over another, and decline Google’s suggestions towards your previous preference a number of times until it learns, recalculates, re-cements, and begins to stratify you anew. Or you click an unexpected link (i.e. one of lower probability, or a link of no probability that happens to be presented by a secondary site to the search results), and again, this initiation of change happens by chance. It is not facilitated by the
personalization of search. In this scheme of things, the user does bear some agency and mobility, but the user here is responsible for initiating his or her own becomings. Google will not do that for them. Instead, it will inhibit these becomings, by placing the constant, calculated weight of historical precedent on each and every movement, targeting each individual with the perpetual force of ever increased stratification. This is its goal: to build a user profile so detailed and accurate that Google will never be surprised by you. And omniscience only comes at the price of determinism.

The end result of this is the elimination of the new, the truly and utterly new, the new that disturbs you, that works you over viscerally, that you enter into an assemblage with and emerge from different. What Google Search, by its very operative logic, can never allow to enter into its search results is precisely philosophy-art.
CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSIONS

This notion of expressive mediation calls for a vocabulary that will enable us to describe the agencies and sites of the production, mobilization, deployment, organization, management, and transformation of mediation as becoming. The leading contender for such a theoretical vocabulary is the increasingly visible notion of affect.

Lawrence Grossberg, 2012, p. 192

While no single text could hope to answer Deleuze’s call to “establish the basic sociotechnological principles of control mechanisms” (1995, p. 182), this thesis has hopefully taken some steps in the appropriate directions. Following Lawrence Grossberg (2012, p. 192), I have argued that affect theory has developed into the best potential critical tool for articulating both the theoretical principles of control structures and their practical mechanisms of modulation. Utilized correctly (i.e., with a strict adherence to – and maintenance of – the ontology from which it was developed), affect theory presents the best articulation of said principles and mechanisms. Unfortunately, affect theory is oftentimes not utilized with such ontological precision, which leads to many dead ends and circular quibbles between and amongst both its proponents and opponents. It has been my claim throughout that ontological precision can render many such quibbles moot and open up passageways that before lead to both theoretical and practical dead ends, and further, that it also allows for a better practical explanation of the interactions between affects, masses, and control structures (esp. capital).

In the first chapter I have shown how the notion of affect allows for a theoretically and practically useful exeunt from the (now) circular arguments about the political efficacy of publics and rationality in an age of hyper-accelerated flows of information (or perhaps
simulacra). While much theorization is caught between revivifying both the theories and practical applications of rationality and public spheres and decrying the absolute death of politics in the crushing weight of mass inertia, affect theory shows a before-untheorized movement of affective transduction to, between, and from the masses even during the heights of their linguistic-informational inertia. In short, affect theory shows that something (political) is happening here, in the midst of 21st century informational floods, hyperreality, and precessing simulacra, and this something involves mass activity, and even agency. This mass activity is only further catalyzed by the current trajectory of technological development in the digital, and as such, we can only expect affective transduction to become a more prominent feature of mass action and agency in the future. If all of this is in fact correct, then affect theory (when adhering to its ontology) is of utmost important for politics, at least for the foreseeable future, and further, these politics will all constitute ethico-politico-aesthetic conjunctions.

In the second chapter I established a rigorous conception of affects and their refrains grounded in Spinozan/Deleuzian ontology and worked to clear up some of the most striking misperceptions and misapplications currently circulating in popular critiques that employ affect theory. In particular, I explained at length the ontological articulation of bodies and their interactions with affect. Having done so, I demonstrated the lingering employment of the notions of (Hegelian) organic totalities, teleology, and dichotomous conceptions of utopia/dystopia that have been contradictorily injected into an ontology that has no room for them. Affects do not work on the body in a straightforward and predictable way, and thus cannot be employed formulaically in a teleological fashion. The myriad other forces that serve as efficient causes to a body (i.e., its own internal forces or intensive properties that guide its actualization) and the atmosphere or structure of feeling in which the body is constantly awash all interfere with even
the affects that could most feasibly work on the body in a teleological fashion and distort those affects’ effects. Finally, affects do not lend themselves a priori to either power structures or revolutionary forces. Their ability to expand bodily capacity under the circumstances of Spinozan ‘joy’ can become the foundation of a revolutionary politics, but at the same time, their gradual mastery through their stratification into refrains can serve as a powerful tool for control structures’ modulation of bodies and boundaries. These two opposing practical effects of affect constitute the focus of the final two chapters of this thesis, but it is important to note that these effects are always confined to the realm of practice (or what Deleuze would term the actual), and, while both are contained within the virtual/ontological structure of affect, neither serves as an a priori privileged actualization of affect1.

In the third chapter I demonstrated one way in which the revolutionary potential inherent in affect theory might be critically articulated. In particular, I looked to flesh out an ontologically rigorous proof of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s assertions that the engineering of affects must always take place outside of capital and only later be appropriated through those affects’ territorialization and stratification into refrains. Tracing Deleuze’s treatment of Francis Bacon’s painting methods in particular, I fleshed out the act of engineering new affects. I showed the ways in which a philosopher-artist can deterritorialize and destratify the actual in order to return to a point of virtual haecceity, from which the artist can then build new refrains with more intensive affective residue. I then looked to Pierre Bourdieu’s articulation of literary and artistic fields to demonstrate how such affective engineering runs contrary to Karl Marx’s articulation of the commodity fetish. The production of philosophy-art, and thus affective engineering, is in large part fiscally unscrupulous. The philosopher-artist rarely achieves any sort of financial

1 N.b. Nor do the two collectively serve as the sole actualizations of affect, which, being virtually multiplicitous, could actualize into an indeterminate number of concrete effects.
success during the course of their engineering of new affects, and in fact, the esteem in which they are held is often diametrically opposed to fiscal success. In closing I noted that in the period Bourdieu was tracing, this lack of financial success afforded the bourgeois philosopher-artists a distinctive advantage, in that they could afford to be fiscally unsuccessful for long bouts of time. I argued that new media methods of cloud-sourcing and wikis, and other sorts of univocal digital networks, allowed for this fiscal risk and deficit to be spread amongst an unprecedented number of people, and as such we might expect affective engineering to come about en masse from multitudinous assemblages.

In the fourth and last chapter I examined one way in which affective refrains became schematized, stratified, and disseminated in such a way that bodily boundaries were modulated. I began by tracing some of the recent scholarship in software studies that described post-hegemonic power. I argued that these authors were perhaps a bit too quick to dismiss hegemonic practice, and suggested instead that hegemony might be mutated and appropriated by post-hegemonic practices of modulation and control. In order to demonstrate my argument, I traced the functioning of the two main algorithms in Google Search – PageRank, which yielded organic results, and AdWords, which yielded inorganic results – and outlined what little is known about Google’s newer algorithms that work to personalize search. Afterwards, I demonstrated the continued presence of hegemonic and normative force in the digital, leading to collective stratification in the case of the first two algorithms, and a more personal (individual, or even ‘dividual’) stratification in the case of the third. Google’s conduction of affective and noological flows leads to a reification of the same, a same that is reactive to user agency, but becomes more rigid as more data is mined, eventually converging at a limit with a point of total digital stratification.
There is still a considerable amount of work to be done, both in theory and practice, when it comes to ethico-politico-aesthetic conjunctions, and the use of affects and refrains for control and modulation that those conjunctions entail. I hope to have provided at least an initial framework for such investigations. More detailed ontological theorizations of the transduction of affects to, from, and amongst the masses are certainly in need, as are updated accounts of statistical modeling, demography, and psychography as catalyzed by algorithms. While Spinoza’s assertion that we don’t yet know what a body can do may still hold, a watchful eye must be kept on the expansion of the capacities of quantitative and qualitative instruments of measurement. Perhaps the most work is yet to be done in terms of multitudinal affective engineering. In particular, work that examines the capacity of masses to collectively engineer new affects in the digital age would be extremely useful and timely. Such examinations ought to look at the networked organizations of co-authorships that allow for a univocity, as well as into their financial successes and shortcomings. For now, new affects aren’t hot commodities, but one never knows what the future will hold. And lastly, more work examining the shift from hegemonic to post-hegemonic power, or their very conjunction, and that examines concrete cases would be very useful in order to better flesh out the sociotechnological principles of control through modulation.
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