



## 7.2 Post-Cinematic Affect: A Conversation in Five Parts

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### 1. Cinema's Exhaustion and the Vitality of Affect

#### Elena del Río

Like an expired body that blends with the dirt to form new molecules and living organisms, the body of cinema continues to blend with other image/sound technologies in processes of composition/decomposition that breed images with new speeds and new distributions of intensities. The cinema does not evaporate into nothingness, but transmutes in a becoming that has no point of origin or completion. Does the affect disappear when the image is emptied out of feeling? But perhaps, one shouldn't start with the feeling, but always with the image. Is the image strong enough to know of its own capacities for creation and destruction—what it can bring together, what it will tear apart? Can the image portend our own becoming? If post-cinematic affect strikes us as a draining away of traditional modalities of feeling or emotion, an exhaustion of vital

forces, there must still be a remnant of affect or vitality (in us, in the image) that allows for the hollowed out affect to resonate with palpable intensity. For affect always emerges through difference—a shocking divergence between two quantities giving rise to a new quality. Difference disorganizes the relation between the two things, which can no longer be gauged through comparison, analogy, or resemblance. Affect throws into disarray the system of recognition and naming. At once, the image gives something to feel and takes away my capacity to say “I feel.” How does affect fare in the age of global capitalism? If we believe we have reached a point of exhaustion, is this also the end of affect as an emergent possibility? Exhaustion without vitality is the zero degree of the body without organs, the emptied out body that has sabotaged its own capacity for transformation. But I believe, on the contrary, that the commodifying frenzy of global capitalism, its equalizing powers, cannot obliterate affect, or even tame it into a bland proliferation of commodified emotions. Instead, as Deleuze says in his book on Foucault, “when power becomes biopower, resistance becomes the power of life, a vital power that cannot be confined within species [or] environment.” We are clearly at a point where the cinema has begun to transform itself beyond the stage that Deleuze envisioned in *The Time-Image*. But, is the distinction between the crassly commercial and the creative that he affirmed still possible or necessary, and does this distinction have any relevance to the production of affect?[1]

**Michael O’Rourke:** *The Exhaustion of Affect Theory*. Thanks Elena for getting us off to a great start. I wanted to get you to say something more about exhaustion and affect theory. Fredric Jameson, of course, talked about the “waning of affect” a long time ago now. But there has been a recent turn *against* or *away from* affect theory and since your post argues for the “vitality” of affect, I wondered if you might talk about the field of affect *theory* more broadly. Ruth Leys, the historian of science, in a recent article in *Critical Inquiry* (“The Turn to Affect”), has been extremely critical of affect theorists and the affective turn in general.

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Leys wonders why “so many scholars today in the humanities and social sciences” are “fascinated by the idea of affect” (435)? One of her criticisms is of the sort of affect theory which privileges the image and Deleuzian intensities and becomings. She is also critiquing a general tendency to theorize affect as a way of disciplining subjects but also the more positive politicized understanding of affect as a vitality with its own potentials for disruption—whether we use Malabou’s notion of plasticity or Deleuzian becomings to describe this lively embodied energy. These two criticisms seem like ones you would be well positioned to respond to.

In the end, Shaviri is cautious about his “affective mapping” and the possibilities for “resistance.” Interestingly, accelerationism is described as the “emptying out” of capitalism through a “process of exhaustion,” but Shaviri is not at all hopeful about accelerationism as a political strategy. However, he does see value in the “*intensity effect(s)*” of an accelerationist aesthetics. Do you think that your vitalized affect can effect something more than a temporary suspension of the “monotonous” logic of capital? Are the “untamable” disruptions you describe sustainable?

**Elena del Río:** *The Exhaustion of Affect Theory.* Thank you for your thought-provoking comments. There are many things to say about this topic and the questions you raise. Jameson’s “waning of affect” makes sense if one thinks of affect as emotion or feeling in the traditional subjective or collective sense. In that sense, our age is either wallowing in clichéd sentimentality or utterly numbed. Affect, as I understand it, is a capacity or power of transformation. Just as life and death don’t belong to the person who undergoes them, affect is not a product or creation of a subject, but rather the network of forces that circulate around and through us while we are alive. In the Spinozist sense, affect is rather synonymous with the vital force. And the affirmative sense both Spinoza and Deleuze impart to this is probably one difference between the way I understand affect and the way Shaviri, it seems to me, understands it. I hope he can comment on this and clarify this point, which I’ve found to be a question that came

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up again and again as I was reading his brilliant book on post-cinematic affect. So I now will segue into the book just briefly and will come back to other things.

For me affect carries a capacity for rupture (and also rapture) that I see happening in the works Shaviro discusses in very sporadic and faint ways. But these few places where I can identify a strong affective component are interestingly those where Shaviro finds an interruption of “the reign of universal equivalence” that takes us “outside the circle of capital.” That is how he describes the final scene in *Boarding Gate*, for example. But sporadic moments like that contrast with the more general trend to identify capitalism as a quasi totalizing process that extracts value from affect itself, a process where affect and capital come to be indistinguishable. If affect is taken to have the same equalizing value/effect as capital, is there any difference between the two? Is there any need to speak about affect at all? I think at that point affect has become so utterly evacuated of any capacity for action that using the word itself is pointless. We might as well just describe the devouring powers of capitalism for their own sake. What remains transgressive about capital’s unremitting self-expansion? How can more of the same give birth to difference?

Coming back to other points you make, I am not familiar with Ruth Leys’s argument against affect theory, but thank you for bringing it to my attention. It will be interesting to read. All I can say, without having read it, is that affect for me represents the only notion that expresses something not quite susceptible to colonization or cooptation. When ideas centering around consciousness, reason, or even subjectivity, have proven utterly incapable of keeping up with the complexity and the fundamental non-humanity of life, affect, for the time being, is the only concept that to me is capable of approximating the complex texture of life’s mechanics and one that takes the human centrality out of the picture. Just like any other theory, affect theory that I know of is anything but coherent. Unlike what I said about affect, some people speak of affect as a more

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sophisticated word for emotion or feeling. I've found that a lot in film analysis. Shaviro brings this up as well, and in that I am in total agreement with his position. I've also found Massumi's writing on affect right on the mark. I think what's needed in affect theory, and I think Shaviro's book is beginning to articulate that in very important and eloquent ways (in my opinion, without enough emphasis on resistance) is a symbiosis of the affective and the political. I agree wholeheartedly with him that we shouldn't oppose affect theory and Marxist theory. How or where can we find transformative affective flows amidst the social, political, or economic processes of transnational capitalism? As rare as these flows might be, I don't think they stop happening, but they don't always take on the actual forms, or occur at the quantitative scale, that we might qualify as substantial or visible changes. In any case, the affirmation of life's differences is the most potent expression of resistance. That is why affect (in my perspective) is inherently a form of resistance, as its very foundation is difference, divergence, dislocation. Here, I couldn't disagree more with Leys's critique of affect as a vehicle for disciplining subjects. Affect and discipline are diametrically opposed concepts. For me, Massumi/Deleuze/Spinoza's distinction between *pouvoir* and *puissance* is a very useful one when dealing with the intersections between affects and politics. When affects become institutionalized or they acquire normative meanings, they become congealed into recognizable or capitalizable emotions. That's the realm of *pouvoir*.

**Shane Denson:** *Metabolic Affect*. Great post—eloquent and very thought-provoking! Though I have no answers to the questions being raised here, here are some ideas that I hope might complement the effort to think through these issues:

Deleuze's "vital power that cannot be confined within species [or] environment" might be thought in terms of "metabolism"—a process neither in my subjective control nor even confined to my body (as object) but which articulates organism and environment together from the

perspective of a pre-individuated agency. Metabolism is affect without feeling or emotion—affect as the transformative power of “passion” that, as Brian Massumi reminds us, Spinoza identifies as that unknown power of embodiment that is neither wholly active nor wholly passive. Metabolic processes are the zero-degree of transformative agency, both intimately familiar and terrifyingly alien, conjoining inside/outside, me/not-me, life/death, old/novel, as the power of transitionality—marking not only biological processes but also global changes that encompass life and its environment. Mark Hansen defines “medium” as “environment for life”; accordingly, metabolism is as much a process of media transformation as one of bodily change.

The shift from a cinematic to a post-cinematic environment is, in your description, a metabolic process through and through: “Like an expired body that blends with the dirt to form new molecules and living organisms, the body of cinema continues to blend with other image/sound technologies in processes of composition/decomposition that breed images with new speeds and new distributions of intensities.” To the extent that metabolism is inherently affective (“passionate,” in a Spinozan vein), you’re right that post-cinematic affect has to be thought apart from feeling and subjective emotion. Your alternative, which (apposite with Deleuze’s mode of questioning while thinking beyond his answers) asks about the image, taking it as the starting point of inquiry, is helpful. The challenge, though, becomes one of grasping the image itself not as objective entity but as metabolic agency, one caught up in the larger process of transformation that (dis)articulates subjects and objects, spectators and images, life and its environment in the transition to the post-cinematic. This metabolic image, I suggest, is the very image of change, and it speaks to the perspective of metabolism itself—to affect distributed across bodies and environments as the medium of transitionality. As you suggest, exhaustion—mental, physical, systemic—is not at odds with affect; rethinking affect as metabolism (or vice versa) might help explain why: exhaustion, from an ecological perspective, is

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itself an enabling moment in the processes of metabolic becoming.

**EdR:** *Metabolic Affect.* Hi Shane. Thank you for your comments, which totally resonate with what I was talking about. I find the metabolism idea very apt to describe affective processes. I am also in total sync with your comment on how we need to make the image itself a metabolic agency disengaged from human agency or consciousness. I've found sometimes when submitting a paper that speaks of the image as something that thinks, the editor wants me to change that to make it sound like it is the director's choices or whatever. I think that's really annoying because it totally misses the point which has to do with the autonomous process in which images engage regardless of what we mean or do not mean. And to your point about exhaustion: the more I think about this, the more I see that exhaustion is itself an affect, and not at all that which opposes affect. The exhaustion that bodies exude on screen often has a lot to do with the intensity that comes from changes/differences in speed, and what strikes me usually about these exhausted bodies is their deeply unconscious power to become the vehicles for forces and forms that, to me, speak of vitality far more than of exhaustion. I think there's a deep irony in images of exhaustion vis-à-vis this issue of affect and vitality.

**Karin Sellberg:** *Resistant Affect.* Thank you indeed, Elena, for your inspiring post, which opens up an array of questions regarding affect in the time of global capitalism. I would like to add a dimension to Michael's and Shane's responses, by inviting you to extrapolate on the ways in which your truly explosive film clip collage engages with your suggestion that a vitalizing affective "resistance" remains.[\[2\]](#)

Capitalism is one aspect of contemporary culture—another aspect is the pressing awareness of a continual state of exception, as theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler, among others, and the drawn-out (although often indefinable) threat of war and apocalypse. I was taken by your interweaving of WWII home-coming scenes and the particular

moment in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* where all images break down. Lynch's film seems to ask a similar set of questions as your post. Is there truly nothing beyond our worn-out cinematic tropes and pre-rehearsed calls for affect? Naomi Watts's search for the "truth" throughout the first half of the film—and her violent spasms of emotion when she finds it (whatever we decide that "it" is) seem to indicate that there is. The unnamable and unspeakable affect that cannot be contained in a post-cinematic society eventually break through, in a resistant Deleuzo-Foucauldian power-surge of life.

Most of the scenes in your clip seem to signal a sense of relief or release. They are of course excerpts, but together they form a procession of violent outbursts of relief (at the return of the soldier) and explosive release of pent-up fear and emotion. I understand this as a demonstration of the affective "untamable" that resists the codification—as counter-examples to Shaviro's conductive tropes, if you like. Seen together like this, these affective eruptions invoke something very different, however. Your clip becomes a fascinating portrayal of a *perpetual* state of exception. It's a catharsis that never ends. The clip collage starts and ends with music and/or movement, and Naomi Watts's spasms of affect in *Mulholland Drive* are of course also induced by Rebecca Del Rio's singing. I can't help being reminded of Nietzsche's work on tragedy, where music features as a violent and purely Dionysian expression. What I find most interesting, however, is that when the scenes are compiled like this they feel almost empty. The resistant affect is no longer resisting anything, and becomes another affective trope in the chain of coded similitude.

**EdR:** *Resistant Affect*. Hi Karin. Thank you for such a rush of ideas that literally jump off from the page. The clip that I posted is part of an 18-minute film that a friend and I put together some five years ago. The idea of making it came to me as I was falling asleep one day, probably because I was thinking of images in the films I was writing about in my book. You can watch the whole thing on Vimeo.[\[3\]](#) Anyway, the most



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exhilarating experience for me in making this was to realize that I didn't have to make any decisions on where to cut or how to edit the sound, that the images themselves were deciding that. I know it sounds ridiculous, but for me there was no doubt about it. What we were looking for in the selection and sequencing of the images was the highest possible intensity in the changes between body speeds and patterns of movement. It was a bit like releasing the force of the body to the max, and I think your choice of the word "release" or "relief" is very appropriate here. Because this sequence has no psychological, moral, or representational content, the only thing remaining is the force of the body itself. This for me is a vitality that goes beyond the political at the same time that it is traversed by the political and everything else. The political acts that impact this may revolve around either releasing this force (potentializing it, as Spinoza might say, composing a more powerful body by joining other bodies/affects) or repressing it, arresting it, obstructing it (although this may be an oversimplification, the state of exception that we permanently live in, as you put it, definitely works along these lines of decomposition and weakening of forces through exclusionary methods that purport to safeguard and maximize life, but actually release nihilistic forces of death such as war, or any form of fascistic repression). I think it's much easier to find resistant affects in art, definitely in cinema, than in the life we live outside art. Maybe art shows us the way.

Lynch's cinema for me is somewhere between the cinematic and the post-cinematic. One of the features Steve [Shaviro] aligns with the post-cinematic is the absence of an "absolute, pre-existing space." Especially in his latest films, Lynch never constructs such a referential space. Cinema is the space; there is nothing outside it as a real or transcendental ground. But what's interesting about Lynch is that although space ceases to have unity or solidity, the sense of duration is very strong. Maybe this is what separates it from the post-cinematic as Steve describes it through Grace Jones, *Boarding Gate*, *Southland Tales*, etc. In Lynch cinema is folded into itself and realism loses all meaning. But, as you say, this creates a power-

surge of affect rather than its waning. What the example of Lynch makes me think is that the line between cinematic and post-cinematic is much more diffuse and difficult to identify than one might think, and that while one needs to look at specific cases, like Steve does, to be able to elaborate a theory of the post-cinematic, in practice this theory may undergo all sorts of changes, qualifications, and in a way, even a bit of skepticism towards theory as a unified system. But it goes without saying that Steve's work has bridged a huge gap in addressing issues about the transformations cinema is experiencing. In a way, he's telling us that we cannot go on pretending that things haven't changed, and that the cinema is still the cinema as if embalmed for eternity. This reminds me of a question I'd like Steve to respond to if he can: what do you think of the history of cinema as seen by Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*? Godard talks about cinema as a living being with a childhood, adolescence, and maturity, even of its death, although he never envisions the kind of almost ontological shift that the digital brings about. Anyway, just to address Karin's last point, which I find one of the most amazing: you say that the images in the clip feel almost empty and that the affect is no longer resisting anything. Exactly. Either you take them all as resistant images (resistant to narrative, certainty, etc.) or they are always already liberated from the cycle of action and reaction. This is a schizo-violence of free floating affects. It's a full emptiness. Like me right now. More tomorrow.

**Adrian Ivakhiv:** KS wrote: "What I find most interesting, however, is that when they are compiled like this they feel almost empty. The resistant affect is no longer resisting anything, and becomes another affective trope in the chain of coded similitude."

I don't feel this at all . . . I find a rhythm surging through the movements (kinesthetic, affective), a rhythm that propels itself forward according to its own internal (immanent) measures, not according to an external code or even in terms of anything being resisted.

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Elena writes: “Either you take them all as resistant images (resistant to narrative, certainty, etc.) or they are always already liberated from the cycle of action and reaction. This is a schizo-violence of free floating affects. It’s a full emptiness.”

Since they are taken out of the contexts within which they might arise as resistance, I’ll go along with seeing them as “always already liberated.” (Of course, having seen the films, I add my own interpretations of what the liberation may be *from*, but then I draw back from that, wanting to see them as movements/images/rhythms in themselves.) There’s nothing obviously violent or empty in them (for me). Especially not empty. There is energy, flow, passion, and it is for me as a viewer to feel and work with . . .

**MOR:** *Panpsychism and the Image*. I was struck in reading through the comments by the ways in which the image is being thought as having a “mental pole.” Shane in his fascinating description of an “anthropotechnical interface” he calls the “metabolic image” says that: “The challenge, though, becomes one of grasping the image itself not as objective entity but as metabolic agency, one caught up in the larger process of transformation that (dis)articulates subjects and objects, spectators and images, life and its environment in the transition to the post-cinematic.” This disarticulation (which Elena talks about in terms of a vitality which exceeds species and environment) is one she endorses: “I am also in total sync with your comment on how we need to make the image itself a metabolic agency disengaged from human agency or consciousness. I’ve found sometimes when submitting a paper that speaks of the image as something that thinks, the editor wants me to change that to make it sound like it is the director’s choices or whatever.” Responding to Karin, she goes further: “the most exhilarating experience for me in making this was to realize that I didn’t have to make any decisions on where to cut or how to edit the sound, that the images themselves were deciding that. I know it sounds ridiculous, but for me there was no doubt about it.” These comments take

us in the general direction of Shaviro's own post-*Post Cinematic Affect* work on panpsychism ("Panpsychism") and his controversial insistence in "The Universe of Things" that "vital materialism and object-oriented ontology both entail some sort of panexperientialism or panpsychism." He admits that "this is obviously not a step to be taken lightly; it can easily get one branded as a crackpot. Most metaphysicians today, analytic or continental, science-oriented or not, tend to reject panpsychism out of hand." His earlier book *Without Criteria*, he says, was too hasty in dismissing the panpsychical dimensions of Whitehead's thought because, he now thinks,

a world of objects is really a world of experiencings; as Whitehead insists, we must at least be open to the prospect that "having-experience" is already intrinsic to all existing actual entities. I will not argue this proposition any further here, but I wish to leave it as a lure for thought, a prospective consequence of the fact that we find ourselves in a universe of things.

**EdR:** *Panpsychism and the Image*. This gets me interested in reading Whitehead and Shaviro on Whitehead. I wasn't thinking of the concept of panpsychism itself, but more of the concept of "subjectless subjectivities" (Bains), which in many ways I think is similar. Paul Bains's essay in *A Shock to Thought* (which in fact mentions pansychism) was very inspiring to me in terms of this aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking. Besides talking about singularities as pre-individual, non-personal events or sensitive points, he talks about autopoietic bubbles of perception, self-surveying systems that do not perceive themselves from a distance (the distance of the human cogito), but rather from their own interiority. I want to quote a line from this essay that fits in with Paul Bowman's question as to what affect might contribute. It's sort of related:

A plane of consistency, an absolute survey that involves no supplementary dimension. Rational modes of discursive knowledge cannot adequately grasp this kind of metalogical

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approach which can only be fully appreciated through a non-discursive, affective pathic awareness. (103).

**MOR:** *Subjectless Subjectivities*. Thanks Elena, I can see how Bains's idea of subjectless subjectivities (isn't this much the same as Deleuze's larval subjects which are also singularities prior to any subjectivity?) links up with both your post on the vitalities of affect (and the image) and Shane's metabolic images.

Your wonderfully evocative opening lines ("Like an expired body that blends with the dirt to form new molecules and living organisms, the body of cinema continues to blend with other image/sound technologies in processes of composition/decomposition that breed images with new speeds and new distributions of intensities") remind me that, for Deleuze, "human" "subjects" are a bundle of sensory and material elements (matter, air, water), or what he calls "organic syntheses":

We are made of contracted water, light, earth, and air—not merely prior to the recognition or representation of these, but prior to their being sensed. Every organism, in its receptive and perceptual elements, but also in its viscera, is a sum of contractions, of retentions and expectations. (*Difference and Repetition* 93).

**Kristopher L. Cannon:** *Image and Thing*. Hi Elena. Thanks for a wonderful post, which seems to have been followed by equally interesting conversation in the comments.

I was particularly fascinated by the thread of comments about images, as they were placed in conversation with the notion of metabolism and also Shavairo's recent writing on "Things." What I noticed, while people were discussing this topic is the general use of the word "image," and I wonder if you have thought about some of the discussions emerging in visual culture studies where, following the work of people like W. J. T. Mitchell or Mark B. N. Hansen, people have started to differentiate "images" from

their material “picture(d)” manifestations (e.g. photographs, celluloid, etc.). I find this distinction useful because it allows us to consider the life of images as they may escape the confines of anthropocentric concerns—escaping with and enabling their own desires.

I also find it beneficial, as Shaviro mentions in his essay on “Things,” to anthropomorphize things as a means to fight against anthropocentrism. It seems that this connects with part of your response to Shane, where you mention how images “think” and function within/as affective processes. Does this move allow us to better understand the thing-ness of images, where images imagine themselves through the affective processes of imag(in)ing, similar to how humans imagine the meaning of pictures through the process of imagining?

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## 2. Post-Cinematic Effects

### Paul Bowman

Shaviro argues that the cinematic epoch is coming to a close. We are now at the end(s) of the cinematic. This is registered within cinema, and cinema remains influential across all of its inheritors. Hence, the times are “post-cinematic” and not anti- or non-cinematic: gaming, all things interactive, the music video, and so forth, all remain informed by cinematography, but they move away from its technological limitations. Meanwhile, cinema attempts to incorporate the new technological advancements within itself. Accordingly, films like *Blade Runner* or *Sim-One* are not post-cinematic, whilst *The Matrix* and even *Old Boy* are. The former are *about* future technologies; the latter *incorporate* future technologies into themselves, affecting the styles of computer simulated choreographies: *The Matrix* employs the sharpness and precision of arcade game fights; *Old Boy* incorporates the two-dimensional plane of old computer games, but counterbalanced by including all the scrappiness of messy brawling that most action films sanitize.

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Quite what the “affect” of all of this “is” is irreducibly debatable. In viewing the famous corridor fight in *Old Boy*, I perceived passion: Oh Dae-su enjoyed his vengeance. And this reading was consistent with the film’s themes: Oh Dae-su’s response to five years of sensual deprivation, his inability to resist, and his delight in every sensual experience. Accordingly, this fight was a continuation of that theme: a real orgy of violence. Yet, the director’s commentary later informed me that the scene was conceptualized as one of loneliness: Oh Dae-su was the loneliest man in the world; his lack of fear was that of someone who’s lost everything, fear, hope, passion. . .

So whose reading is “right,” mine or the director’s? And what is the “affect”? To my mind, this “affect” is not “one.” There is not one “affect,” nor even one economy, ecosystem, or ecology of affect(s)—just as there is not one reading of one text. Post-cinematic effects, yes; Shaviri makes an important observation. But affects? I’m not so sure why or how they would be different from everything that postmodern theorists have long been saying about postmodernity. The ultimate question, to me, is whether approaching the world in terms of affect offers anything specific for cultural theory and the understanding of culture and politics.[\[4\]](#)

**Michael O’Rourke:** *Post-Cinematic Effects (Uncut)*. Those wishing to comment on Paul’s provocative and polemical post might wish to read a longer version of the text (“Post-Cinematic Effects”) which introduces the notion of post-cinematic affect as it is laid out by Shaviri, discusses Rey Chow’s meditations on the emergence of cinema in her book *Primitive Passions*, considers the inter-implicated histories of literature and cinema in modernity and the ways in which literature can be thought of as itself post-cinematic, reads the fight scene in *Old Boy* in terms of its *many* affects, and finally argues for post-cinematic “effects” rather than the more problematic “affects.”

**Shane Denson:** *Affect/Effect*. Paul, thanks for this great post, which raises

several very interesting questions. I'd like to comment on two aspects that occur to me, and hopefully you can say a bit more about them.

The first is the distinction between being “about” future technologies and “incorporating” them, which you offer as a way of thinking about the difference between the cinematic and post-cinematic. While there is certainly heuristic value in this perspective, it remains problematic in that a genre like science fiction film has always gone beyond science fiction literature in precisely this way: if future tech was a thematic feature in the latter, it was always incorporated, highlighted, and displayed in the former (e.g. in special effects, which invite attention to images and interrupt the narrative). According to someone like Brooks Landon (“Diegetic or Digital?”), this gets underway well before the 1950s birth of a dedicated SF film genre, as early as the Lumières’ *La Charcuterie Mécanique* (1895).

Which makes me think, coming to the second point, that a prioritization of effect over affect is already at the center of this perspective on the difference between the cinematic and post-cinematic. More to the point, it seems that the “many affects” you describe are not the same affects meant by people coming from a Deleuzian (Bergsonian, Spinozan, etc.) background. To ask about your reading of the images’ affective meaning vs. that of the director is already to personalize affect, to appropriate or subjectivize it as emotion, for example, while the affects of the tradition just mentioned are pre-personal. I understand that there are reasons to be skeptical of that understanding of affect, as it is always vague and conceptually indeterminable. The reasons for advocating it are aesthetic/ontological, though, and would have to be refuted on those grounds. In any case, I don’t see that understanding of affect as being somehow singular, so I see no contradiction with the multiplicity of effects. Instead, it seems to me that emphasizing effects over affects is precisely in line with postmodern theory, identity politics, etc., whereas affect is perceived by advocates of this line of thinking as



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a way out of there: as a reintroduction of a messy experiential realm that is categorically bracketed out of postmodern textualism and its exclusive interest in textual effects (including subject-positions and the like).

**Elena del Río:** *Post-Cinematic Effects*. Hi Paul. Great clip! I wanted to respond to some things in your post that made me think of other things. I totally agree that affects cannot be part of a prescriptive system and that in cinema they work dependent on whoever is watching and the predominant affects in them at that point. I also think that affects are more like clusters than singular identifiable emotions. They tend to be muddy or muddled rather than clear. I don't see a contradiction in the affects you are describing in the *Old Boy* fight scene: passion versus loneliness. To me, it feels like a formidable will to power that is able to subdue the (quantifiably) much greater forces that he fights. His strength is based on intensity rather than extension or quantity. And that is both passionate and requires an extreme amount of concentration of force. No dissipation, hence loneliness.

I also find the distinction between affects and effects not that important and maybe just a matter of a different vocabulary. Affects are close to the idea of effects that cannot be traced to actual causes (or causes that are actualized in particular states of affairs). They are like chains of effects that have no exact point of origin and no final point or resolution. Deleuze speaks of an affective causality or virtual causality (quasi-causality), and I think in that sense one could align affects with effects.

To the issue of whether affect may contribute anything different from postmodernism, I think there would be a lot to say. I think Steve would be much better equipped than me to tackle this one. The postmodern concept of the "aestheticization of violence," which is quite relevant to your clip, seems to look at violence as a visual *form* that expresses the surface tendencies of postmodern culture. From the point of view of affects, this play of surfaces is a shifting encounter of *forces* with a capacity

for mutation, a kind of materiality that has an ethical and creative dimension.

**MOR:** *Post-Continuity Cinema*. Shaviro has a post up at *The Pinocchio Theory* blog today on his notion of “post-continuity” cinema (“Post-Continuity”), which makes me wonder about Paul’s fight scene clip from *Old Boy* and whether this is continuity cinema or post-continuity.[\[5\]](#) In his longer description of the fight sequence Paul makes a distinction between the precisely choreographed fight scenes of *The Matrix* which incorporates the post-cinematic “sharpness and precision” of arcade games and the more traditional “two-dimensional” plane of the fight scene in *Old Boy*. While this makes *Old Boy* a film which draws on post-cinematic technologies, Paul also claims that this is counterbalanced “with the inclusion of all of the scrappiness, imprecision, stumbling, gasping, moaning and, indeed, *messy brawling*, that almost all action films exclude or repress.” In a response to Matthias Stork’s formulation of “[chaos cinema](#),” Shaviro expands on his own notion of “post-continuity” which first surfaced in *Post-Cinematic Affect*. He explains that the “stylistics” of post-continuity (mostly in action films but also horror and other genres) involves “a preoccupation with moment-to-moment excitement, and with delivering continual shocks to the audience” which “trumps any concern with traditional continuity, either on a shot-by-shot level or in terms of larger narrative structures.” He makes a sharp distinction between his own understanding of these (mostly Hollywood) filmmaking practices and David Bordwell’s well known concept of “intensified continuity,” which features “more rapid editing . . . bipolar extremes of lens lengths . . . more close framings in dialogue scenes . . . [and] a free-ranging camera.” For Bordwell this is an intensification (rather than a breakdown or discarding) of traditional continuity, but Shaviro claims that there has been a perceptible shift in the stylistics of continuity in the 21st century. And it is worth considering the fight scene in *Old Boy* and Paul’s discussion of its effects and affects in the context of these changes. Does *Old Boy* intensify traditional fight segment techniques? Or, does it make a radical break with them?

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Shaviro asserts that in recent action cinema “the expansion of the techniques of intensified continuity, especially in action films and action sequences, has led to a situation where continuity itself has been fractured and devalued, or fragmented and reduced to incoherence.” He suggests that

Bordwell himself implicitly admits as much, when he complains that, in recent years, “Hollywood action scenes became ‘impressionistic,’ rendering a combat or pursuit as a *blurred confusion*. We got a flurry of cuts calibrated not in relation to each other or to the action, but instead suggesting a *vast busyness*. Here camerawork and editing didn’t serve the specificity of the action but overwhelmed, even buried it.” (Shaviro, “Post-Continuity,” quoting Bordwell; emphasis added)

Paul is getting at precisely this impressionism and “blurred confusion” when he talks about *Old Boy*’s “inclusion of all of the scrappiness, imprecision, stumbling, gasping, moaning and, indeed, messy brawling” that other action films have routinely sanitized. Shaviro says that

in mainstream action films . . . as well as in lower-budget action features . . . continuity is no longer “intensified”; rather, it is more or less abandoned, or subordinated to the search for immediate shocks, thrills, and spectacular effects by means of all sorts of non-classical techniques. This is the situation that I refer to as post-continuity.

So, we might ask whether *Old Boy* is an exemplar of “intensified continuity” in Bordwell’s sense or “post-continuity” in Shaviro’s?

**Karin Sellberg:** *Sensual Flows and Empty Orgies*. Thanks for an excellent post, Paul! I agree with Shane and Elena that you’re raising several very important questions about cinematic affect as well as cinematic representation in general. Since Shane and Elena have responded to your discussion regarding effects and affects, I’d like to turn to your discussion of passion and the senses in *Old Boy*.

I would agree with Elena that the corridor scene in *Old Boy* features both loneliness and passion, but not necessarily for the same reason. I don't even think that they are two separate emotional states—certainly not affect(s), because like Shane, I consider affect to be something slightly different—but part of a complex affective flow conducted through this scene. I am not talking about the effect here—that would be the impact it has on the viewer(s)—but the sensual communication that is taking place.

Most interestingly, I think that *Old Boy* provides a meta-narrative insight on affect as a concept. Being deprived of the sensual in-take, like Oh Dae-su, is not very different from being deprived of affect, is it? You are entirely cut off from the affective flows that surround you. When he regains it, Oh Dae-su gorges himself. He works his way through the men in the corridor (and the architectural lay-out here really emphasizes his journey), and he relishes in every point of contact—as you say, he takes delight in every sensual experience. However, as he steps out of the lift at the end, we are made aware that he remains as lonely (or sense-deprived) as ever throughout. As Elena suggested in yesterday's discussion, an affective overflow will result in exactly no affect at all. It's a full emptiness. Oh Dae-su's sensual orgy leaves him disconnected, unaffected, and spent.

**MOR:** *Post-Continuist Affect*. And what about post-continuist *affect*? Shaviro argues that Stork's [video essay](#) is too dismissive of post-continuist cinema and its effects on audiences when Stork posits that viewers can “sense” the action but are “not truly experiencing it.” Like Paul, Stork is arguably making a distinction between effects and affects. However, *Old Boy* appears to fit with Shaviro's definitions of *both* the post-cinematic and the post-continuist (as the *Paranormal Activity* films do too, which he discusses in “What is the Post-Cinematic?”), especially in so far as the film does not, as Paul says, completely dispense with the more traditional, classical techniques of action fight scenes. Rather, *Old Boy* simultaneously moves “beyond’ . . . or apart from” those stylistic

devices “so that their energy and investments point elsewhere” (Shaviro, “Post-Continuity”). It also seems to resonate with Shaviro’s understanding of post-cinematic affect since what ties together the various films he would designate as post-continuity cinema is that they share a “structure of feeling” in Raymond Williams’s terms.

\* \* \*

### 3. A Hair of the Dog that Bit Us

#### Adrian Ivakhiv

Steven Shaviro’s *Post-Cinematic Affect* is a work of “affective mapping” (5) for a world of neoliberal, networked and hypermediated, endlessly metamorphosing capitalism. This hypercapitalism is a “world of crises and convulsions” (131) ruthlessly organized around the relentless logic of commodification and capital accumulation, a world of “modulation, digitization, financialization, and media transduction” (132). Rather than moralize or denounce the symptoms of cultural malaise or wax nostalgic about the past, Shaviro looks for the “aesthetic poignancy” (133) of post-cinematic media that assume that “the only way out is the way through” (136)—works that pursue a strategy of “accelerationism,” exacerbating or radicalizing capitalism to its point of eventual collapse.

Grace Jones, in Shaviro’s reading, is a transgressive posthuman who endlessly modulates her own image, which “swells and contracts, bends and fractures, twists, warps and contorts and flows from one shape to another” (11), all the while projecting a certain “singularity” (12) of “‘Grace Jones’ as a celebrity icon,” consisting of a “long string of Jones’s reinventions of herself” (18). Rather than being “homeopathic,” as Shaviro contends (32)—which would suggest that she injects a minute dose of the “hair of the dog that bit us” to trigger an immunogenic effect in the body politic of hypercapitalism—Jones’s work seems to me a plunge into excessive, performative mimicry—magical rather than homeopathic, yet fully expressive of the condition itself.

That makes it incumbent upon viewers to activate the immunogenic response for themselves, rather than assimilating the dose into a bloodstream configured for endless modulation. The question is whether Jones provides a hinge for critiquing the infinite transcodability of hypercapitalism. More broadly, it's a question of whether there remain breathingspacesand sources of transcendence *outside* of hypercapitalism's ever-modulating codes. Is it futile to look for them, say, in truth, beauty, adventure, art, or peace (the five qualities A. N. Whitehead identified with "civilization" back when the word still meant something), or in nature, spirituality, political hope? Are these reducible to *nothing but* their commodified forms? Does modulation and plasticity render everything a commodity, or on the contrary, does an open universe—the kind Whitehead and Deleuze, two of Shaviro's philosophical heroes, believed in—allow us to modulate commodification itself by exposing it to a different standard, a different hair of a different dog? Can we get by without hope for a *beyond* to hypercapitalism?[6]

**Michael O'Rourke:** *More "Hair of the Dog."* Those who would like to comment on Adrian's terrific post might like to read a longer text ("Post-Cinematic Affect in the Era of Plasticity") that he wrote on *Post-Cinematic Affect* and Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity (focusing for the most part—as this curation does—on Hooker/Jones's video for "Corporate Cannibal"). It begins with a description of Shaviro's overall project and the two major shifts it identifies: from classical cinema to non-cinemacentric digital and computer-based media and from a Foucauldian disciplinary society to the era of endlessly transcodable "hypercapitalism." He then moves to a discussion of how Jones's video reflects these modulations and a consideration of Sean Cubitt's reading of the 1908 film *Fantasmagorie* and the differences between this early cinematic moment (and Cubitt's reading of it) and Jones's performativity (and Shaviro's reading of it). There follows a consideration of the possibilities for resistance and creating wiggle room which would be less "pessimistic" than Shaviro's description of our surrender to the

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“inexorable” logic of capital. Ivakhiv finds such a space for escaping or evading infinite transcodability in Malabou’s *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* but sees even more promise for a neuroplasticity and open futurity in Deleuze. The flash review concludes by asking if there is a tension between the “analytical-Marxist strand” in *Post-Cinematic Affect* and the more (underdeveloped) Deleuzian-Whiteheadian strand (or strands) in the book.

**Shane Denson:** *Repetition and Variation*. Brilliant post, Adrian, which identifies a crucial question about our contemporary moment. I was hoping I might get you to say a few more words about the distinction you draw between homeopathic and magical expressions or performances. Is it primarily a question of subtlety versus extroversion, apparent complicity versus hyperbolic critique or exaggeration? Or how exactly do you identify the difference between these two modes?

The question of this difference—homeopathic vs. magical—is framed here by Jones’s incessant reinvention of herself against a background of sameness: an interplay of repetition (still Grace Jones) and variation (a new persona or facet is added). This type of interplay is something that we’re familiar with from many fictional characters from the 19th and 20th centuries—characters like Dracula, Frankenstein, Tarzan, or Batman, who are continually reinvented as they jump from literature to radio to film to TV, comics, and now digital media. And as we get closer to our own so-called “convergence culture,” we see a number of “real-world” characters following this pattern of repetition and variation or reinvention: think of David Bowie’s many personae, Madonna, or Lady Gaga. What I’m wondering is whether the question of homeopathy vs. magic can be related to this media-historical line of development, i.e. whether the dynamics of variation and repetition that characterizes the fictional and non-fictional characters has anything in particular to do with the distinction you’re making. And is there a particular juncture at which a reversal between homeopathic and magical modes occur? Is

Paul Bowman et al.

David Bowie magical? Is Lady Gaga homeopathic? (The latter two being questions I've been dying for the right context to ask . . .)

I hope these questions make sense. And thanks again for a wonderful presentation!

**Adrian Ivakhiv:** *The Homeopathic & the Magical*. Thanks for the excellent question, Shane, and thanks, Michael, for your exquisite summary of my longer argument. I'm still catching up with the last two days' posts, so this will just be a quick reply to Shane.

You're right to ask me to clarify my use of the terms "magical" and "homeopathic," since I was a bit loose and quick with them. The latter is really a subcategory of the former, which includes many different types (e.g. sympathetic, imitative, associative, etc.). But since "magic" is one of the discursive modes by which modernity has defined itself (the modern as the overcoming and rejection of the magic and superstition of the past), we're working in messy terrains here. I think the examples of Dracula, Tarzan, Bowie, and Gaga are all very pertinent. Magic has been an important part of disciplinary societies: give them just enough magic (or affect—I think we need to think these two terms together) to excite them, and then we'll funnel that excitement into the "proper" channels, thereby strengthening those channels. This magic, of course, gets its potency (in part) from its marginalized status.

Postmodernity, in this sense, has been characterized not by a "waning of affect" but by a generalized letting loose of the magical/affective, a dropping of barriers, simultaneous with a release of the hypercapitalist virus (so to speak) into the flow, rather like the hippies/yippies who dreamed of spiking a city's water supply with LSD. I think this is compatible with Shaviro's (and others') arguments about hypercapitalism becoming a generalized condition, but I think we need to more carefully analyze the role of magic (and enchantment) within this condition (as the work



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of Michael Saler, Randall Styers, Jane Bennett, Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels, and others points to, in a more historical vein). Artists need to keep reinventing themselves more and more quickly (note the increasing rate of reinvention from Tarzan to Bowie to Gaga) in order to keep the magical in play. But my point is that the magical will always be in play and that it is up to us as viewers, respondents, and culture users (and artists as well) to work with the magical/affective so as to nudge it in the right directions.

**AI:** *Sticky Tarzan.* Not, of course, that Tarzan was an artist like Bowie and Lady Gaga . . . But, then, maybe he was. (And the others, too.)

**AI:** *Continuing...* Deleuzians like to say that the brain is a screen/image (or cinema itself). I would say the brain is a magical tool, built for noting connections between things so as to be able to work those connections, and that affect is one of the fluids that runs through the system of machinic connectivities between brains/nervous systems and other things. Scientists have expended a lot of energy trying to determine which connections do what and which are merely “imagined,” but they have not changed the brain, which continues to do what it’s always done (more or less)—and which throws a wrench (or several) into the machines that scientists (and Latour’s “moderns”) would build.

Cinema is a machine for plugging into and through, a machine that produces worlds and elicits movement of the affective fuel by way of the worldliness it sets up and the diffractions between that worldliness and the general worldliness in which we (brains/nervous systems) operate. That is, in itself, as magical as things get. I like your (Shane’s) idea of the image as “metabolic agency . . . caught up in the larger process of transformation that (dis)articulates subjects and objects, spectators and images, life and its environment.”

The “post-cinematic” landscape resembles the pre-cinematic except that now we have all these other machinic possibilities that weren’t there before

cinema, and many of these were made possible, and are deeply implicated in and “infected” by capitalist relational dynamics. It’s important to note how those dynamics have evolved (i.e. to “hypercapitalism”) and how cinematic/imagescapes have evolved with them (i.e. to the post-cinematic), but also to remember that these evolutions are multiple, with many spaces for movement *otherwise*. . . .

**Karin Sellberg:** *The Magical Lady Gaga*. Thanks Adrian, for an excellent and practically mitotic chain of posts! I really like your idea of the magical/performative-affective continuum. I would like to invite you to talk a bit more about how this would fit into your earlier discussion of hypercapitalism. Furthermore, I agree that postmodernity should rather be characterized by its explosion of affective barriers, rather than a “waning of affect,” but surely these ever-accelerating transformative circulations could not continue to move if they had no definitive other? Could it be that what you call a “hope for the beyond” is that little hair that keeps the system going?

I’d also like to linger briefly on Shane’s question of whether David Bowie is magical and Lady Gaga is homeopathic—I would possibly say that it’s the other way around. Bowie, if anyone, was amazing partly because he was an almost perfect reflection of his various cultural moments. He *was* the image of his time—and he made it cool. Gaga’s performances are more grotesque. She is very similar to Grace Jones, in many ways. She continually reinvents a different self *through* the images of contemporary society—and she makes them disturbing.

**AI:** *Acceleration vs. Slack, & the Magic Thereof*. Karin—to your question, “Could it be that what you call a ‘hope for the beyond’ is that little hair that keeps the system going?”: Yes, it *could* be that, since the system relies on maintaining a gap, a dissonance that its subjects are craving to fill/harmonize. But then doesn’t every system? Is there just a single, hypercapitalist system, or is this the way of the world, known since

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the Buddha pointed out that craving is never satisfiable and that the trick is to inject an opening, a loosening, a slackening (to bring Ivan Stang's Church of the SubGenius into the mix) that would create the possibility of enjoyment in the gap itself rather than in the object being pursued? If we can learn to move within that gap, we can evade the trajectory/teleology favored by the system (i.e. whatever system we're wanting to evade) and to follow/develop different patterns leading to different outcomes. That's why I'm not convinced that accelerationism per se provides the best aesthetic strategy; it all depends on what we do with it.

At the same time, the "hope for a beyond" is only effective if we don't confuse the "beyonds" being offered us, that are only extensions of the system, with the *other* beyonds that are open to us (which, in turn, may be the "withins" of alternate, parallel systems). The point is to multiply/pluralize/open up what's available, creating possibilities for alternative trajectories. I tend to follow J. K. Gibson-Graham's and others' argument against seeing capitalism as a massive and singular monolith. There are alternative patterns being generated in this planetary eco-socio-technical machine and we can ally with them to move elsewhere.

You raise an interesting point about Bowie and Lady Gaga. I would say that Bowie was a reflection of *tendencies* in his cultural moment, but he was ahead of the curve(s), which is why he could make certain things "cool." The best artists (I think, for example, of Miles Davis in the late '50s to mid '70s) are reaching ahead and pulling the rest of us into a tangle of connections that have not quite been forged yet, that are there in potential, in the virtual. Lady Gaga is doing that as well, though I'm not sure which of her connections we might want to pursue.

**AI:** *Magic & Grace Jones.* I should define what I mean by "magic" here. I wrote that "the brain is a magical tool, built for noting connections between things so as to be able to work those connections"; and this aspect of seeking correspondences between things is important in most

forms of ritual magic going back to well before the Renaissance (which was the heyday of ritual magic; I'm not speaking of sleight-of-hand stage magic here, though there's a historical connection between the two). But that doesn't get across the centrality of the *image*, which shares etymological roots with "magic" for good reason. Most contemporary practitioners of ritual magic would define magic as something like "the art of working with images to bring about affective change." This is, of course, exactly what the modern arts of advertising, marketing, and propaganda do so well. (Ioan Couliano, among others, has shown the indebtedness of those arts to what Renaissance mages like Ficino, Bruno, et al. were up to.)

To say that an artist (e.g. Bowie) or a film/video is "magical" is to suggest that they have an enchanting, spellbinding effect on us. It is, arguably, the *movement* of the *image* that most directly elicits that effect. Cinema is magical by nature. Capitalist cinema is cinema that triggers a response in its viewers, a need, drive, or desire that can only be satiated (however temporarily and ineffectively) in and through the commodity. This is rarely *all* that a film/media object does, and the pursuit of commodities is in any case rarely *only* that. The question for me is what other trigger points can be solicited, charged, invoked by a film or by a viewer in the presence of a film.

To the extent that "Corporate Cannibal" adds to—and enlivens—the iconography by which we imagine capitalism as deadly, it is performing anti-capitalist magic. But Jones *is* the cannibal here, the "digital criminal" (and "criminality" suggests something outside the norm, not mere capitalism but only an extreme form of it). So there's no point of identification for us as viewers except in the act of over-the-top mimicry. It's up to us whether to extend this mimicry to our lives, to use it as a hinge for opposing capitalism, or to shrug our shoulders and enjoy the game.

**MOR:** *Gaga's Modulations*. Adrian—citing from the opening chapter of *Post-Cinematic Affect*—writes that the video for "Corporate Cannibal" reflects a

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state of endless modulation. Jones plays herself as endless modulator of her own image, an image that “swells and contracts, bends and fractures, twists, warps and contorts and flows from one shape to another,” all the while projecting a certain style, a certain “singularity” of “Grace Jones’ as celebrity icon,” a “long string of Jones’s reinventions of herself.” Jones is the transgressive “posthuman” who, unlike Madonna who “puts on and takes off personas as if they were clothes,” cannot retreat into the anonymity of the unmarked (because white) artist. Jones, a black woman, is already marked to start with, and is therefore playing “for keeps,” devouring “whatever she encounters, converting it into more image, more electronic signal,” and “track[ing] and embrac[ing] the transmutations of capital” as she goes. Jones in this sense represents “the chronic condition of our hypermodernity,” a hypermodernity we, or most of us, cannot escape. (“Post-Cinematic Affect in the Era of Plasticity”)

Lady Gaga, of course, is clearly marked as a *white* artist who “puts on and takes off personas as if they were clothes,” and for this reason she has most often been compared to Madonna. However, earlier this year, Grace Jones herself lashed out at Gaga for copying her style(s) and her outfits. Karin says that Gaga is in many respects “similar” to Grace Jones. But might we not go further and substitute Gaga for Jones in Shaviro’s arguments above? Gaga, too, is after all, in a state of “endless modulation” and re-modulation of her image. Rather than being a flattened out surface as Jameson might say, doesn’t Gaga also swell, contract, bend, fracture and flow as she morphs and manipulates from one shape to another in a kind of posthuman performativity? This does not signal an “end” to style as Jameson might argue (or indeed a “waning of affect”). To be sure, Gaga too projects a “certain style” and “singularity” of Lady Gaga as “celebrity icon.” But do her flows, warpings and contortions and endless shape-shiftings suggest possibilities for productive flows, ways to escape the “chronic conditions” of hypermodern capitalism? Do Gaga’s plasticized

mutations create “wobble room” for further mutations at the level of the social, economic, ecological, technical?

Like Jones, Gaga cannibalizes and consumes everything within reach and transmutes and twists it into yet “more image.” We could argue that the Haus of Gaga’s transcodings simply embrace hyper-commercialism and commodity culture. But this would be to miss the way that Gaga transmits affect, the ways in which her own remixings and self-alterations produce effects in viewers and fans. Jo Calderone’s appearance at the VMA awards as Gaga (who performs her own absence) forcefully brings the affective work of being, imitating, remixing, and performing Gaga to the fore. If Jones is “marked,” and therefore “playing for keeps,” then maybe Gaga has a greater potential for facilitating turbulent flows which might allow for an escape—however sporadic that might be—from the logic of capital. Adrian says that “[t]he point is to multiply/pluralize/open up what’s available, creating possibilities for alternative trajectories. I tend to follow J.K.Gibson-Graham’s and others’ argument against seeing capitalism as a massive and singular monolith. There are alternative patterns being generated in this planetary eco-socio-technical machine and we can ally with them to move elsewhere.” And, perhaps Lady Gaga’s accelerationist aesthetics is one such alternative trajectory?

**MOR:** *Going Gaga.* In his contribution to the catalogue for the recent exhibition *Speculative*, Jack Halberstam talks about “Gaga Feminism” as he thinks about new possibilities for living in an inviable world and ways in which we might revolutionize our critical modes and tactics of reflection imaginatively and politically to generate a more “livable future.” Jack loves the little manifesto-text *The Coming Insurrection* by The Invisible Committee which urges us to “wild and massive experimentation with new arrangements and fidelities,” also suggesting that we should “organize beyond and against work” (qtd. in Halberstam 26). Jack also exhorts us to think in less disciplined, more an-archic ways, to think like “speculative and utopian intellectuals” in order to refashion

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our political landscapes:

on behalf of more anarchy, less state, cooperative social forms and brand new sex/gender systems, I offer up Gaga Feminism—a form of feminism that advocates going gaga, being gaga, running amok, physically and intellectually, and in the process finding new languages with which to imagine, craft, and implement a different way of living, loving, and making art. (28)

**SD:** *Alles Gaga.* Just wanted to chime in once more and say what a fascinating discussion this has turned into. I'm still not sure I have a total grasp of the magic/homeopathy distinction or continuum, but it looks like an interesting avenue to follow, at least to tentatively imagine some contours in what is a chaotic (media and cultural) landscape. And I'm very much looking forward to Shaviro's own take on the discussion of Gaga (and her relation to Jones, Bowie, Tarzan & Co.); I know that he is quite interested in Gaga, so I'm hopeful he'll have something to say.

**AI:** *Going More than Just Gaga.* Celebrity culture and hyper-fashion are very comfortably established within the landscape of capitalism, but they can be used to do some interesting things. I'm sympathetic to Halberstam's (and others') arguments for a Gaga Feminism, as I think it does provide symbolic and affective resources for "refashioning" our social and cultural landscapes (and maybe our political landscapes, in a loose sense of the word). In Michael's words, Gaga Feminism may well "facilitate turbulent flows which might allow for an escape—however sporadic that might be—from the logic of capital."

But it's worth thinking about the extent, quality, and sustainability of that "escape." The logic of capital can be *resisted* through a variety of escape hatches, liberated spaces, etc., but I don't think it can actually be *replaced* unless there's a different logic to take its place. And that requires a more systematic and fundamental refashioning of the ways we live, produce and consume things, and metabolize the world around us.

**Elena del Río:** *Most Everything*. Adrian, I have some comments that are about different things I've been thinking, not necessarily the last Gaga stream. They're also about things said all over this discussion by Paul and Patricia, or suggested in Shaviro's book. I've been thinking that affect is a very slippery concept and each of us has their own take on it. I've usually thought of it in the Spinozist sense of a power to affect or be affected, a power to pass from one state of the body (taking body in the most general sense of materiality) to another. Of course, that can involve an augmentation or a diminution of a body's capacity to act, and, although the affective-expressive event always carries the sense of transformation, from an ethical (not moral) standpoint, it can either involve creation or destruction, composition or decomposition. This seemingly very straightforward definition demands a much more nuanced perspective and tons of qualifications or readjustments when we begin to transfer the affective into the realm of neoliberal, global capitalism or the post-cinematic as discussed in Shaviro's book. Something I said too lightly the first day has been coming back to me and I need to retract what I said. Michael brought up Ruth Leys's critique of affect theory; one of the grounds of her critique had to do with how affect was utilized to discipline subjects. My response to that was that discipline and affect ran in opposite directions, as I was taking affect to point to the disruptive force of events or things that takes us away from signification, representation, etc. (also in the sense Patricia talks about it in her wonderful post and as expressed by her clip). However, Shaviro's book as well as some of your posts here have made me reconsider, and probably expand on, this perspective. When Shaviro talks about the affective flows of hypercapitalism, the flows formed in the pervasive, and irreversible, exchangeability of affects and commodities, there is very little here of the affirmative possibilities of affect as I originally understood it. The only transformative force indeed in this self-expanding, self-devouring cycle is, as he also mentions, its own accelerated speed that might eventually usher in its own collapse. But I also think the post-cinematic need not be wholly colonized by such overwhelmingly commodified processes,



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and this is what for me opens up the notion of affect into two different dimensions.

Of course affects, in the sense of flows and movements of forces, can be used in the direction of colonizing, territorializing, repressing, or whatever. One thinks of the highly emotive crowds of the third Reich, the explosive encounters between hooligans at a soccer/football game, or, indeed, anybody engaging in high-strung emotions that are directed towards politically repressive ends. But, as Adrian remarks when speaking about the magical, “it is up to us to nudge it in the right directions.” So, to my point about how the post-cinematic need not be as completely identified with the affective flows of transnational capitalism, with its unremitting conversion of affect into currency: I’m not sure I can articulate this very clearly yet, as I’m working through it, but it’s just a try. We need to differentiate between actual affects and virtual ones that still retain the capacity for mutation. For example, the post-cinematic should, in my opinion, do something more than simply diagnose or show the capitalist production of affective flows. It should also accommodate a supplementary dimension of friction, distance, or difference/shock so as to mark the possibility for the affective production to be decomposed or redirected into different affective configurations. In other words, the affects cannot just stand in their actualized form of whatever flows capitalism manufactures for its own ends, but art/media/the post-cinematic should try to extricate these congealed affects from the limits imposed on them by signifying regimes of global media and capitalist exchange. Such an operation I think would emphasize the virtual, most creative aspect of affect. I think some of this has been said by Adrian already when he was talking about art, but I needed the rambling for my own clarification.

**KS:** *The Gaga Concept.*

Shaviro argues that Grace Jones’s African heritage and Afrofuturist undertones provide her with an ability to fully embody, and continually (re)internalize, her play with surfaces: her mutational selves “delv[e]

beneath the surfaces” in a way that somebody like Madonna never could (*Post-Cinematic Affect* 24). Importantly, what keeps this progression going is the de- and re-fleshing chaos that ensues from Jones’s becoming-alien. Jones self-cannibalistically devours and is devoured, dissolves and rematerializes. She is an amorphous meaty madness machine, that admittedly always falls back into the harmonic chain of readable images, but nevertheless provides that little moment of freakiness or “friction” that is needed if we are to instill some magic into hypercapitalist accelerationism.

Lady Gaga’s grotesque play with the very concept of internalization (like when she wore the infamous meat dress to the MTV Video Music Awards, literally wearing the fleshy insides on the outside) and constant use of distorting make-up and prostheses (like in the videos for “Born this Way” and “Bad Romance”) brings her one step further down the line of dehumanization than Grace Jones. She *is* “gaga,” the “mother monster,” madness personified—and her figure never truly falls back in line. Where Jones instills a pinch of chaos into the structure of her image, Gaga installs it into the structure of contemporary pop culture.

**MOR:** “*After Hope.*” Adrian concludes his curation by asking: “Can we get by without hope for a beyond to hypercapitalism?” Coincidentally, Shaviro has published a brand new article called “After Hope” on Mladen Djordjevic’s *Life and Death of a Porno Gang* (2009), which balances the Serbian film’s more utopian moments against its more death-driven ones. He uses Deleuzian language to describe this temporary escape from social, economic and cultural forces: “There is a strong utopian element to the porno gang’s summer tour through the Serbian countryside. A group of self-consciously marginal people form their own small counter-society, fueled by sex, drugs, and a shared spirit of adventure. Their trip is an exodus, a creative line of flight.” Even though the characters “experiment with new ways of living, loving, and expressing,” they are unable to escape the clutches of hypercapital: “In the world of globalized, neoliberal capitalism, transgression is not a daring risk. It is no longer a repudiation of all social

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norms. Rather, it is a supreme commodity, a locus of particularly intense capitalist value-extraction. Transgression is not an act of defiance, but a reaffirmation of power.”

Adrian comments that

it’s worth thinking about the extent, quality, and sustainability of that “escape.” The logic of capital can be *resisted* through a variety of escape hatches, liberated spaces, etc., but I don’t think it can actually be *replaced* unless there’s a different logic to take its place. And that requires a more systematic and fundamental refashioning of the ways we live, produce and consume things, and metabolize the world around us.

And, as Shaviro poignantly demonstrates, however much the porno gang finds creative lines of flight and experiments with new ways of living, loving, producing, expressing, in the end these metabolizations are unsustainable: All this becomes apparent both in the narrative content of the film and in its stylistics. *Life and Death of a Porno Gang* speaks of, and to, a time when hope has been exhausted, and when it seems that There Is No Alternative. If it does nonetheless suggest a way out from the universal rule of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, this is only because it speaks so marginally and so obliquely, from a position of humiliation and opprobrium.

**AI:** *Affect, Capitalism, & the Big Outside*. Thanks, Elena, for bringing up Leys’s critique of the “new affect theorists”—and thanks, Michael, for bringing that into the conversation originally. I find Leys’s article interesting and useful, not because she demolishes the Massumi-Connolly (and by extension Tomkins-Ekman) paradigm of affect as separate and, in some ways, prior to cognition (she doesn’t), but because she enriches the conversation that humanists (the people who read *Critical Inquiry*) can have about affect and its role in politics and culture. I’ve never found Massumi’s “missing half second” argument entirely convincing; it seemed

Paul Bowman et al.

to me too much like the other snippets of pop-science that circulate for a while and then disappear (the “hundredth monkey,” the “butterfly effect,” etc.). But I think Massumi and especially Connolly, at their best, acknowledge the complex layerings and interactions between the affective and the cognitive-representational-intentional.

Leys identifies a risk in the “new affect theory”—that of re-reifying a dualism between mind and body at a different level than the one that had already been rejected by these theorists. But I would say that this is a point of ambiguity in the theorists (Massumi et al.) that needs to be further thought through. Her alternative paradigm is hardly a paradigm yet (from what I can tell), but it’s useful to think of the Tomkins-Ekman school of thought *as* a paradigm, with critics and potential rivals, and of the Damasio-Ledoux-et al. neuroscientific paradigm—and the Deleuzo-Spinozan line of thought that we all, it seems, draw from to varying degrees—also as paradigms, with their critics, faddishness, etc.

All that aside, I agree that we need art/media that would “try to extricate these congealed affects from the limits imposed on them by signifying regimes of global media and capitalist exchange.” I’m not as pessimistic as Steven is, in part because I tend to consort with people who do very different kinds of things (start farming CSAs, work on “transition town” plans for small cities, try to revive decaying cities like Detroit from the ground up, etc.) and maybe because I live in the DIY optimist’s (quasi-socialist, by US standards) state of Vermont, so these things give me hope. But they also tend to be off-the-map of popular media culture. I would love to bring Grace Jones here for a year’s artistic residency.

**MOR:** *The Affect Debate Continues...* Adrian and Elena, you might be interested to know that Bill Connolly has responded to Ruth Leys’s critique (“The Complexity of Intention”) and that she, in turn, has offered a response (“Affect and Intention”), both in the current issue of *Critical Inquiry*. However convinced or unconvinced you may be by their

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respective arguments, this debate is at least revivifying the affective turn and this, as Adrian says, gives us further food for thought.

**EdR:** *One Last Thing—And Thank You.* This is what I meant all along. I'm borrowing Claire Colebrook's words because she says it very precisely: There is nothing radical per se about affect, but the *thought* of affect—the power of philosophy or true thinking to pass beyond affects and images to the thought of differential imaging, the thought of life in its power to differ—*is desire, and is always and necessarily radical.* The power of art not just to present this or that affect, but to bring us to an experience of any affect whatever or “affectuality”—or *that there is* affect—is ethical: not a judgment upon life so much as an affirmation of life.

For me, this is a non-negotiable aspect of Deleuze's thinking—the way he commits to a radical thinking that rejects any kind of reduction of life to any single term or series of relations, be it capitalism or any other form of axiomatic repetition or stratification. I agree with Shaviro that affect is the terrain itself where the war (of desire, of bodies and their will to power) is being waged, and there is no spatialized outside, no transcendental ground from where to judge its play of forces or dynamics. The affective itself is the plane of immanence, yet, for that very reason it cannot be totalized by, or subsumed under, one single term such as capital. And I even wonder whether, in fact, effecting such totalization does not amount to a reinscription of transcendence.

This discussion (and I know this doesn't have to be the end) has been amazingly enriching for me, and I want to give a big *thank you* to everyone involved, especially Michael, Karin, Kris, Shane, and Adrian, for their relentless intellectual generosity, and Shaviro for pushing me to think through his work and his comments.

\* \* \*

#### 4. Fragments of Unconscious Machines

Patricia MacCormack

Shaviro states we “scarcely have the vocabulary to describe” post-cinema (*Post-Cinematic Affect 2*). Can we now ethically commit to being new media spectators rather than needing to address new media itself (without its exclusion, of course)? Can new media actually herald a more material imperative? Opening each increment of “the film” to its infinite or infinitesimal (no matter how brief, always both) presents an ethics of expressivity. In its post-structural/astructural genealogical context, at worst the post-modern pseudo hedonism-identity resulting from indulgence in metamorphic signifiers, but at best from Shaviro’s suggestion, an adherence to the capacity to express and thus affect, and the capacity to be affected by expression in a Spinozan sense, without easily alighting upon the familiar, the coded, the presumptively causal or contextually consistent. Free floating sensibility is a deeply corporeal sensorial, as effulgent as it is frightening in the realm which demands sense without subjectification and experience without signification—Shaviro’s “participation” over “representation.” YouTube coalesces search with finding what we didn’t know, expect, want, accident as experimentation. The clip has no relation to itself as contextualized by a film. YouTube means searching and coming upon random clips; they are not fragments but complete in themselves, scenes without and beyond cinema. The accident is integral to the film experience, it can only exist by accident. This clip is not “from” a film; YouTube offers the fragment for itself, while using the full film as referent excuses the fragment. Like the search for recognizable content occupying this scene, the scene contextualized by narrative is unnecessary. YouTube’s fragment spans possible unconscious machines, potentially affected ecstasy, libidinal confusion or boredom or . . .

This clip<sup>[7]</sup> is what Shaviro calls “*expressive*: . . . giv[ing] voice (or better, giv[ing] sounds and images) to a kind of ambient, free-floating sensibility that permeates our society today” (*Post-Cinematic Affect 2*).

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The ballerinas are evocative escaping irritant, witch and child punctum without referent, in a sanguine vascular-corridor trajectory, to where our eye has migrated, now occupying a new sensorial territory, expressive perceiving-affected organ-dissipation. Our harrowed ears emphasized and our attention aching, demanding with no response but the wide eyed catalyzation of a tachycardic gesturing. We see nothing, we are affronted with the shard of illumination that blinds, looking without alighting, photophobic warnings to not seek but open to affect, seeing as expression, our belief in an abstracted shape that reveals there is nothing to reveal, what Shaviro calls allure, not always pleasant but irreversible.

**Michael O'Rourke:** *Cinesensuality*. Thanks Patricia. I'm very taken by the last line of your post where you mention "our belief in an abstracted shape that reveals there is nothing to reveal, what Shaviro calls allure, not always pleasant but irreversible" because I have long wondered whether there is a connection between Graham Harman's concept of allure (and the way it is taken up by Shaviro in *Post-Cinematic Affect*) and your own work in *Cinesexuality* on filmy-ness and mucosal perception. The cinesexual encounter (or event, as you call it) is always one which involves tactile and viscous acts of desire, and as Shaviro explains, "*Intimacy* is what we call the situation in which people try to probe each other's hidden depths" (*Post-Cinematic Affect* 8).

These moments of *cineintimacy* between spectators and the filmy-ness of films—where it is fragments-which-are-complete-in-themselves that make demands on us as viewers—are precisely alluring in the sense which Harman and Shaviro use the term: "The inner, surplus existence of the alluring object is something that I cannot reach," and this alluring object "explicitly *calls attention* to the fact that it is something more than, and other than, the bundle of qualities that it presents to me" (9). When Harman writes about sensual objects he is referring to the way that all objects are not reducible to their appearing and that their very "inappearance" or excessiveness-to-appearance involves a disjunction

between their bundle of qualities and their very being. And, as Shaviro puts it:

What Harman calls *allure* is the way in which an object does not just display certain particular qualities to me, but also insinuates the presence of a hidden, deeper level of existence. . . . I experience allure when I am intimate with someone, or when I am obsessed with someone or something. But allure is not just my own projection. For any object that I encounter *really* is deeper than, and other than, what I am able to grasp of it. And the object becomes alluring, precisely to the extent that it forces me to acknowledge this hidden depth, instead of ignoring it. Indeed, allure may well be strongest when I experience it *vicariously*: in relation to an object, person, or thing that I do not actually know, or otherwise care about (9).

**Shane Denson:** *Surface/Depth Allure*. Great post, and nice approach to YouTube, which resonates with a tendency of my own in thinking about visual media. This discussion of allure helps me to think about this tendency somewhat critically, though, and I wonder what you might think about this. The tendency I'm thinking of is the tendency to look for moments that somehow escape narrative (or continuity), exceed it through self-reflexivity or preoccupation with non-narrative visuality or mediality (whether in Buster Keaton's "operational aesthetic," in sci-fi special effects, or gratuitous flaunting of CGI, etc.). I tend to seek out this excess—which YouTube showcases almost by default—and to address it as a deeper level of medial materiality underlying the discursive construction of the diegesis, a level that (one might say) has an allure of its own, which resonates with the materiality of my own embodied, pre-subjective agency. I'm not ready to give up on this approach, but the talk of allure allows me to think depth and surface as reversible—material depth is at the same time visible surface, narrative *Oberfläche* is at the same time a dimension of depth created through the images. My quest to become intimate with the material/affective underside of film or other



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visual media (a quest that YouTube and the digital generally expedite) is, in a sense, something like the tunneling of perception that we execute when we focus on only one instrument within a larger symphony (or maybe listen for audience members coughing in the pauses), whereas the symphony as a whole has an allure of its own, which is no less material, no less embodied, no less animated by an agency that exceeds the intentions of (one or more) humans. This is just to say that decontextualization (whether imagined by me or enacted concretely on YouTube) is one way of achieving a non-anthropocentric intimacy with a “deep” materiality, but isn’t there an equally non-anthropocentric intimacy to be found in a focus on the surface, in a probing exchange of agencies at the level of the narrative? We might think of the infinity that Levinas sees at work in the encounter between subjects—an alterity that exceeds subjective capture. Might we not find something similar in the film-viewing experience, a sort of too-big infinity that constitutes the allure of the narratively contexted clip, which complements the digital allure of the infinitesimal and decontexted?

**MOR:** *Cineallure*. This strangeness at the heart of objects and the weird excess which makes them appealing to us reminds me of your cinesexual encounter-event (which is also an experience of *intimacy with or desire for* something which is “deeper than and other than what I am able to grasp of it”) and how the very filmy-ness of film is also a kind of vacuum seal. There is a fundamental aporicity, it seems to me, in both Harman’s radically withdrawing objects and the filmy-ness found in cinesexuality. And this also brings affect into the picture since the cinesexual embrace is affectively excessive and the spectator (who is a disincorporated subject) participates in this “not always pleasantly” (never painlessly) and “irreversibly” (but always longingly, desirously). So the way you describe “cinecstasy” resonates with Shaviro’s allure which “reveals” that “there is nothing to reveal.” As you say in *Cinesexuality*: “cinesexuality describes a unique consistency that is cinematically ‘filmy’ rather than being about films” (15). And a bit further on: “Every time a concept is

teased it affects all other concepts and the total singular whole changes its nature, function and percepts—the territory of which is an event of the production Spinoza sees as the result of affection and affectivity. This book is about cinema but certain cross-over concepts arise” (16). Could one of these cross-over concepts be “cineallure” which would describe the way our relation (or non-relation) to the cinematic makes a swerve away from the subjugation of images to narrativity, context, or meaning? For, as you say here, “Free floating sensibility is a deeply corporeal sensorial, as effulgent as it is frightening in the realm which demands sense without subjectification and experience without signification—Shaviro’s ‘participation’ over ‘representation.’” So, in the cinealluring encounter-event, in the conjugations and participations you and Shaviro are imagining (Guattari in *The Machinic Unconscious* would call these “machinic territorialities”), is the pellicule/skin of the celluloid one we touch without touching? And in this “conjugal territory” (Blanchot) of radical withdrawal, don’t we encounter a material which is precisely excessive (tacky and sticky) and sensual in Harman’s terms?

**MOR:** *She’s in Fashion?* I have a further comment/question for Patricia about how your work converges with or diverges from Shaviro’s. It is clear enough—on reading *Cinesexuality*—that *The Cinematic Body* has been a shaping influence on your creation of concepts and theories of enfleshment. But, I wonder if the moment of *Post-Cinematic Affect* gives us a chance to assess shifts not just in Shaviro’s work but also your own. Adrian remarks that Shaviro down- or under-plays the Deleuzian/Whiteheadian strand in *Post-Cinematic Affect*. When we think of what the project of *Without Criteria* was, this seems all the more strange. That book successfully staged a philosophical fantasy in which Whitehead’s process philosophy would replace or succeed Heideggerian phenomenology. Yet, and despite the many differences between Shaviro’s philosophy and Harman’s (and the disputes between them can be traced on their respective blogs [Object Oriented Philosophy and The Pinocchio Theory] as well as in their essays in *The Speculative Turn*), the emphasis on allure would suggest that it

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is (Heideggerian/Husserlian) phenomenology which is more at the fore in this recent book. (Of course Shaviro everywhere problematizes the logic of succession and the “post.” His concepts of the post-cinematic and post-continuity do not mean replacement but rather a repurposing or retooling.) And your own focus on allure above would suggest that phenomenology has taken a more prominent place in your own thinking (indeed the most dominant strand in your own writing has been the Deleuzo-Guattarian one). Of course, I’m not arguing that you and Shaviro are suddenly more interested in phenomenology than Deleuze/Whitehead. But I am suggesting that you are both less suspicious of the phenomenological tradition than you had been up to now. (Suspicious might be too generous a word for your work since Heidegger and Levinas merit just one entry each in the index for *Cinesexuality*, and Merleau-Ponty only just beats them with two.) And this may well be signaling a reversal in theoretical fashions more generally. Up until recently, *en vogue* in continental philosophical circles have been thinkers such as Deleuze, Badiou, Žižek, Lacan, Laruelle, Malabou, over against the more unfashionable thinkers from the phenomenological tradition. What is theoretically interesting about Shaviro’s work (and your own) is that they stage potential encounters or unnatural alliances between these two divergent trends.

**Karin Sellberg:** *YouTube*. Thanks for a truly inspired post, Patricia! I find the way you describe YouTube absolutely alluring—I caught myself starting to consider its hidden depths and affective magnetism. I have one question, though—YouTube clips are certainly different from films, trailers, and excerpts, but are they really a new visual art form? Is it not rather similar to the 1990s and early 2000s installation art of, for example, Tracey Emin and Matthew Ritchie, where the viewer is getting the impression of watching random slice-of-life clips and/or confessional and awkwardly intimate pieces of self-expression? Sure, YouTube is online, readily available and open to everybody, which makes the range of material rather different to what you would see in a gallery space, but

their affective exchange and participatory approach seem rather similar to me.

One might even argue that art that features random CCTV clips, like the work of Bruce Nauman, would be even more accidental and conducive for affective unconscious machines, since the YouTube clip will always carry the context of the very conscious act of filming or posting.

**MOR:** *Free Labor and Affect.* Karin, this brings to mind Tiziana Terranova's concept of "free labor." After all, those who upload, edit, and comment on YouTube clips are willingly giving up their time and labor. The following quotation from an interview with Terranova is very interesting in the context of this week's discussions (especially with respect to the comments on Adrian's post and the conversation about Gaga) and in terms of post-cinematic affect and work more generally:

In Marxist terms, what you are asking about is how you pass from the existence of a "class-in-itself," that is a class whose existence as such is given within the objective conditions of production, to a "class for itself," that is a class who is conscious of its unity and able to pursue collectively its goals of shared liberation. If we remain within this framework, then the unity of such a class is "objectively" given within the conditions of the current capitalist mode of production. The unity of labor is given by its generalized exploitation that is characterized on the one hand by a surplus of wealth (the excess of pleasurable production, of the investments, desires, knowledge, intelligence, and capacity for invention) and on the other hand by its surplus of "poverty" (economic impoverishment, loss of rights, and control over the working process, etc.). In such context, which Negri and Hardt among others have called "biopolitical capitalism," this passage is problematized in ways that help to understand the difficulties I'm having in answering your very important question. The

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technologies of production, and the very source of production, are basically affecting and reworking subjectivity. It is as if capital had installed itself within the working subject. It constitutes it at the level of language, affect, perception.

As Franco Berardi has put it, it is as if the antagonism between labor and capital has been interiorized as a conflict within the subject—causing feelings of inadequacy, fear, depression, powerlessness, isolation. The unity of the working class as class for itself in industrial production is given by the collective nature of that work, the disunity of the working class as class for itself in conditions of free labor is given by this interiorization of capital, of competitiveness, individualism etc.

However, I do believe that the conditions for a newly found unity is given somehow within the current organization of production. It is the unity of the network, that is a mutant multiplicity in an endless process of transformation. Nobody can see the future, but I still believe that it is within the form of the network, and the peculiar conditions that it expresses, that new antagonistic relations will be realized. I'm saying 'potential antagonisms' because the network is a very open form and it does not mean that it will have the contents that we believe it should have. After all you are dealing with subjectivity, that is with memory, habits, percepts, affects, desires, opinions, feelings, sex etc.! There is no historical teleology, here, no predetermined happy ending for the troubled relation between labor and capital, but only an open field of experimentation.

**Patricia MacCormack:** *Territories of Need*. Shaviro suggests “we do not live in a world in which the forces of affective vitality are battling against the blandness and exhaustion of capitalist commodification. Rather, we live in a world in which *everything is affective*” (in part 5 of this conversation), and responding to your fascinating suggestion that this could herald a new kind of phenomenology which sees theory as affective of itself, neither taxonomical nomenclature nor resistant to it: In

a way we can come thus to theory itself as approach and allure—tentative, as a promising but enticing libidinal territory. We know we are destined to be unfaithful but as Shaviro rightly points out, it is precisely because theory is neither faithful nor unfaithful to the false dichotomy of affect or/over/against resistance. It invokes Rodowick’s “cinema of thought,” which claimed all memory is resistance and all history is power—both are always simultaneous and it is the very imperative not to choose which is that which makes all approach ethical and all allure irresistible without being felicitous. The clip nature of your interesting examples of fragmentary events bear out Shaviro’s thoughts, because the fragment is always part of a connective consistency just as those cinematic events which masquerade as complete conceal the unnatural participations they are always making with all territories of affect and all affect as territory. The question becomes not whether an affective territory is resistant or, as your wonderful expression suggests, teleologically memorial, but to what extent it is needed at any moment. For this reason, YouTube’s clip-ish nature is the need we didn’t know we had because it forces us to take responsibility for the use of the affects of the accidental terrain.

**PM:** *A New Occultism.* I have very much enjoyed the coalescences of ideas on panpsychicism and magic. It seems what is being suggested in these intersections is what could be called a new occultism that, in a radical reconfiguration of superstition or ordained “faith,” terms such as panpsychism and magic are able to be utilized as belief in what is not finally and exhaustibly knowable but is premised on experimental mappings of chaos to catalyze what could have only hitherto been thought of as inconceivable or, more correctly for cinema, imperceptible. I think we may have here a new ecstasy or mysticism which is a deeply ethical project that emphasizes affect as activism, and so we could add to Foucault’s thought from outside which replaces knowledge only possible within the epistemic slaughter of affects, the idea of belief (a Spinozist seeking of ethical benefit or good while acknowledging results can never be predicted—thus technically a belief in what we do not yet know, the

belief in quality of affect itself, liberated from description or prescription) and hope (perhaps a new methodology of investigation to replace myths or hypotheses). Potentially this is a strange little divergence, but recalling Shaviro's emphasis on new opportunities for emergent vocabularies, these words are no less empirical but through their exquisite sensitivity produce a way to describe projects of affect-ivation.

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## 5. A Response Steven Shaviro

First of all, I would like to thank Michael O'Rourke, Karin Sellberg, and Kris Cannon for setting up this theme week at *In Media Res* devoted to my book *Post-Cinematic Affect*, to the curators Elena del Río, Paul Bowman, Adrian Ivakhiv, and Patricia MacCormack for their postings, and also to Shane Denson for his comments. The discussion has been so rich, and it has gone in so many directions, that I scarcely know where to begin. I will try to make a few comments, at least, about each of the four curators' postings in turn.

Elena del Río praises the power of affect, for the way that it "throws into disarray the system of recognition and naming." She opposes the state of "exhaustion" and indifferent equalization that we might seem to have reached in this age of globalized finance capital to the way that "affect or vitality" remains able to energize us, to shake things up, to allow for (in the words of Deleuze) "a vital power that cannot be confined within species [or] environment." While I remain moved by this vision—which has its roots in Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Deleuze—I am increasingly dubious as to its viability. I'm inclined to say that praising affect as a force of "resistance" is a category error. For we do not live in a world in which the forces of affective vitality are battling against the blandness and exhaustion of capitalist commodification. Rather, we live in a world in which *everything is affective*. What politics is more virulently affective and vital than that

of the American Tea Party? Where is intensive metamorphosis more at work than in the “hyper-chaos” (as Elie Ayache characterizes it, following Quentin Meillassoux) of the global financial markets? It is not a question of a fight between affect and its “waning” or exhaustion (whether the latter is conceived as the actual negation of the former, or just as its zero degree). Rather than being on one side of a battle, affect is the terrain itself: the very battlefield on which all conflicts are played out. All economic and aesthetic events today are necessarily aesthetic ones, both for good and for ill.

Paul Bowman is therefore not being wrongheaded when he wonders “whether approaching the world in terms of affect offers anything specific for cultural theory and the understanding of culture and politics.” Indeed, I answer this question in the affirmative, whereas Bowman seems to lean towards the negative. But my saying this is not because I think that affect offers us “anything specific”; it is rather because affect (much like Whitehead’s *creativity*, or Spinoza’s *conatus*) is an entirely *generic* notion, one that more or less applies to everything. Affect is not a particular quality; rather it designates the fact that *every* moment of experience is qualitative and qualified. Eliminativist philosophers notoriously argue that “qualia” do not exist; at the opposite extreme from this, I follow William James and Whitehead in insisting that there is nothing devoid of qualia. For this reason, I am in agreement with the commentators who suggest that the two affective readings Bowman offers of the clip from *Old Boy* are not in contradiction to one another, and that sensual heightening and loneliness in fact go together. Bowman’s *effects* are inseparable from what I am calling *affects*.

Adrian Ivakhiv asks “whether there remain breathing spaces and sources of transcendence *outside* of hypercapitalism’s ever-modulating codes.” That is to say, he worries that my account of what Marx called the “real subsumption” of all social forces under capitalism in contemporary society leaves no room for anything else. Do I not run the risk of painting



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so totalizing a picture that Whitehead's and Deleuze's vision of an "open universe" becomes impossible? I must admit that I present a rather pessimistic view of our prospects. I fear that under the sway of what Mark Fisher has called "capitalist realism" we suffer today from a general paralysis, both of the will and of the imagination. I do not share Gibson-Graham's happy vision of all sorts of wonderful utopian alternatives burgeoning under the surface of actually existing capitalism. If I instead present what seems like a totalizing picture, this is only to the extent that capitalism "itself"—however multiple and without-identity it may actually be—involves an incessant *drive towards* totalization.

This is capital's essential project: the ever-expanding accumulation of itself, of capital. It's a process that is both economic (quantitative) and aesthetic (qualitative). The goal of complete subsumption is of course never entirely realized, precisely because accumulation can never come to an end. Also, we cannot see, feel, hear, or touch this project or process: in itself it is a version of what Ivakhiv calls "magic." And to my mind, this makes the aesthetic a kind of counter-magic, a *spell* to force the monstrosity to reveal itself, an effort to make it visible, audible, and palpable.

Patricia MacCormack generously expands upon the aesthetic and affective stakes of what I was trying to accomplish in *Post-Cinematic Affect*—as opposed to the concerns over "capitalist realism" that also play a large role in the book, and that were the focus of the other posts. I thank her for calling attention to the Whiteheadian and Deleuzian themes that, as several of the other commentators noted, seemed less present in this book than in my earlier ones. Indeed, this is a tension—or a problem that I have been unable to solve—running through pretty much all of my work. Mallarmé's maxim defines everything that I am trying to do as a critic: "Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et l'Economie politique" ("Everything comes down to Aesthetics and Political Economy"). This seems to me to be a necessary truth about the world; but I am never certain where to draw the line, how to partition the world between aesthetics and political

economy, or when they are absolutely incompatible with one another, and when they are able to partially coincide.

In conclusion, I offer a media object that I hope responds to at least some of the tensions and confusions that we have been discussing this week: the music video for Janelle Monae's song "Cold War."[\[8\]](#)

The song, from Monae's concept album *The ArchAndroid*, works as a kind of Afrofuturist counterpoint to Grace Jones's "Corporate Cannibal." It addresses the unavoidable conflicts of a world that is increasingly posthuman (as well as post-cinematic). The lyrics to "Cold War" reflect upon the demands and meanings of Emersonian self-reliance and authenticity, and of subjectivity more generally, in a world that is entirely manufactured and commodified. The Metropolis Suite, of which *The ArchAndroid* is a part, narrates the plight of a robot/slave—a commodity, all the more so because she is nonwhite—who has been slated for demolition because she has fallen in love. She is therefore forced, not only to flee for her life, but to invent out of whole cloth, and without models, what it might mean for her to be a "person" with a "life," that is to say, with feelings, needs, and desires. The lyrics of "Cold War," in particular, speak both to the absolute requirement of self-integrity and to the near-impossibility of defining what it might be. The video is a single, continuous take: we even see a time code running in the corner, and a title reading "Take One" appears near the beginning. Against a dark background, we see an extreme close-up head shot of Monae as she sings the song. But at some point, there's a glitch: she flubs a line, looks to the side and seems to be bantering with someone off-camera. Then she clenches her face and seems to be barely holding back tears. Through all of this, her voice and the music continues to play, indicating that she has in fact been lip-synching all along. The extreme intimacy and emotionality conveyed by the close-up on Monae's facial expressions coincide with the revelation of the video's artifice. The video thus resonates with the "Club Silencio" sequence in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (which was sampled in Elena Del Río's video). I don't

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think that the revelation of technological artifice undercuts the affective intensity of the performance (as might have been the case in some 20th-century modernist work). Rather, the impossibles coexist, without negation and also without synthesis or resolution.

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### Notes

This conversation originally appeared in five daily installments, from August 29-September 2, 2011, on the MediaCommons website *In Media Res*, as a theme week devoted to Steven Shaviro's *Post-Cinematic Affect*: <<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/theme-week/2011/35/steven-shaviros-post-cinematic-affect-august-29-sept-2-2011>>. Each day, in accordance with the format of *In Media Res*, one of the participants would kick off the conversation with a video clip and curatorial comments. The theme week was organized by Karin Sellberg and Michael O'Rourke. We have edited only minimally, for continuity and consistency with this volume's format, and wherever possible attempted to locate materials cited in the discussion.

[1] In their original context, these comments were accompanied by an

untitled video clip, which can be viewed here: <<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2011/08/29/cinemas-exhaustion-and-vitality-affect>>.

[2] Karin Sellberg's comments here refer to the video that accompanied Elena del Río's original post on *In Media Res*.

[3] The video, "Body Affect: As It Moves," can be found here: <<https://vimeo.com/8428243>>.

[4] Paul Bowman's comments were originally accompanied by a video clip from Chan-wook Park's *Oldboy* (2003).

[5] A longer piece on "Post-Continuity" is [reprinted in this volume](#).

[6] Adrian Ivakhiv's comments were originally accompanied by Nick Hooker's music video for Grace Jones's "Corporate Cannibal," which is also the subject of chapter 2 of Steven Shaviro's *Post-Cinematic Affect*.

[7] In their original context, Patricia MacCormack's comments were accompanied by a one-minute YouTube clip from Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=78&v=srQfWZZVcKA>>.

[8] The video was posted alongside Steven Shaviro's comments in their original context on *In Media Res*.