



Time, Affect, and the Brain: Deleuze's Cinematic Aesthetics

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In a *Film-Philosophy* review from over a decade ago, Jeffrey A. Bell remarked that the impact of Deleuze's remarkable *Cinema I* and *Cinema II* books was still, lamentably, 'slight to non-existent' (1997).¹ Since then, there has been a boom in scholarly studies devoted to the Deleuzian philosophy of film.² There has also been a flourishing of interdisciplinary work on Deleuzian philosophy and film theory. Some of this work is showcased in a recent special issue of *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy, Diagrams of Sensation: Deleuze and Aesthetics*, edited by Darren Ambrose and Wahida Khandker (2005). This collection will please dedicated Deleuzians, while the uninitiated will find it a welcome guide to the sometimes intimidating conceptual world of Deleuze's film philosophy. While this volume explores Deleuze and aesthetics more generally (with fine essays by Michael Goddard and

¹ Bell was reviewing a special issue on Deleuze and cinema edited by D. N. Rodowick: "Gilles Deleuze: Philosopher of Cinema, *Iris*, n. 23, Spring 1997. See also the Deleuze Special Issue of *Film-Philosophy*, v. 5, November 2001.

² See D. N. Rodowick (1997), Gregory Flaxman (2000), Barbara M. Kennedy (2000), Ronald Bogue (2003), and David Martin-Jones (2006).

Simon O'Sullivan), I shall focus on those essays that deal explicitly with Deleuze's philosophical approach to film. This topic presents us with an interesting challenge, for it forces us to find a way of articulating the film-philosophy relationship without reducing films to merely exemplifying Deleuzian concepts, or else adorning one's film analysis with attractive Deleuzian refrains.

Rather than exploring Deleuzian cinematic aesthetics *per se*, most of the film essays in this issue draw on the conceptual riches in *Cinema I* and *Cinema II* (Deleuze 1986, 1989). Anne Powell's "The Face is a Horror Story: The Affective Face of Horror" is a good example of applied Deleuzian film theory, exploring the horror film genre as a site of affective intensities. Inspired by Deleuze's claim 'that film close-ups are the affection-image par excellence' (56), Powell analyses various horror films that explicitly stage a cinematic destruction of the face, indeed of *faciality* as a locus of signification and subjectivity. Whether through the faces of horror-struck victims or mask-like protagonists, the 'Deleuzian horror film,' for Powell, enacts just such a defacialisation of the human body, disrupting the representational codes that define our social and gendered identities, and thereby revealing the 'inhuman' aspect of our embodied being (62-65).

Powell explores the possibilities of disrupting faciality in three quite different horror films: Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931), and Georges Franju's *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (Eyes without a Face) (1959). The link between this unlikely conjunction of films is that they all feature the face—subject to defacialisation—as an affective locus of horror, or even as rendering the Deleuzo-Guattarian "body without organs". Barker's sado-masochistic horror fantasy *Hellraiser*, for example, offers a horribly literal depiction of 'the deterritorialisation of a human face,' a foregrounding of the 'abjection of the flesh and disintegration of subjective wholeness' by the violation and destruction of the body (65). In a quite different vein, Dreyer's stunning *Vampyr* presents us with arresting facial images of impassive, affective intensity; the character of Gray, for example, whose 'frozen face of witness' reveals 'intensive faciality' (69). Franju's horror masterpiece *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, by contrast, is viewed through the lens of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the body without organs; the mad experiments of the plastic surgeon Dr. Génessier anticipating the 'demented experimenter' described in *Anti-Oedipus*, 'who flays, slices, and anatomises everything in sight' (70). Imprisoned by her father as a human guinea pig and thus rendered socially invisible, the character Christiane moves within a reflective milieu in which everything has become a mirror-like surface. The

striking images of Christiane in shimmering garments transform her into a 'moving crystalline surface' (73). Anticipating recent 'facial transplantation' controversies, Dr. Genessier excises the facial mask from his hapless patients and transplants them onto his daughter Christiane's face. In the end, however, Christiane liberates herself and the other victims of her father's facial obsessions; gliding away into the garden as a 'figure of surreal grace,' she becomes, in her refusal of faciality, a Deleuzian 'body-without-organs' (75).

Powell's approach to these remarkable films deploys a common move in Deleuzian film philosophy: the use of films as cinematic exemplars of philosophical concepts; in this case, those of faciality, intensity, and the body without organs. Powell thus avoids any reflection on why horror films are so fascinated by the abjection of the body, the disintegration of identity, or what anxieties about embodiment, mortality, sexuality, and technology they both intensify and allay. While noting *Hellraiser's* sado-masochistic imagery and 'torture chamber' antics, as well as Franju's surrealistic critique of scientific mastery and patriarchal domination, there is little engagement with the thematic, psychological, or stylistic concerns of the horror genre. Rather, the films are philosophically interesting insofar as they graphically 'flesh out' the Deleuzian concepts of faciality and body without-organs in an affective dimension.

A more transformative instance of Deleuzian film philosophy is to be found in Bill Schaffer's excellent discussion of animation, "Cinema Three? Re-animating Deleuze". Against Bordwell's accusations of conceptual imperialism, Schaffer launches a strong defence of Deleuze's unabashedly ontological project in *Cinema I* and *Cinema II*: a project emerging out of his attempt to define the specificity of cinema as depicting movement in relation to the 'any-instant-whatever'. *Contra* traditional conceptions of movement in Western thought, for Deleuze movement cannot be deduced from pre-existing 'transcendental poses' or privileged moments. Rather, as Schaffer deftly puts it, the cinematic logic of 'any-instant-whatever' 'depends upon the automatic sampling of movements through time at a rate which is standardised and independent of content' (81). No particular movement is privileged over any other; each is simply an instant equal to any other that can be synthesised in order to present an immanent *movement-image*—an image that moves 'in itself' rather than an image *of* movement. Once the technical apparatus of creating movement-images via the 'any-instant-whatever' is taken over 'as a machine of synthesis for purposes of art and entertainment,' we have, according to Deleuze, the cinema. The latter can then realise the artistic possibilities of controlling and

fabricating movements, generating 'false continuities,' and thereby generating time-images once the sensory-motor schema that organises movement-images into narrative action sequences begins to break down. Film, in short, is the industrial artform made possible and solely defined by the any-instant-whatever. So where do things stand with *animation* on this Deleuzian specification of cinema?

Schaffer responds by developing a fascinating critique of Deleuze's subsumption of animation within his analysis of cinematographic movement. Unlike many Deleuzian film theorists, Schaffer engages in a *critical* discussion of Deleuze's 'blind spot' on animation, but also *extends* Deleuze's account into an original conceptual model for understanding animation. According to Deleuze, animation is cinematic in that it is also constituted in relation to the any-instant-whatever; there are no privileged instants or 'transcendental poses' that define its particular movement-images. The individual drawings composing an animated sequence, for example, do not give us instances of 'a figure described in a unique moment, but the continuity of the movement which describes the figure' (quoted in Ambrose and Khandker 2005, 84). Schaffer notes that animation is distinguishable from cinema in that it *does* in fact depend upon 'privileged instants' (individual drawings) rather than just on any-instant-whatevers (84). More importantly, Schaffer argues that animation also introduces a *double register of time*: the *manual* temporality of the composition of individual drawings, and the *automatic* temporality of the completed animated sequence—a fact that Deleuze's account of animation simply ignores (84-85). Indeed, as Schaffer notes, 'Deleuze uncritically replicates a prejudice of film theory when he precipitously equates filmic movement in general with a principle exemplified by cinematography' (85).

What makes Schaffer's critique so interesting is that it is both conceptual and empirical. Indeed, he invokes the reflections of both popular and avant-gardist animators—from Bob Clampett and Chuck Jones to Norman McLaren and Hans Richter—confirming the interplay of these two orders of temporality, both in the creative process of composing animated images and in the experiential dimension of viewing animated films. Bringing these perspectives together—the Deleuzian theory of movement-images and animators' reflections on their art—opens up a fascinating dialogue on the temporality of the creative process itself. The process of producing animated images, for instance, clearly depends upon this difference between these two temporalities. The animator not only is responsible for composing each frame but he or she can intervene at any point, and thus

alter the direction or meaning of the whole sequence. This makes animation, unlike cinema, the 'uniquely *generative* art of direct interaction with every interval of the any-instant-whatever generated by film' (86). Cinema and animation are therefore distinct at genetic and compositional levels, even though contemporary film is able to 'mix the two without limit at the level of synthesis' (87). A theory of cinema capable of accounting for the specificity of animation must be able to accommodate these 'two quite distinct dimensions of the moving image' (87).

The interplay between these two orders of time becomes manifest in the animators' descriptions of their own 'becoming-animatic'; their entering into a character, becoming him or her or it (*'I am the wabbit!'* exclaims Bob Clampett), in order to draw—and draw out—the character's personality. Schaffer shows beautifully how this creative process involves a dance between two dimensions of time and a becoming-other that is an intrinsic part of the animator's art. To *become* (with) the character does not mean imitation or impersonation; rather, the animator or puppeteer 'discovers the character acting in himself, in the virtual, from moment to moment' (92). The interplay of the actual and virtual creates a creative temporal loop between 'the moments of acting out oneself and witnessing the bodying forth of another' (92). Here there is an unexpected but illuminating link to be found between performance and animation. The experience of animatic acting, found both in puppetry and character animation, depends upon being able to creatively inhabit, manipulate, and transform these two orders of temporality. Schaffer's elaboration of a Deleuzian concept of the *animatic* thus not only helps us to understand cinema and animation but also outlines a Deleuzian theory of performance as creative becoming.

Felicity J. Coleman's "Deleuze's Kiss: The Sensory Pause of Screen Affect" promises something different with its arresting description of couples kissing in Warhol's 1963 film, *Kiss*. It soon reverts, though, to Deleuze's more familiar account of the shift from movement-image to time-image regimes, rehearsing his favourite examples of the new cinema of opsigns and sonsigns (the films of Ozu, De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* (1948), Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), Chantal Akerman, and Alain Resnais). Coleman's interest here is to show how the Deleuzian analysis of opsigns and sonsigns can contribute to recent film theory debates on 'desire, gender, duration, spectatorship and affect' (101). She argues

that these Deleuzian concepts can be construed as 'specific screen mechanisms that rhythmically and irregularly punctuate and parse screen affect' (101). Given that affect is the focus of Coleman's discussion, one might have hoped for some clarification of this suggestive, but rarely analysed, concept (for example, the relationship between its Spinozist provenance, its Bergsonian resonances, and its anti-psychologistic connotations). In any event, Coleman claims, following Deleuze, that affect is distinguished in kind from perception; affectivity is explored via 'the crystal-image's expressive ability—expressive not emotive' (102). At the same time, Coleman also seems to equate affect with emotion, arguing that expression is a passionate activity in the sense of being 'expressive of lived and embodied emotions' (102) and later describing the 'affective emotion' caused by the temporalising crystal-image (110). A Deleuzian account of affect, however, need not remain anchored within the more familiar psychological and phenomenological talk of emotions or lived experience, since it refers to forms of trans-subjective becoming that are no longer confined to a particular individual's subjective interiority.

Whatever the case, Coleman lucidly describes Deleuze's analysis of the opsins and sonsigns that comprise the emergent 'crystalline regime' in post-war cinema. Opsins and sonsigns express 'pure optical and sound situations' that are opened up once the sensory-motor schemata defining action-image sequences begin to break down. Under such conditions, vision is no longer extended into action, space is no longer a milieu for action and time is presented and experienced "for itself"—for Deleuze, this corresponds to the emergence of a cinematic aesthetic evinced in the post-war Italian neo-realism but also in cinema verite of the 1960s, the films of Alain Resnais, and 1970s American cinema (103). The analysis of these 'crystalline' image regimes can show us, Coleman claims, how 'the screen creates a temporal topology of event-vectors of variable durational forces that Deleuze describes as capable of affecting the spectator's "belief in the world"' (103). Although such beliefs are open to ideological manipulation, the power of modern cinema, for Deleuze, is that it provides 'reasons to believe in this world ... to believe in the [flesh of the] body' (103). Curiously, it is the exquisitely contemplative cinema of Yasujiro Ozu that Coleman cites in connection with this 'temporal topology of event-vectors' that might affirm our 'belief in the body'. Here, however, Coleman shifts from the Deleuzian talk of 'event-vectors' to a more conventional discussion of aesthetic and narrative concerns: Ozu's spare and restrictive *mise en scènes* (chosen for both practical and aesthetic reasons), and his poetic rendering of domestic, familial, and generational dramas against

the background of a post-war Japanese culture undergoing intensive upheaval (104). It remains unclear, though, how this account of Ozu's work clarifies the more obscure Deleuzian passages (like the 'temporal topology of event-vectors of variable durational forces'), or how such formulations help shed light on Ozu's cinematic poetics.³

What Coleman adds to this account is what she describes as 'Deleuze's kiss': the dynamism of affective forces unleashed by pure optical and sound situations (forces that are precisely not translated into action, hence their affective intensity). Sonsigns open up 'non-localisable', virtual dimensions (memories, for example) that intensify the time-images presented on the screen. Opsigns and sonsigns are thus no longer tethered to action and movement. Rather, they are 'vector points in space' that can alter the configuration of the cinematic whole that we experience temporally as well as affectively and corporeally (112). This multi-vectorial experience of cinematic space and time (Deleuze's kiss) adds an interesting philosophical dimension to the intriguing experience of watching passionate couples in Warhol's *Kiss*.

What might Deleuze's kiss tell us about the brain? This is one way of transiting to Gregg Lambert and Gregory Flaxman's admirable "Ten Propositions on the Brain". In a text that performs a veritable becoming-Deleuze, Lambert and Flaxman outline ten conceptual variations on the theme of cinema and the brain ('the brain is the screen'). In manifesto-like style, Lambert and Flaxman declare that it is 'high time' that we turn from the tired history of consciousness to the 'incomparably more complex question of the brain' (Ambrose and Khandker 2005, 114). Not the brain of cognitive neuroscience or materialist theories of consciousness, of course, but Deleuze's enigmatic Bergsonian thesis that 'thinking itself is situated within a "*machine assemblage of moving images*" from which the brain is materially indistinguishable' (114).

To my mind, this is one of the most difficult and puzzling aspects of *Cinema II*: what to make of Deleuze's appropriation of the Bergsonian metaphysics of images. For the Bergson of *Matter and Memory*, there are only images that act upon and react to each other, the entire set of which comprises an 'infinite whole' or plane of immanence; the human brain is taken as 'one among many images' on this plane that is nonetheless capable of comprehending a section of the whole (114-115). From the chaos of the universe at its

³ Coleman does make an interesting connection between Ozu's visual style and that of Jim Jarmusch (104), but without noting Jarmusch's more obvious homages to Italian neo-realism or his distinctive use of music (and musicians as actors) compared with Ozu's rather sparing use of sound.

birth, a primordial plane (or 'metacinema') in which 'there is no distinction between image, matter, movement, and perception,' individuated bodies ('molarities') somehow emerge; among these, there are some that will introduce an interval between action and reaction, thus commencing the extraordinary evolution of the brain (114). According to Deleuze-Bergson, the brain can be understood, like Leibniz's monad, as 'a kind of hiatus in the field of images, a synaptic caesura that perceives ("prehends") the world from a particular point of view' (115). But the brain takes its own affective interval as a means of stabilising its perception and privileged point of view on the universe (of images); it construes the world 'cinematically' by schematising reality according to the sensory-motor schema of perception-images, affection-images, and action-images. The habitualised brain, however, is captured by the narcissistic delusion of its own centrality, imagining itself as the organising centre of the world, now construed as a theatre of action that stands at its disposal. As Deleuze puts it, with the rise of the modern subject, 'the world has become a bad film' (115).

It is against this 'bad film' of modernity that Lambert and Flaxman pitch their Deleuzian cinematic thinking of the brain. But such talk of the brain is by no means a naturalistic byword for "the subject" (as in cognitive scientific or brain-mind identity theories). Rather, the brain must be conceived as what Whitehead called the "superject": the 'pure perspective of the brain, apart from its secondary connections and integrations' but without introducing any 'brain behind the brain' or 'anthropomorphism of the brain' (116). At this point, the reader might be feeling a little brain strain of their own. The brain, Lambert and Flaxman continue, is a 'form in itself' that corresponds to no external view (Ruyer); it is no mere organ but the totality of all relations, including those that have not yet been actualised—that is to say, the brain actualises a particular plane of immanence that is only ever partially realised in relation to other planes (116). The brain should therefore be conceptualised in terms of its 'relative speeds and intensive states'; perceptions, memories, conscious versus unconscious states, are all matters of intensity and threshold rather than topology or spatio-temporal location (116). The brain, from this viewpoint, is a virtual plane 'that provides the conditions of time and space (actualisation of the virtual)' (116). Far from bridging the gap with cognitivism and neuro-aesthetics, we are well ensconced here within Deleuze's Bergsonian assemblage of cinema-brain metaphysics—a heady brew for the film philosophy of the future!

Nonetheless, Lambert and Flaxman insist that philosophy and neuroscience come together in this event of attempting to think the brain, though not in a way that cognitivists would find congenial (or even recognisable). According to Deleuze and Guattari, while science creates functions and art creates percepts, philosophy conceptualises these scientific functions and artistic percepts on a conceptual plane of immanence. This means, for Deleuze, that we need a new image of thought, one that no longer dogmatically reproduces the assumptions of common sense or the privileges of scientific theorisation (as in Carroll's or Currie's work). For all that, Lambert and Flaxman nonetheless cite Deleuze's own interest in neuroscience in order to elaborate his claim that the neural synaptic circuitry of the brain can be transformed by what we experience through art (118). Echoing Spinoza, we do not yet know 'what a brain can do'; hence we should look to the cinema for 'a machine to triumph over mechanism' (118). Cinema can provide a way of creating a new brain for ourselves, opening up new ways of thinking and feeling against the dogmatic images of thought and clichés of cultural representation that sap our 'belief in the world'.

How might cinema do this? By creating new cinematic brains that are capable of expressing a new image of thought. For Lambert and Flaxman, Deleuze's enfolding of the brain and the screen—the brain as a screen and cinema as comprising a brain—points to the different ways in which different directors formulate a 'cinema of the brain' (120). Indeed, Deleuze's two *Cinema* books, they contend, 'form a single meditation on the brain itself and its various images' (120). And this enfolding of the brain and the screen—the 'full cerebralisation of cinema'—is nowhere more evident, as Deleuze has it, than in the films of Stanley Kubrick (120). Lambert and Flaxman thus wax lyrical and philosophical about Kubrick's 'cinema of the brain,' wherein world and brain are 'virtually identical' because 'the world itself has become a vast neural arrangement' (120). Cerebral images of the world as brain abound in Kubrick's films: the centralised war room of *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), the maze of trenches in *Paths of Glory* (1957), the literal maze in the grounds of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (1980), or the regimented marine barracks in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) (120). One wonders, though, whether Kubrick's self-reflexive meditation, in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), on the deadlock between masculine and feminine desire would quite fit this Deleuzian cerebral template. Another question is whether we are dealing with cinematic images of brains that are at once metaphorical and metaphysical, or with an

expanded sense of 'the brain' that is no longer organic or neuronal but functional and informational, or maybe a bit of both.

Whatever the case, Lambert and Flaxman argue that Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) presents us with various images of the brain, from the virtual and pre-historic to the cosmic and mystical. The brain, for example, is 'objectively present in the form of the black monolith' that mysteriously appears to the pre-historic hominids (120); it is present as immanent to the world or environs of the characters aboard the spaceship *Discovery*; and finally the brain emerges as a 'generalised power' that seems to be responsible for the evolutionary process 'on a planetary and cosmological level' (120). Again, it is hard to shake the sense that this Deleuzian interpretation of Kubrick's 'images of the brain' remains metaphorical-metaphysical, despite their claims to philosophical concreteness and conceptual creativity. Why, for example, assume the mysterious black monolith in *2001* 'represents' the brain (120) unless one has decided beforehand that this defines Kubrick's own cinematic odyssey?

Technology also figures, for Lambert and Flaxman, as an extension of the evolutionary journey of the brain. From the bone as tool (via Kubrick's famously audacious cut) to interplanetary spaceship, Kubrick configures the *Space Odyssey* as a *Brain Odyssey*—from proto-humanity, through technological mastery, to 'beyond the infinite'. Here the computer emerges as a new brain; not an externalised or 'artificial' intelligence but the differentiation of a new kind of brain that incorporates the human cortex as one of its networked elements. Indeed, for Lambert and Flaxman, there is not one brain but many brains, whether chemical, cinematic, or technological. HAL in *2001* is not only the infamous computer that runs the spaceship *Discovery* but also the brain network encompassing the entire spaceship itself (122). Astronaut Dave Bowman 'introduces a schism or paranoid formation' into the brain-spaceship, which HAL resolves by ejecting Dave (and colleague Frank) from its own body, 'thus resolving the logical impasse' (122).

What Kubrick's cinema of the brain can teach us, Lambert and Flaxman argue, is to discover a new image of thought via a new way of thinking the brain (cinematically). In doing so we might avoid the twin dangers of producing a 'disciplinary brain' requiring audio-visual/moral re-programming (as in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)), or the reproduction of an unconscious in relation to the new cybernetic brain, which risks becoming riven by the same (psychoanalytic) lack that afflicts ordinary desiring consciousness (as in Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001), which was based upon a Kubrick idea) (123-124).

So what of the future of cinema? The Deleuzian thesis that ‘the brain is the screen’ can show us that a new brain requires a new body. Indeed, the crystalline image regime Deleuze describes has two contrasting dimensions: the depiction of the neuroses and exhaustion of the body, paralled by the presentation of the ‘neurotic or demented brain’ (126). According to Lambert and Flaxman, the renewal of cinema will thus require a twofold movement: a new cinema of the body ‘composed of new possibilities for what a body can do’; and new actualisation of the brain, involving multiplications of ‘new artificial brains (chemical, electronic, silicon-based, etc.)’ (126). Such is the task of modern cinema, and of the Deleuzian film philosophy it inspires. Lambert and Flaxman brilliantly elaborate this task, venturing philosophically far beyond the dutiful rehearsal of Deleuzian film favourites and pointing the way to more creative conceptual approaches to recent cinema.

One thing that might strike the reader of *Diagrams of Sensation* is how Deleuzian film philosophy frequently divides into competing accounts: those that foreground non-subjective *affect* or sensation (as Powell and Coleman do) and those that emphasise *thought* or the cinema as brain (as Lambert and Flaxman do). The “affective” and “brain” Deleuzians, however, rarely meet on the same conceptual plane, which is unfortunate for our understanding of both Deleuze and cinema. For this is surely one of the most interesting questions facing Deleuzian film-philosophers: what is the cinematic relationship between time, affect, and the brain?

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