GRAPHIC AFFECT

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Graphic Affect
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In the context of disciplines other than graphic design, new materialist thinking has given rise to fresh ways of thinking about the relationship between matter, subjectivity, emotion and culture.

I shall consider human actions and desires in exactly the same manner, as though I were concerned with lines, planes, and solids. (Spinoza, 1955 [1677], p. 129).

Writing in 1677, the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza formulated what is sometimes termed a 'double aspect', materialist philosophy. Spinoza's claim was that matter and sensation were substantively identical – that the internal life of thought/sensation and the external life of the body arose from the machinations of a single substance that expressed itself in two different ways. Spinoza's dictum is echoed in a more recent comment by Brian Massumi, which serves also to emphasise the dynamism of contemporary accounts of materiality:

If you start from an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation the slightest most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference, because as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling, and feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably. Qualitative difference: the issue, immediately, is change. Felt and unforeseen. (Massumi, 2002, p. 1).

Massumi is not alone in his veneration of dynamic, qualitative, differential-materiality. Spinoza's naturalistic fusion of matter and sensation has in recent times served as an important source of inspiration for a number of 'new materialist' approaches to philosophy, which have in turn influenced new perspectives in sociology, as well as literature, art and visual culture, in what have come to be known as the 'affective' and 'performative' turns (Massumi, 2002; Bennett, 2010; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). In the context of disciplines other than graphic design, new materialist thinking has given rise to fresh ways of thinking about the relationship between matter, subjectivity, emotion and culture. Contemporary materialisms question what they take to be the hegemonic role of language, representation and communication in cultural theory - emphasising instead the affective and transformative dimensions of our encounters with other bodies. Similarly, the non-anthropocentric focus of new materialist thought extends ideas of agency beyond human subjectivity, encouraging us to think of the agential and communicative powers of non-human entities – a category which, importantly for our purposes here, might include the images, artefacts, and performances of art and design.

Many of the questions that are central to the consideration of graphic design and communication have a strong resonance with issues appertaining to the philosophy of affect. It seems strange then that whilst there has been much interest in the affective turn in the context of the arts, it has been relatively absent from discussion of graphic design. This seems particularly odd when we consider the ways in which matters of feeling, emotion and behavioural disposition are often combined in the context of advertising and visual communication – that is, in the at once semiotic and political regulation of the social, or, conversely, in

Figure 1. Suffragette Emily Davison's attempt to stop King George V's horse 'Anmer' at the Epsom Derby, 4th June 1913. Photograph. Image courtesy of Alamy Stock Photo.

the modes of resistance that emerge out of practices of design activism. Indeed, if we expand our conception of the graphic to embrace the notion of spectacle, or affective display, then our consideration of imagistic affect may broaden to encompass the design of political posters and placards along with the somewhat loose visual-spatial choreography of the protest march and other forms of political spectacle. Thus we might position the image of suffragettes chaining themselves to the railings of government buildings, or the sight of Emily Davison leaping beneath the hooves of the horse of King George V during the 1913 Derby, as examples of proto-situationist forms of graphic display in their combination of the behavioural, the aesthetic and the political. Examples of more contemporary expanded political design might include Natlie Jeremijenko's rallying of hacked robotic dogs to sniff out pollutants in public parks and landfill sites (DiSalvo, 2012; Roberts, 2016) or 'the social probes' of Dunne and Raby (Blauvelt, 2008), which eschew the more obvious signifiers of design activism (such as scrawled text, cut and paste pastiche and caricature), embracing high-end product design aesthetics instead in an attempt to actualise, or activate, alternative political futures from within the spectacle of neo-liberal capitalism.

Consideration of the relational (be it material, experiential, social or otherwise) has been central to Massumi's theorisation of affect. Massumi, informed by the process-relational philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead, attempts to capture our sense of relational transformation – the sense of the body in transition as it transforms with the unfolding of material-experiential events (Massumi, 2002, p. 15-16). For

Massumi, there is an important sense in which this process is at least in part felt, and interestingly for our purposes here, the recent 'relational', 'open' and 'conditional' movements in the context of graphic design seem driven by a set of similar aesthetico-relational concerns. Many of these contemporary modes of design, perhaps in accord with the Spinozist lineage, emanate from Dutch design studios (e.g. Studio Moniker and Experimental Jetset) or from theorists and practitioners such as Abakee and Andrew Blauvelt whose histories encompass both art and design. Relational practices in their various forms serve to closely connect the aesthetic and the behavioural - drawing upon insights derived from processual and performative conceptions of artistic practice to at once activate and implicate the audience in the performance of spectacle - opening a space to consider the politics of living being in a thoroughly designed world.

Figure 2. Emma Sproson (left) and a friend chalking the pavement, 1907. Photograph. Image courtesy of Alamy Stock Photo.

The Affective Context of Graphic Display

Whilst explicit consideration of affect in the context of graphic design and communication has been rare, it has not been entirely exempt from new materialist analysis. Laurie Gries (2015) has for instance recently explored the at once rhetorical and political life of Shepard Fairey's *Obama Hope* image in new materialist, affective terms - investigating its tendency to propagate and mutate as it encounters diverse communities of actants. Gries conceives of an image as a vital force that acquires additional power through its various material encounters. Noting the plethora of ways in which the Obama Hope image has been repurposed, subjected to permutation, and satirised for what are sometimes antithetical ends, she positions Fairey's image as something comparable to a materially-semiotic 'tumbleweed', circulating throughout and across a variety of political ecosystems where it experiences its own rhetorical transformation, whilst creating strange and unforseen alliances that themselves induce cultural and political change.

Gries, following Latour, states of Figure 3, that

> humans are transformed by the relations they enter into with non-humans just as nonhumans are transformed as they enter into relations with humans …both girl and poster are transformed through their material engagement and/or relationship …a third social actor emerges from such relation. (Gries, 2015, p. 73).

Gries' novel take on visual rhetoric hints at one way in which we might begin to consider practices of graphic design and communication in new materialist terms, and as such it serves as a useful illustration of the way in which such philosophies typically address two overlapping senses of the term 'affect'. The first of these concerns qualities of felt experience and is primarily psychological or phenomenological in character, whilst the second is more materially focused, stressing the ontological power of material things and their transformative effects upon the world. Accordingly, Spinoza's philosophical concept of affect, reactivated by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and subsequently extended by Massumi (2002) and Bruno Latour (2005), can be used to explore the agency of images and objects, and their entanglement with the material world. Alongside this naturalistic focus, philosophies of affect typically present a highly kinetic, dynamic and vitalistic picture of the material world, with notions of circulation, contagion and changing patterns of both embodied and experiential relations figuring prominently. The transmission of affect – the way it would appear to be passed from an image/artefact to its audience, or the way in which it would seem to migrate from one person to the next (influencing emotion, behaviour and patterns of social life), inflects discussion of communication in interesting ways - departing from propositional accounts of informational exchange and moving, as we shall shortly see, towards a particularly materialistic, as opposed to linguistic reading of the semiotic.

Figure 3. Three for Barack Obama. Photograph. Tony Fischer, 2008.
Image courtesy and copyright of Tony Fischer.
www.flickr.com/photos/tonythemisfit/2433650018/in/photostream/
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/

The Theorisation of Affect in the Context of Artistic Practice

Consideration of both the emotional and performative role of affect has been central to much contemporary writing on art and aesthetics. In the context of the arts, the turn towards affect imbricates a number of related intellectual currents. That is to say, there is a vestige of romanticism that would seem to inform affect theory's resistance to language and representation – as well as its veneration of nature and its expressive, emotional concerns. However, the foregrounding of process that takes place in the theorisation of affect, along with its high regard for performance, chance and contingency, also implicates the early processual experimentation of John Cage and Allan Kaprow at Black Mountain College in 1930s and 1940s. Cage and Kaprow's work can be seen to have laid the ground for the performative turn in the context of art in the 1960s whilst also inflecting the otherwise more straightforwardly formalist work of Pollock**.** Interestingly, even as Deleuze rejected the purely optical context and the Kantian underpinnings of Clement Greenberg's modernist aesthetics, (Zepke, 2010, p. 65), it is ultimately Greenberg - the champion of Pollock's anti-representational, modernist materiality - that made the strong distinction between the primacy of affect and a second order emotional sentimentality that would become so important to Deleuze's approach to affect (Duve, 2010, p. 93).

It is, however, the notoriously visceral 'body art' performances of Chris Burden and Marina Abramovic that took place in the context of the performativity of the 1960s and 1970s which has proven particularly attractive to affect theorists (Bennett, 2005; Shaughnessy, 2012) with their simultaneous exploration of emotional, and physical extremes, the recurrent trope of bodily inscription, and an important participatory dimension that is most apparent in works such as Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974) and Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964).

Figures 4 and 5 juxtapose illustrations of Abramovic's performance *The Lips of Thomas* (1975) and a poster designed by Stefan Sagmeister that appropriated Abramovic's strategy of incised bodily inscription. The poster was employed to promote Sagmeister's talk at the AIGA graphic design conference in 1999. Jill Bennett, in her account of Abramovic's work, describes the visceral, affective engagement between the audience and performer, claiming that

> even as one reads the figure … [of the five pointed star which was cut by the artist into her stomach with a razor blade] … one winces or squirms [and is] forced into an affective encounter. (Bennett, 2005, p. 38).
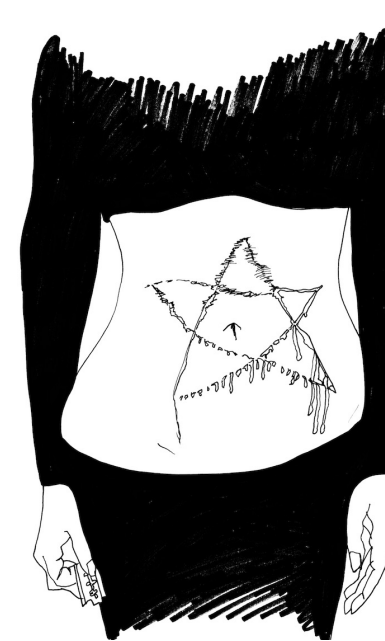

Figure 4. After Marina Abramovic's, The Lips of Thomas 1975. Drawing. Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.
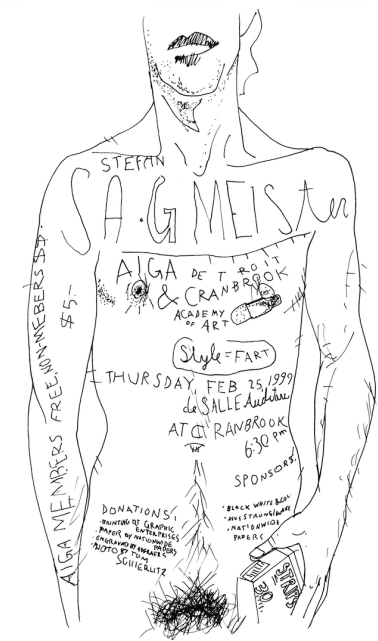

Figure 5. After Stefan Sagmeister's AIGA poster, 1999. Drawing. Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.
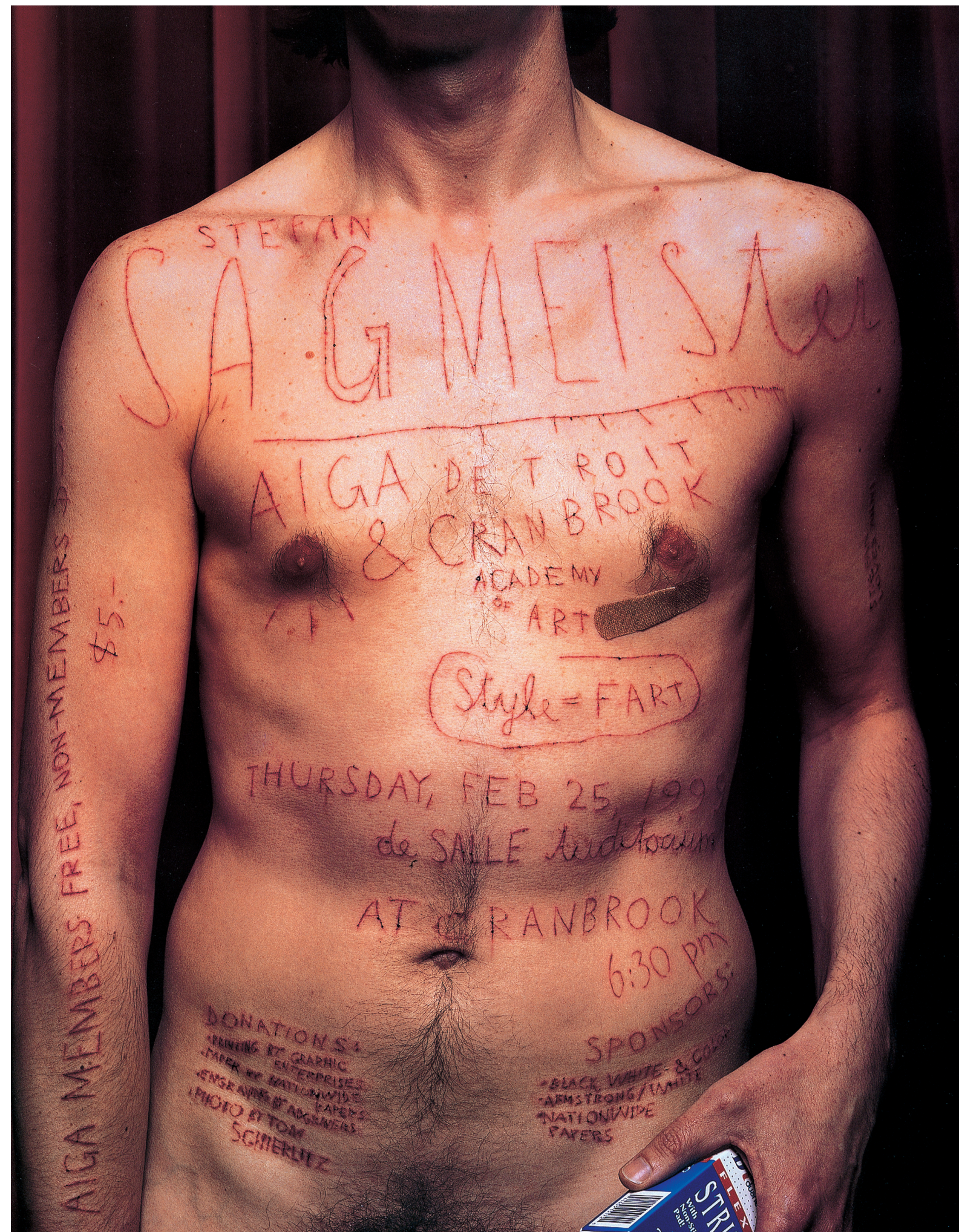
Figure 6. AIGA Detroit Programme. Poster. Stefan Sagmeister, 1999. Image courtesy of Sagmeister & Walsh.

Thus, there is an important sense for Bennett in which the performance and the resulting documentation 'cannot be perceived as anything other than a wounding process' (ibid). The image of the star with its blood-spoilt geometry has become the most enduring relic of Abramovic's performance, which also involved an extended period of flagellation and long durational exposure to extreme cold (Abramovic lay on blocks of ice for 30 minutes). With this in mind, Sagmeister's image seems in comparison slightly sanitised – albeit in a rather knowing fashion - combining tropes of authenticity with liberal helpings of ironic bathos (as evidenced by the plaster strips that he holds in his left hand). Sagmeister's lines are clean and the cuts less deep, having been carefully carved into his skin by a company intern with an X-Acto craft knife. Sagmeister has, however, stressed how important it was the image wasn't produced in Photoshop and has signaled that his intention with the AIGA poster was to at once signify authenticity and to evoke pain – but for Sagmeister it was 'the pain that seems to accompany most of our design projects' that mattered (Sagmeisterwalsh.com, 2016).

Emotional and Ethico-Aesthetic, Political Affect

The discussion of Abramovic and Sagmeister brings one of the core aims of this paper to the fore – namely, the desire to distinguish the advertising and design community's concern with image and emotion from the ethico-aesthetic, more political sense of affect that is often explored in the context of much artistic practice. It is claimed here that much of the interest in affect that has arisen in the context of design has been directed towards the potential universality of emotional communication. In support of this, we might note how Sagmeister has for the last sixteen years been investigating the representation and production of feelings of happiness (through a combination of commercial projects, a series of 'happiness' themed gallery exhibitions, the production of a film on the nature of happiness, and a series of non-commercial 'sabbaticals' in which ideas and processes are tested without commercial pressures). The design industry's concern with the evocation and transmission of (for the most part) pleasant sensation can be contrasted with what Claire Bishop has termed the 'relational antagonism' that she takes to condition much artistic activity – that is, the attempt to disturb the presiding aesthetic/political status quo and activate an audience through broadly affective means (Bishop, 2004). Bishop develops her concept of relational antagonism in opposition to what she describes as Nicolas Bourriaud's 'feel good' conception of relational aesthetics – which emphasises the importance of social inclusion through the production of consensual 'micro-utopias'. Significantly, Bishop notes how the ideal of unified subjectivity and the notion of community as 'immanent togetherness' can all too easily play into the hands of the ideologies of consumer capitalism (Bishop, 2004; Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 196) – and this notion would seem to be equally impactful in, and pertinent to, the context of design.

Sagmeister's earliest talks on design and its relationship to happiness were timely - addressing the zeitgeist of emotional design that emerged at the turn of the 21st century. Indeed,

reading Virginia Postrel's rather conservative and roughly contemporaneous analysis of affective concerns in *The Substance of Style*, where 'form follows emotion' (Postrel, 2003) and *The Power of Glamour*, where glamour is 'an illusion known to be false but felt to be true' (Postrel, 2013) or the claims of the reinvented Donald Norman (2004) who now stresses the importance of 'look and feel' in optimizing functionality ('aesthetically pleasing objects actually work better'), one would be forgiven for thinking that affect theory in the context of design is oriented solely towards the dissemination or production of feelings of happiness, contentment, and satisfaction.

In contrast to this, the affect theorist Nigel Thrift has drawn attention to a darker side to Postrel's work, emphasising her awareness of the subterfuge and deception that is often employed in the construction of emotional affect - linking advertising and journalism's redaction of 'discordant details' such as 'blemishes on the skin, spots on the windows, electrical wires crossing the façade, (and) piles of bills on the kitchen counter' to 'meticulous selection and control' in the designerly production of 'fake' feelings - which are nevertheless accompanied by *real* affects (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010).

Gill and Pratt's affective analysis of freelance graphic designers is similarly dark – positioning such workers as the vanguard of the contemporary 'precariat' - a mobile, exploited, proletariat, embodying a new, particularly insecure form of political subjectivity – the emergence of which has been closely alligned with capitalist, neo-liberal modes of production (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

Integrative and Differential Approaches to the Concept of Affect

It should be clear from what has been said this far, that the material-relational underpinning of the concept of affect lends it amenable to theorisation in both integrative and differential terms. Thus, Massumi and Bishop stress the transformative qualities of artistic encounter (focusing upon the operation of differential and contestational relations in the production of the new), whilst Jill Bennett in what seems to be a rather stark contrast, chooses to emphasise the communicative and integrative aspects of affective encounter – exploring the way in which affect might enable modes of communication which can transcend or circumvent cultural and historical borders through an empathetic mode of visceral communication that avoids any ultimately solipsistic or radically relativistic impasse. It is common to find both integrative and differential tendencies simultaneously at work in the context of both art and design. Thus Sagmeister, when constructing an inventory of projects that he associates with the feeling of happiness, cites the ambient, affective, materiality of James Turrell's *Skyspace* installations as well as Ji Lee's more socio-politically relational *Bubble* project – the 50000 blank speech bubbles that were produced by Lee (then branding director at Droga5) to provoke public commentary upon commercial advertisements (Sagmeister, 2014).

Sagmeister notes firstly how Turrell's project frames the sky in a highly aesthetic fashion, stressing how in the process

it affectively transforms the emotional and physical demeanor of the audience, and secondly how Lee's speech bubbles mobilise individuals to construct their own (often satirical) captions which proceed to provoke fresh reactions from passers by - simultaneously serving the needs of the advertisers (by re-engaging attention), providing a voice for the public, and opening an informal space for ideological critique.

A Process-Philosophical Lineage

Whilst discussion of affect is a fairly recent phenomenon, it arises out of a long 'process-philosophical' lineage. Process philosophy has been present as a minor current in Western philosophy since as early as 540 BC and through the influence of luminaries such as John Dewey and Susanne Langer, it has long been associated with education in the arts. Philosophies of process tend to emphasise both the ontological priority of change and the relational constitution of entities - positioning the world of stable and enduring things as arising out of a play of interacting forces that admit of multiple and contingent patterns of relation (Rescher 1996, p. 10). There is, however, an interesting schism between broadly integrative and broadly differential forms of process philosophy that mirrors the aesthetic tensions that have thus far been located in affective practices of art and design. Catherine Keller (2002) notes how American process tradition is 'integrative and holistic' in character and that this seems, at first glance, hard to reconcile with the radical alterity of post-structuralist European process thought (with its emphasis upon difference, otherness, divergence and disjunction). In exploring their commonality, however, Keller notes how:

> Both jubilantly privilege becoming over being, difference over sameness, novelty over conservation, intensity over equilibrium, complexity over simplicity, plurality over unity, relation over substance, flux over stasis. (Keller & Daniell, 2002, p. 6).

Thus, for Keller, the core difference between these approaches is that representatives of the post-structuralist tradition see relationality at work in its characterisation of traces of something outside or 'Other' being in some sense 'constitutive of identities, historical contexts and disciplines.' (Keller & Daniell, 2002, p. xix)

It is conceivable, then, that despite the rather bewildering and sometimes seemingly antithetical array of theoretical approaches that address the operation of affect it is perhaps this very complexity that might ultimately provide a fertile means of addressing the contemporary topography, of art, design and communication. That is to say, it may well be that it is precisely the ethereal, circulatory and ultimately liminal concept of affect that is required to facilitate cross-disciplinary discussion within the visual arts. Accordingly, the remainder of this article will ask if the concept of affect might flow between the disciplines to address not only the (integrative and antagonistic) relationships between contemporary modes of practice in art, design and communication – but also their somewhat incestuous histories.

Figure 7. The Colour Inside. Photograph. James Turrell, 2013. Image courtesy of Michael Khoo.

Figure 8. Bubble project. Installation/intervention. Ji Lee, 2002. Image courtesy of Ji Lee.

That is to say, there was a concern at both institutions with a material-experiential mode of aesthetic experimentation...

The Hidden History of Graphic Affect

In an attempt to mine a hidden history of affect in the context of graphic design, we will interrogate two landmark, though somewhat oppositional periods in its history - namely the functional modernism of the Bauhaus, and the differential post-structuralism of Deconstructive design. After a brief pause to consider the way in which affective practice may have been implicated in the near disappearance of design theory at the turn of this century, we will then go on to further consider the relationally affective dimension of contemporary design, examining the at once 'open' and 'conditional' mass interactive-design work of the Dutch design-collective Moniker.

Design Archeology 1: The Bauhaus, Modernism and Graphic Affect

Two institutions that loom large in histories of education in the visual arts are the Bauhaus (in the context of design) and Black Mountain College (in context of art). However, despite their radically different outputs, the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College shared (at least in the first instance) remarkably similar philosophical underpinnings. That is to say, there was a concern at both institutions with a material-experiential mode of aesthetic experimentation, and they were each likewise influenced by progressive educational ideas - sharing an affinity with the process-philosophical thought of John Dewey (Ellert, 1972). Arguably, it was this educational and philosophical affinity that facilitated the overlap of staff and alumni - beginning with the relocation of Josef and Anni Albers in 1933.

The approach to making that was fostered at each of these schools was strongly process-oriented and materials based (Ellert, 1972, p. 147). That is to say, both institutions emphasised the importance of aesthetic experimentation, and stressed the need for students to acquaint themselves with the material-phenomenal properties of things. This began at the Bauhaus with the basic course of Johannes Itten, which recommended an at once colour-centric combinational, and constructivist approach. Itten's writings are curious in so far as they were partly aesthetic instructional manuals, partly documents of psychophysical experimentation and partly process-metaphysical tracts. That is to say, Itten believed that colours should be considered in material-kinetic terms as dynamic, radiant, physical forces that have correlative psychological effects – noting that

> The optical, electromagnetic, and chemical processes initiated in the eye and brain are frequently paralleled by processes in the psychological realm (Itten, 1970, p. 83).

Interestingly, Itten also stressed the importance of the 'ethico-aesthetic' – a concept which he derived from Geothe, which, like Greenberg's distinction between affect and emotion, went on to become very important to Deleuze,

Following Itten's departure, the basic course was developed further and effectively re-written by László Moholy-Nagy and Itten's student Josef Albers. To some extent, Itten's process-philosophical orientation was reflected in Albers' notion of 'colour

action', which also explored a dynamic, flux-like, material interaction between colours. However, whilst it is common for commentators to attribute the recognition of the relational dynamics of colour to Albers, it is important to note that this idea was already present in Itten's work. That is to say, for Itten as much as for Albers, the phenomena of simultaneous brightness contrast was more than 'a curious optical phenomenon', it was something that stood at 'the very heart of painting' (Albers, 1975; c.f. Itten 1970).

László Moholy-Nagy's teachings though more technologically focused were no less experimental and no less metaphysical in character. That is to say, Moholy-Nagy's photographic experiments can be seen as exercised in defamiliarisation, or as early attempts to see the world with fresh eyes (Lurie, 2012). Moholy-Nagy's techniques were highly innovative – indeed, there is some dispute over who invented the photogram - and Moholy-Nagy's name is often invoked alongside those of Man Ray and Christian Schad in connection with this.

Whilst there is no doubt that Moholy-Nagy emphasised the importance of the communicative, interactive and aesthetic qualities of materials, he also began to encourage students to develop an inventory, or taxonomy of phenomenal 'surface effects' (Saletnik, 2016). In this sense, the notion of objectivity came further in to view. Indeed, Moholy-Nagy's own attraction to metaphysics was coupled with a stronger sense of functionalism and a stronger techno-rationalist sensibility than was possessed by either Itten or Albers. Ultimately this would sew the seeds for a systematic approach to visual grammar along with a universalist approach to the human faculties. In this sense, concerns with the aesthetic *signing* of materials began to be overshadowed by a more pragmatic, utilitarian concern with *de-signing* in the service of function and industry – a tendency that would come increasingly prominent after the resignation of Walter Gropius in the years following the relocation of the institution to Dessau.

Despite the functional, utilitarian image of the Bauhaus that is presented in the textbooks of industrial design, it is important not to lose sight of the dynamism of Itten's thought, or of the extent of its background influence. That is to say, even under Moholy-Nagy's tutelage, a constructivist, combinatory approach to materials was still very much in place, and it is clear that his interest in technology was not straightforwardly reductive – his interest in esoteric poetry, experimental film and kinetic devices, along with his quasi-alchemic dimension of his embrace of synthetic materials stands as a testament to this. Indeed, in his letter of resignation from Dessau he wrote

We are in danger of becoming what we as revolutionaries opposed: a vocational training school which elevates only the final achievement and overlooks the development of the whole man. (Borchardt-Hume, 2006, p. 75).

It is important to recognise the prominence of tropes of kinetic materiality, affectivity and performativity that run across the history of the Bauhaus, and to see how they were manifested variously in the aesthetics of Itten, Albers and Moholy-Nagy.

With this in mind, it seems particulary apt that the Bauhaus was also the first art school to host a course in performance. Performances of the Bauhaus likewise embodied tensions between language, form and kinetic materiality, and this was reflected in the respective agendas of the performance tutors Lothar Schreyer who was primarily concerned with the language and form of performance, and Oskar Schlemmer whose interest was focused upon the material body in motion (Bauhaus-online.de, 2016).

Figure 9. After Oskar Schlemmer's, Triadic Ballet Performers 1924. Drawing. Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.
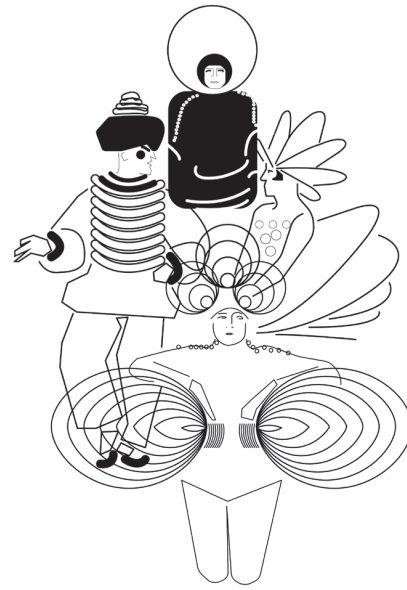
Figure 10. After Metallic Festival, Bauhaus, 1929. Drawing. Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.

Figure 11. After Triadic Ballet, 1924. Drawing. Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.

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Black Mountain College and the Inception of the Open Artwork

The more rustic setting of Black Mountain College was perhaps better in tune with the emphasis upon craftsmanship, and material knowing that had initially oriented the Bauhaus. Severed from any emphasis upon product, the students of Black Mountain College further venerated process, producing avant-garde artworks that challenged existing forms of categorisation – works which, to use the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, could be said to have attempted to produce new kinds of affect as opposed to constructing any kind of phenomenal or experiential inventory. In this sense the stronger formalism of the Bauhaus environment, with its growing attraction to universal principles, and to a more parsimonious, reductive approach to aesthetics, can be contrasted with the less structural aims and environment of Black Mountain College, which arguably resulted in less of a house style, and less uniformity of work. Informed by an agenda that embraced the operation of chance and contingency, Robert Rauschenberg's early white panel paintings (intended as receptors for light, shadow and dust particles) set a theoretical trajectory that would go on to inform his combines as well as the corporeal, indecorous materiality and cultural detritus of his later works. At Black Mountain College, Rauschenberg's paintings were developed alongside John Cage's more explicitly performative works (it is well known that Cage staged his first happening at Black Mountain College), and the experimental painting and filmmaking practices of Stan Vanderbeek (marking the beginnings of his expanded film projects). Collectively such works signposted, and in some sense anticipated aspects of post-modern practice and post-structural critique that would come to prominence many years later.

As we shall see, the emphasis upon difference, anti-essentialism and contingency that began to take hold at Black Mountain College becomes further accentuated in the radical deconstructive design criticism of the late twentieth century. That is to say, contemporary philosophies of affect informed by Deleuze, arose out of post-structuralist European philosophy – the same strain of thought that engendered much of the early thinking in what might be considered the hey-day of post-structuralist design theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s – and as such they share a concern with the concepts of contingency and difference, and tend to be politically radical in character.

Affect and Post-Structural Materialism

In her more culturally oriented, sociological introduction to affect theory, Margaret Wetherell (2012) remarks upon the way in which Massumi's philosophy of affect much like that of Deleuze and Guattari has an at once social and yet strangely impersonal character. That is to say, Wetherell notes that there is a sense in which affect theory's relational dynamics are inherently collectivist in the sense that it positions entities as being both constituted and manipulated by flows and confluences of affects. However, she notes that in these more radical forms of affect theory, it is not any straightforwardly human form of sociability and emotion that is under discussion – rather, it is

...there is a direct lineage between early modernist aesthetics and the emphasis upon matter and sensation that can be located in Deleuzian thought, with its veneration of aesthetic experimentation, and the production of the new.

something far more impersonal (2012, p. 59). Wetherell draws attention firstly to the way in which philosophers such as Massumi and Deleuze position affects as pre-personal, autonomous qualities that drift through the world, animating bodily behaviour and conditioning experience - and secondly to the sense in which this serves to undermine – or at the very least trouble traditional notions of personhood and agency. Arguably, what results is a somewhat unmoored and un-owned conception of experience. That is to say, for Deleuze, it is not so much that there are first subjects who 'have' sensations, rather, it is the operation of autonomous, material sensation that, 'fissures our subjectivity' (Ó Maoilearca, 2006, p. 14).

We have seen how despite the broadly post-structural orientation of Deleuze's philosophy, there is a direct lineage between early modernist aesthetics and the emphasis upon matter and sensation that can be located in Deleuzian thought, with its veneration of aesthetic experimentation, and the production of the new. The Deleuzian scholar Stephen Zepke has suggested, however, that Deleuze and Guattari's modernism is 'inseperable from ontological processes both cosmic and chaotic' and that it must be distinguished from more reductive and purist models of modernism – and that it is this that ultimately distances it from the more formal Kantianism of Greenberg (Zepke, 2005, p. 152). More recently, Zepke has claimed that for Deleuze and Guattari, the secret of modern composition is the 'abstraction of materials from their external referents' in order that their 'intense complexity' might be expressed.' (Zepke, 2012, p. 228).

Consideration of Deleuze's connection with modernism, when juxtaposed with his philosophy's post-structuralist orientation, enables us to place Deleuze's thinking of affect into relation with an important period in design history that flourished in the last few decades of the Twentieth Century. That is to say, consideration of Deleuze's contemporary conception of materiality leads us to consideration of the poststructural, or deconstructive turn in graphic design and typography that began at Cranbrook, in the late 1970s. Deconstructive and postmodern design were influenced by French poststructuralist thought that came to prominence in the 1960s – and in many ways they dominated the theoretical and aesthetic agenda of graphic design until the end of the 1990s (emanating for the most part from Cranbrook, CalArts, and Emigre magazine) – successfully bringing the field of graphic design into relation with philosophy.

Design Archeology 2: Deconstruction, Post-Structuralism and Graphic Affect

Deconstructivist design theorists shared an interest in visual-grammar with the universal modernism that arose in the context of the Bauhaus. However, they approached it from an at once critical and antagonistic standpoint. These aspects of deconstruction are eloquently discussed in Ellen Lupton and Abbot Miller's essay in the volume of *Visible Language* that was edited by the Cranbrook alumnus Andrew Blauvelt (Lupton and Miller, 1994). Lupton and Miller ground their analysis in the philosophy of Derrida and attempt to demonstrate its significance in the context of graphic design and typography. Ultimately they align deconstruction with a language oriented, critical agenda, and suggest that deconstruction in graphic design should be considered a mode of 'questioning' or a mode of 'critical form making'.

Despite the broadly textual orientation of Lupton and Miller's work, there is also a clear leaning towards materiality in their focus upon the corporeal performance of writing and the idea that there are coercive forces at work on the written page. This serves to indicate a certain affinity between the post-structural textual approach of Derrida and the similarly post-structural (but nevertheless materially-affective) approach of Deleuze that underpins much work on affect theory in the arts.

We can perhaps be seen more clearly if we consider this passage from an early essay by Johanna Drucker, which seems to simultaneously address the textuality of Derrida's thinking, whilst heralding the arrival of a more directly materialistic Deleuzean post-structuralism:

> Think of the page as a force field, a set of tensions in relation, which assumes a form when intervened through the productive act of reading. Peculiar? Not really, just unfamiliar as a way to think about "things" as experienced. A slight vertigo can be induced by considering a page as a force field, a set of elements in contingent relation, a set of possibilities, instructions for a potential event. But every reading reinvents a text, produces it, as an intervention, and that is a notion we have long felt comfortable invoking. I'm merely shifting our attention from the "pro-duced" nature of signified meaning to the "productive" character of a signifying field. (Bierut, Drenttel and Heller, 2006, p. 31).

Given their shared post-structural orientation, there are clearly many overlaps between Derridean and Deleuzian thought. Indeed, after Deleuze's death, Derrida wrote of their philosophical friendship:

> Deleuze undoubtedly still remains, despite so many dissimilarities, the one among those of my "generation" to whom I have always judged myself to be the closest. I have never felt the slightest "objection" arising in me, not even potentially, against any of his works. (Bearn, 2000, p. 442)

Figure 12. Visible Language: French Currents of the Letter. Journal. Katherine McCoy, Richard Kerr, Alice Hecht, Jane Kosstrin, Herbert Thompson. From Visible Language VII.3, 1978, reprinted by permission, copyright University of Cincinnati.
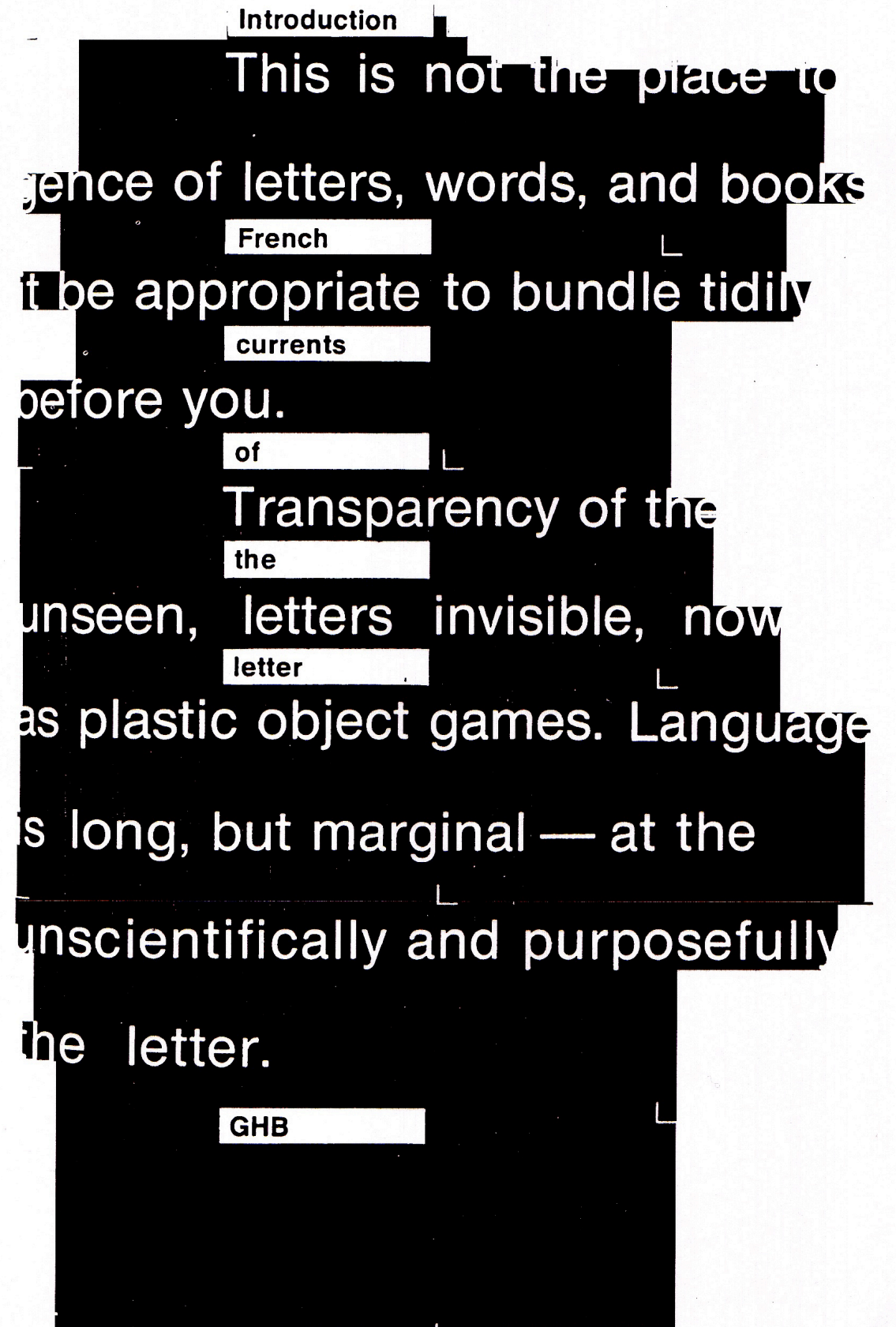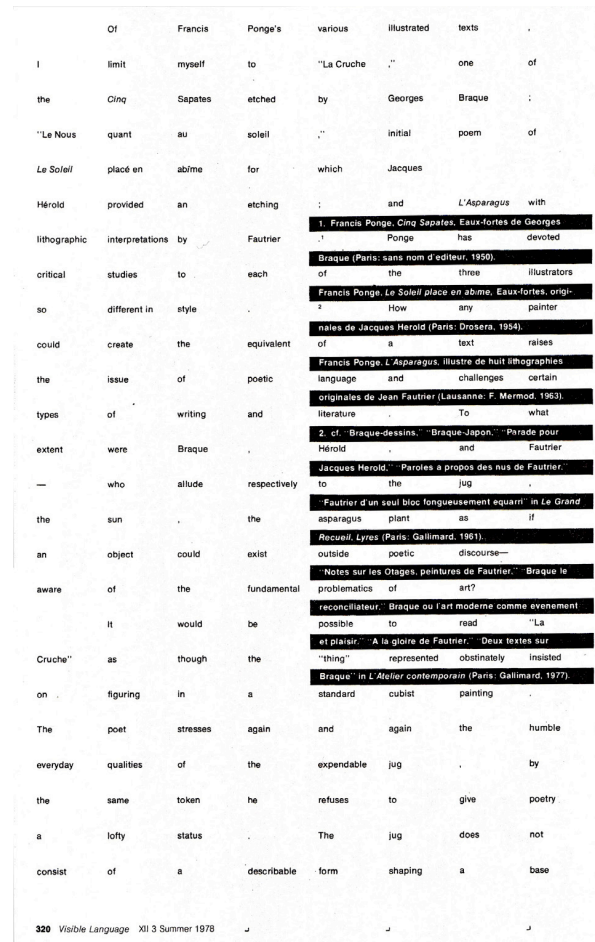
This relationship was in no way one sided and Deleuze likewise wrote of his admiration for Derrida's method of deconstruction. However, despite their shared interest in political difference, Deleuze was not well disposed to Derrida's veneration of language, or to his suspicion of metaphysical enquiry. The Deleuzian scholar John Protevi (2001) has noted how Deleuze sought to develop a contemporary metaphysics that had much affinity with the sciences of complexity. For Deleuze, both the identity of individual things and the differences between them are preceded by a richer mode of swarming differences of intensity that stand as their condition.

> Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, difference of intensity. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 222).

For Deleuze, these swarms of material difference are both sub-representational and pre-empirical in character, suggesting that they cannot be directly experienced, but that they are nevertheless, in some sense, still more properly felt:

> What is encountered … may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 176).

Thus, the philosopher James Williams' (2008) reading of Deleuze stresses the significance of intensive, affective qualities of experience such as the ebb and flow of emotions, a rising sense of disquiet, or a felt sense of hunger. For Williams, these qualities resonate with Deleuze's intensive, energetic conception of the world - and we have seen how this emphasis upon material-sensation in many ways chimes with the material-phenomenal aesthetics of the early Bauhaus.

The Retreat of Design Criticism

It has been suggested that despite arising out of the textually oriented deconstructive paradigm of design, the post-structural design theorists of the 1980s and 1990s came close to addressing the operation of affect through their concern with difference, complexity and graphic intervention, and that arguably this form of post-structuralist design criticism better captured the vitalist spirit of affect than did the comparatively conservative vogue for emotional design and functional affordance, which are collectively folded into contemporary notions of 'experience design'.

However, it would seem that the wave of design theory that might have followed on from Cranbrook, CalArts, and Emigre – which would have been well placed to address the question of affect, simply did not emerge. The abundance of design theory that was operation in the 1990s dwindled, and by the turn of the century had almost entirely disappeared. Interestingly, this may in part have been a result of practising designers rejecting the predominately textual orientation of deconstruction, and seeking out modes of more aesthetic, experiential and performative practice. Indeed, contemporary notions of expanded practice,

DIY and modes of critical making might effectively be positioned as having constituted a second wave of design criticism – a more directly materialist outgrowth of deconstructivist design, that turned away from writing, but which nevertheless enacts an 'affective' mode of critique (Somerson, Hermano, Maeda, 2013; DiSalvo, 2012). As Alice Twemlow (2006) has noted, a set of postmodern and poststructural concerns with the complexity, difference and the fragmentation of hierarchies would seem to have leaked out of the printed page and incorporated themselves into the very fabric of design culture. In aesthetic terms, the baroque, intricately detailed, multiply layered forms of graphic design that were prevalent over the course of the late 1990s gave way to a return to simplicity and restraint - the most radical and extreme forms of this were termed 'default system design' due to their insistence of the employment of only default software settings (Vanderlans, 2003). However, it is important to recognise that this simplification of design aesthetics was arguably accompanied by a surge in *relational* complexity.

The Affective Capacities of Relational Design

Andrew Blauvelt - a frequent contributor to *Emigre* magazine (one of the last outposts of graphic design-theory), and most recently curator at the Walker Art Gallery, has, in an Anglo-American context at least, come the closest to envisaging a design-oriented Deleuzo-Guattarian picture of socio-connective affect - albeit with a techno-functional emphasis that perhaps makes such thinking more palatable to the communities of de-sign (Blauvelt, 2008; van der Beek, 2012).

Blauvelt's view of 'relational design', whilst framed against the backdrop of Bourriaud's (2002) *Relational Aesthetics* is deeply indebted (much like Bourriaud's own thinking) to the process-philosophical thought of Deleuze. Blauvelt conceptualises products and consumers in performative terms, questioning their separation, and imbricating them in symbiotic modes of becoming. In the context of relational design, the designer provides an evolving platform for inter-subjective encounters that can be both emotionally and behaviourally transformative (van der Beek, 2012, p. 434-435). From this perspective, contemporary strategies of 'open design' attempt to construct platforms, which foster open-ended relationships and facilitate inter-subjective affective flows. That is to say, in the context of relational design, the designer constructs spaces of encounter that may operate outside of the socially sanctioned, and which may equally contest or affirm the normative and the conventional.

In recent years, the Dutch collective Moniker have been involved in the creation of a number of interesting relational design works. Their work *Do Not Touch,* which they describe as 'an interactive crowd-sourced music video' is particularly useful for our purposes here in so far as it takes place in a digital context and thus makes some of the technological metaphors that underpin relational-design thinking more explicit. Returning to the comparative context introduce at the beginning of this paper, it will perhaps prove fruitful to unpack Moniker's work in relation to participatory performance work such as Abramovic's *Rhythm O* (1974) and Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964).

Figure 13. After Yoko Ono's Cut Piece, 1964. Drawing.
Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.

Figure 14. After Marina Abramovic's Rhythm O, 1974. Drawing.
Brent Hardy-Smith, 2016. Image courtesy of Brent Hardy-Smith.

Figure 15. Do Not Touch (1). Music Video. Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker

Figure 16. Do Not Touch (2). Music Video. Moniker, 2013.
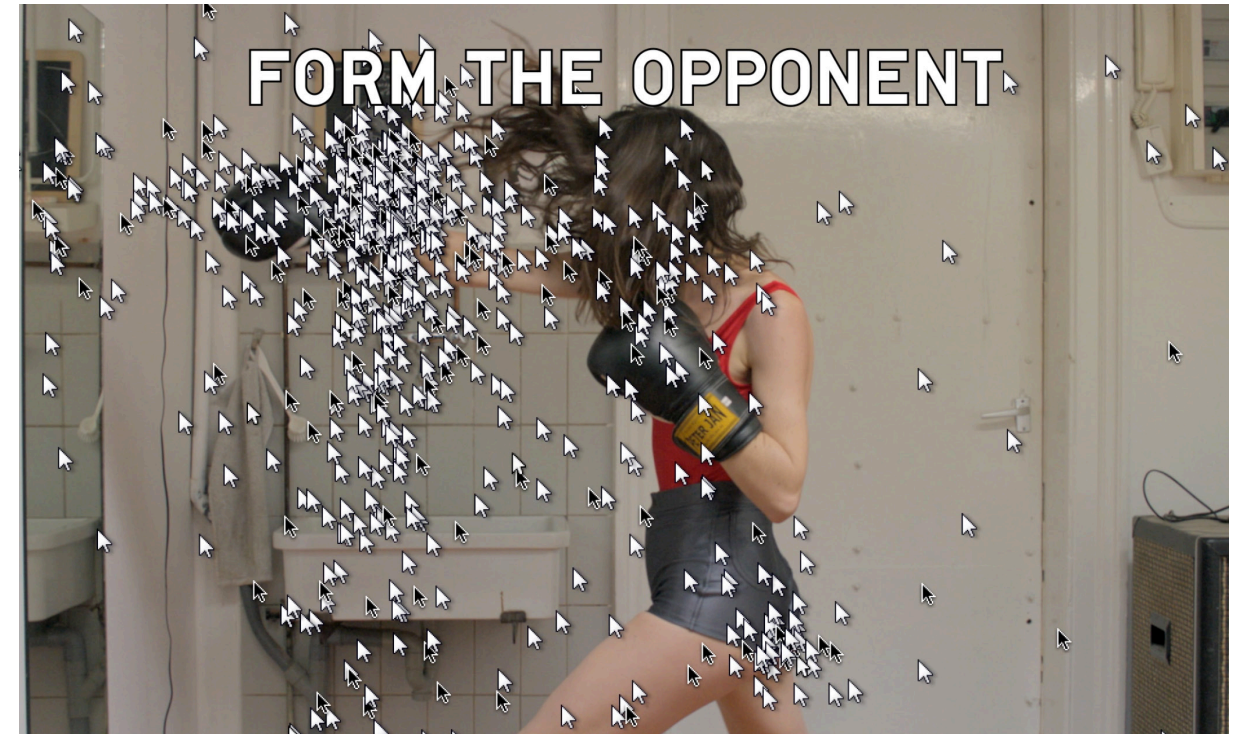Image courtesy of Moniker.

Figure 17. Do Not Touch (3). Music Video. Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker.

Figure 18. Do Not Touch (4). Music Video. Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker.

Both Abramovic and Ono's work stand as landmark moments of participatory practice - they each implicate the audience in the construction of the work and they likewise depend upon props that have a limited range of performative connotations and affordances (scissors feature in both performances, whilst Abramovic's six hour performance also made items such as a rose, a vial of perfume, a scalpel, a container of honey, and a loaded gun available to the public). The implicit 'conditionality' that results from the semiotic connotations of this equipment is made more explicit when we consider Ono's overt directive to the audience that they should cut off her clothing.

Moniker's music video for Light Light (Figures 15-18) was constructed by tracking and overlaying the mouse movements of hundreds of participants as they negotiated its imagistic, time-based content along with a set of playful textual provocations – a strategy that fostered lively engagement with a set of political categories. The limited expressivity of the mouse cursor was placed in an at once aesthetic and politically charged context, inviting the user to repeatedly consider their relationship to individuality, collectivity, anonymity and authority - but to express this in purely performative terms. The user's consent, resistance or passivity was recorded and incorporated into the video itself – and in this context, the collaboration and cooperation of users became as interesting as the creative resourcefulness that they employed to establish dissent. Much of Moniker's work deploys Oulipo-esque strategies of creative constraint in collaborative design contexts - pitting formal rules and textual imperatives against contingency, environment and group dynamics to establish open, creative happenings.

Figure 19. Conditional Design Work Book (1). Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker.

Figure 20. Conditional Design Work Book (2). Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker.

Figurē 21. Conditional Design Work Book (3). Moniker, 2013.
Image courtesy of Moniker.

It is important to recognise that although Blauvelt does not limit relational design to computer based contexts, the ideas of relational design resonate particularly well with the open, plasticity of the computer screen and its rhizomatic, networked structure - and it is important to remember that Blauvelt made a number of contributions to *Emigre* magazine, which was perhaps the first forum to seriously consider the impact of digital technologies on in the context of graphic design. Networked digital platforms provide a space for social collision and transformation - indeed the suggestions of users, along with their design input, and labour, often feedback into the continued 'becoming' or the transformation of platforms themselves. Thus Blauvelt proposes a vision of a 'connected ecology' that is removed from any notion of 'discrete object' or 'hermetic meaning' (Blauvelt, 2008), and which challenges modernist notions of authorship, troubling the distinctions between designer, client and consumer.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of such techo-relational projects, however, is the way in which they would seem to inherit Deleuze's strange fusion of modern and post-structural themes. That is to say, Baluvelt's image of a connective, transformative platform of deeply invested, co-creative users inflects, but does not entirely escape the notion of universalism that Blauvelt himself describes as symptomatic of the first phase of modern design (e.g. the modernist search for universal form) – it does, however, inflect it in an interesting, and somewhat post-structural fashion. Thus, whilst there is a kind of utopianism at work in these kind of techno-relational projects, the aim is not to establish an infinite, singular universal form for all users, but rather to facilitate productive, transformational contact. In Deleuzian terms, such platforms are interesting in the sense that they enable an immersive disappearance into a swarm of deeply intensive relations – we (both) lose (and construct) ourselves in an encounter with other actants that transcends and circumvents geographical boundaries.

Writing in a more overtly affective register, Deleuze associates such transformative, relational encounters with an ethics of love and with a processual conception of beauty. To this end he cites the spontaneous viral, contagious sense of joy that passes between lovers, and its resistance to foreknowledge or plan. Blauvelt's more sober style of writing, communicates well with a de-sign audience but also serves to obscure the deeply affective ground of Deleuzo-Guattarian thought. That is to say, for Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming is itself a process of desire', it is:

> Two bodies caressing . . . unwrapping themselves . . . disorganizing themselves . . . (it is) swarming intensities . . . swarming caresses. (It is) Becoming-beauty . . . or saying beauty otherwise: becoming-becoming (Bearn, 2000, p. 458).

Conclusion - A Third Wave of Design Criticism?

Alongside its mining of design history in search of the spectre of affect, this paper has attempted to investigate the way in which affect *theory* - as a mode of critical writing that is concerned with sensation, materiality and performativity - might once more serve to engage the design community philosophically. Early evidence of such an approach might be found in the writings of the contemporary design theorist Carl Disalvo (2012) who's work can be read as envisaging the social and the political as a cacophony of affects. Disalvo stresses the antagonism inherent in human relations and presents the political as an ongoing contest between emotions, forces and ideals - drawing attention to the at once rhetorical and affective dimension of designed things. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes here, a variety of forms of expanded design theory would currently seem to be flourishing. The performative lectures, writings, happenings and interventions of design groups as diverse as Experimental Jetset, Abake, Moniker, Dunne and Raby, Spatial Innovation Design Labs, Natalie Jeremijenko, and the now disbanded Cox and Grusenmeyer operate in a fashion that embraces both theory and practice – often making use of performative strategies, and employing a range of aesthetic props and devices. Approaches such as these are particularly distinctive in so far as they signpost the emergence an aesthetico-conceptual mode of practice-led engagement that foregrounds aesthetics and practices of design, without in the process withdrawing from writing or sidestepping critical debate.

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INDISCIPLINARITY AS SOCIAL FORM: CHALLENGING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SENSIBLE IN THE VISUAL ARTS

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T Indisciplinarity as Social Form: Challenging the
Distribution of the Sensible in the Visual Arts
A **Richard Miles**