Introduction: Music without Words

> "Why do we love music that is without words?" –
> Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*

The journalist Chuck Todd, host of the American political talk show "Meet the Press," was asked, shortly after the successful presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump in 2016, to reflect on what he saw as the most distinctive features of the president-elect. He said that Trump has a peculiar habit after he finishes taping an interview: he sits in the studio and asks to watch the playback, with the sound off. Todd proposed that Trump's effectiveness as a politician needs to be understood in part through his acute sensitivity to the visual aspects of his performance (Thrush 2016). What is this political efficacy that flows, not from language, but from a face? How can a face, a body, an image, a place, or an object conduct power? Kathleen Stewart writes that "power is a thing of the senses" (Stewart 2007, 84). How do the felt or sensed dimensions of power – not just surrounding individual leaders, but throughout the field of politics – fuel the vast machines making and unmaking societies?

Affect theory is an approach to history, politics, culture, and all other aspects of embodied life that emphasizes the role of nonlinguistic and non- or para-cognitive forces. As a method, affect theory asks *what bodies do* – what they want, where they go, what they think, how they decide – and especially how bodies are impelled by forces other than language and reason. It is, therefore, also a theory of power. For affect theory, feelings, emotions, affects, moods, and sensations are not cosmetic but rather the substance of subjectivity. Unlike liberal approaches that see emotion as the antithesis of political reason, however, affect theory is designed to explain progressive, democratic, and even liberal movements themselves just as well as it explains the appeal of conservatism, reaction, and fascism.

This Element is about the relationship of bodies to affects and, in particular, the conceptual ambidexterity of the term *affect* itself. Affect theory, as scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Eugenie Brinkema, Mel Y. Chen, Ann Cvetkovich, Eve Sedgwick, Greg Seigworth, and Melissa Gregg have pointed out, tracks into divergent, and perhaps incommensurable, definitions: *affect*, in a sense used by thinkers inspired by Gilles Deleuze, as something like unstructured proto-sensation, and *affects*, in a sense used by theorists drawing on blends of feminism, queer theory, emotion psychology, and phenomenology as the felt emotional textures structuring our embodied experience.[1] In the former, *affect* is

[1] See Ahmed 2004c; Brinkema 2014; Chen 2012; Cvetkovich 2012; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Sedgwick 2003.

often aligned with a chain of rhyming concepts inherited from French philosophy that have currency across the humanities, such as *becoming, intensity, excess, the event,* and *the virtual*. This sense of affect is rigidly separated from the realm of "conscious" emotions. In the latter, a more casual approach allows an easy interchangeability of *affect* with terms such as *emotion* and *feeling* and a cross-cutting of registers from the "conscious" to the "unconscious." Both of these definitions are off to the side of a common definitional practice in the psychology of emotions, which pitches *affect* as a micro-register of feeling and *emotion* as a macro-register. I'll return to discuss this use in the final section of this Element.

My argument here is focused on the landscape of this debate and makes a specific intervention: I argue that a theory of affect *and power* can't work if affect is defined as *becoming*. I propose that we need the second version of affect theory in order to understand the relationship between affect and formations of power. The Deleuzian understanding of affect is not irrelevant to accounts of power. But it ultimately indexes something so far upstream of bodies that it is oblivious to the way that power interfaces with organisms in their animal specificity. I follow scholars such as Ann Cvetkovich and Sara Ahmed, then, in preferring that the concept of *affect* remains entangled with terms such as *feeling* and *emotion* rather than rigidly chambered in a nonlinguistic, noncognitive, nonpersonal field.

In the course of developing this argument, this Element engages in a sustained way with the relationship between affect theory and the life sciences. Affect theory's encounter with the sciences is driven, in part, by an attempt to reframe the way the humanities are done. But what understanding of the life sciences leads this discussion? What is the "evolution" of affect theory? I argue that the evolutionary approach conducts us to special attention to the animality of bodies – what Elizabeth A. Wilson has called their *bio-logic* – as a major touchstone for thinking about the domain of affect. Affects in their *animality* need to be understood in terms of concrete dynamics between change and structure, becoming and being, rather than governed by an overarching logic of becoming. I argue that this approach clarifies how affect theory attaches to what Michel Foucault calls the "analytics of power."

The analytics of power focuses on exactly this kind of detailed mapping. The insistence on detail comes across already in Foucault's suggestion that an *analytics of power* is distinguished from a *theory of power* by virtue of tracking the concrete mechanisms by which power is distributed. Crucially for Foucault, this distribution system must be distinguished from a top-down understanding in which power is implemented from above, what he calls the *juridico-discursive model* of power. The analytics of power proposes, by contrast, that

power is always (with the exception of limit cases) *productive* as well as constraining.

Power would not work, Foucault suggests, if it were only an endlessly repeated *no* backed up by force. Instead, we must turn to a conception of power that creates situations that bodies want. He writes that the analytics of power is

> a conception of power which replaces the privilege of the law with the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of prohibition with the viewpoint of tactical efficacy, the privilege of sovereignty with the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced. (Foucault 1990, 102)

Multiplicity, force relations, and a dynamic of variability and stability are the hallmarks of Foucault's understanding of power.

Although Foucault refused to ask after the nature of power itself – preferring to focus on "the little question, *What happens?*" rather than the grand question, *What is it?* (Foucault 1982, 217, emphasis added) – affect theory would seem to offer resources for deepening our understanding of the nature of power (see Schaefer 2015, chapter 1). Foucault seems to want to move the analytics of power out of the domain of a rationalist paradigm preoccupied with centralization: "let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality," he proposes, before continuing, "the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them: an implicit characteristic of the great anonymous, almost unspoken strategies which coordinate the loquacious tactics whose 'inventors' or decisionmakers are often without hypocrisy" (Foucault 1990, 95). This is an entry point for plugging in a theory of affect, which is similarly interested in conceptualizing power's fuzzy relationship with intention, cognition, accident, awareness, and what gets called "reason."

Hélène Cixous asks the deceptively simple question, "Why do we love music that is without words?" (Cixous & Calle-Gruber 1997, 46). Why *do* we love music without words? What is the force – riding airborne vibrations – reverberating deep into our bodies that makes us move? What other unspoken forces shape our embodied subjectivity? Where Foucault proposed a model of *power-knowledge*, affect theory suggests that we need to think of *power-affect* – or *power-knowledge-affect*. But here we're returned to the question of the relationship between affect and "consciousness." The argument advanced here will propose that the evanescent sense of affect as *becoming*, or *excess*, or *the event* – radically exterior to the field of "the personal" – is too slippery to capture the traction of power. It simply doesn't exist in the realm of the contestable, the

material, the concrete – the realm where forces crash against each other and crumple or prevail.

To set up the story of affect theory as it tracks different lines of intellectual development, the section "The Deleuzian Dialect of Affect Theory" explores the trajectory of affect theory along the Deleuzian stream. It studies the dynamic of *affections* and *affects* in Spinoza and how these categories yield Spinoza's complex understanding of embodiment and animality. It then cuts forward to Deleuze's early work on Spinoza and Bergson, revealing how Deleuze's alternating fascinations with Spinoza and Bergson build up a pronounced tension within his work. This is particularly salient in Deleuze's own theory of animals, offered in his later work with Félix Guattari. Where Deleuze is most strongly tinged by Bergson, he tends to take *affect* to be something that is essentially prior to *the personal*. Along these lines, commentators such as Brian Massumi promote a version of affect that is fundamentally exterior to cognition, language, and emotion. *Affect* becomes a capsule or convergence point for a set of isomorphic themes that all reiterate this essential exteriority – *becoming, excess, virtuality, novelty*, and *the event*.

Criticisms of this dialect of affect theory are examined in the section "Unbecoming" with an eye to highlighting the limitations of a definition of affect as synonymous with becoming (and so essentially external to capture). A review of contemporary evolutionary biology's attention to the necessary dynamic *between* structure and change demonstrates that Massumi's theory of animality – which exclusively stresses becoming – misses crucial elements needed for an account of embodied life. This dynamic presentation can be found in a reading of some strands of Deleuze's own thought, primarily those that have the most distance from Bergson. This line of criticism partially overlaps with the challenge to affect theory put forward by scholars such as Ruth Leys.

The section "The Animality of Affect" advances a new framing of affect theory as a way of analyzing power. It suggests that affect provides an excellent lens for thinking of humans as existing in continuity with nonhuman animals, as Darwin himself foresaw in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. By centralizing the nonlinguistic elements of subjectivity, it exposes the implicit assumption, present throughout the humanities, that subjectivity requires language. This highlights the way that the line from humans to animals is not a passage from subjectivity to nonsubjectivity but through a range of embodied forms of subjectivity.

This prompts consideration of a second lineage of affect theory – that which is primarily advocated by queer and feminist scholars of affect such as Eve Sedgwick and Sara Ahmed. This lineage has dialects of its own. One of these is

Sedgwick's queer reframing of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, who built a version of affect theory drawing on Darwin. Tomkins uses affect in a sense more closely attached to psychoanalysis but elaborates a sophisticated framework that detaches the concept of affect from Freud's concept of drives and makes it central to a new theory of motivation. Sedgwick revisits and modifies this framework, devising an understanding of affect that is comfortable with a more intimate set of links between affect, emotion, and cognition. A related dialect is the phenomenological tradition championed by Sara Ahmed, which emphasizes the constitution of the subject through a play of recursive impressions that shape the horizon of feeling.

I show that these lines of thought can be brought together to highlight the limitations of theories of affect that emphasize *becoming*. The risk of locating affect in the register of becoming is shown to be not only an insufficient attention to the material conditions of evolved embodiment but also an insufficient account of the operations of power, which, as Foucault has shown, necessarily play out in an inescapable dynamic of opening *and* constraint. Foucault's analytics of power, it is proposed, are productively supplemented by an attention to a broader sense of affect. In particular, much as an account of evolution, contra Massumi, needs to include attention to both repetition and change, so an account of power needs to expand beyond the channel of *becoming*. Criticisms of Tomkins' Basic Emotions hypothesis and his anti-intentionalism are also considered here.

The closing section, "Economies of Dignity: Reconsidering the Mosque Movement," applies the revised understanding of affect in its animality to Saba Mahmood's account of a women's mosque movement in Egypt during her fieldwork in the 1990s. The mosque movement brought together a number of female Muslim leaders who opted, within the context of a putatively secular society, to reintroduce elements of Islamic piety, such as the cultivation of modesty and the wearing of the hijab. Mahmood sees the mosque movement women as suggesting ways to push beyond liberal/secular narratives that insist on a necessary movement away from religion and toward autonomy. Rather, she suggests, her consultants indicate the diversity and variety of forms of agency in the world – not all of which can be subordinated to a binary of free/unfree.

My revisiting of Mahmood's work takes a different framing, drawing in part on Mahmood's own work on affect in later pieces such as "Religious Reason and Secular Affect" (Mahmood 2007). I argue that the affect theory approach to the mosque movement helps us to think beyond the category of *agency* itself. This version of affect, however, cannot be a synonym for *becoming*, which misses what is happening with the mosque movement entirely. Instead, the mapping of the dynamic between religion, bodies, and power requires a more

textured account of the play of emotion and repetition. Integrating writings on shame from Tomkins and Sedgwick with Sara Ahmed's notion of the *affective economy*, I propose that the mosque movement can be understood against the backdrop of a broader *economy of dignity*. This backdrop provides the coordinates of power within which religious subjects make decisions and navigate their material-affective situations.

Affect theory is at a stage where it will benefit from a survey of its concepts and a clearer delineation of its analytical tool kit. This Element is not designed to resolve this discussion, but it is designed to advance it. It seeks to do so by examining affect theory as a unique zone of engagement between the humanities and the sciences and addressing the primary criticisms that have been levied against it. All told, the understanding of affect in the light of evolution – thinking of affect, in other words, as animal – provides a comprehensive template for thinking about how power interfaces with bodies, whether in secular or religious contexts. Slitting the binary between "conscious" and "preconscious" creates a more versatile theory of power, while also shining a light on how the humanities and the sciences can strengthen the dialogue between them.

1 The Deleuzian Dialect of Affect Theory

The setting was the Center for 21st Century Studies (C21), a research unit at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. It was their 2012 conference, on the theme "The Non-human Turn." On the ground floor of the concrete tower that housed C21, philosopher-artists Erin Manning and Brian Massumi had set up an installation piece, "Weather Patterns." Sited next to the registration area outside the main lecture room, the installation was a mass of black fabric and cables suspended from the ceiling. Conference-goers passed through it like a maze of curtains on their way to the theater (an image of the piece has been posted here: www.flickr.com/photos/nathanielstern/7302487294/in/photostream/).

There were also speakers embedded in the folds of the cloth. The cloth wasn't ordinary fabric. It had been wired up to act as an antenna. The fabric was picking up waves of air from the motion of passersby and absorbing the waves as electronic signals. The signals were collated and converted into sound, which was then emitted by the speakers. The subtle, unpredictable, cross-cutting air currents were transformed into noise. The effect was a cascade of whispering, screeching, and clicking emanating from the cloth and rolling through the concrete halls.

The artwork modeled Massumi and Manning's understanding of affect: a field of pure potential that circulates between bodies. This version of

affect is itself built on the understanding of affect offered by Benedict de Spinoza, as the play of the "infinitely many things in infinitely many modes" (Spinoza 1996, 13), the unfurling of a single substance, what Gilles Deleuze would later call the "plane of immanence" (Deleuze 1988b, 122). As Massumi and Manning wrote of the piece, it was the materialization of "[a] process" that would "[r]egister the environmental conditions in a series of relational cross-currents" (C21 2012, np). The art-machine took this idea of affect – as abstract micro-processes crashing between bodies – and rendered it audible.

Walking through Weather Patterns on the way to sessions was fun – you never knew quite what it was going to do. After a few encounters, however, I came to the conclusion that it was better appreciated at a distance. It was still fascinating. On the last day of the conference, I left the final session a few minutes early. The registration table still had a grad student working at it. She was about twenty feet from Weather Patterns, which was still clicking and whispering away. I realized that she had been effectively sitting *inside the installation* for hours. She was staring straight ahead with her arms folded. I walked up to her and asked, "So has this lost its charm for you?" Still staring straight ahead, arms folded, without looking up, she responded, "I need a drink."

Ann Cvetkovich's *Depression: A Public Feeling* opens with an important preface for any discussion of what now gets called *affect theory*. Although the term itself is relatively new, she notes, attention to affect has been a part of certain scholarly disciplines – including, especially, feminism, queer theory, anti-racism, and postcolonial studies – decades before anyone came up with the phrase "the affective turn" (Cvetkovich 2012, 3ff; see also Wiegman 2014, 13). But within the contemporary discussion, Cvetkovich notes two subtly distinct methodological flavors. In one stream is the loose network of scholars, such as the Public Feelings Collective, who thematize affect as the matrix of feeling at the personal level. In the other stream are what Cvetkovich calls the *Deleuzians*, affect theorists who define affect in a technical sense devised by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In Cvetkovich's account, the distinction between these branches lies in the decision to use a technical or blurred definition of affect: Deleuzians tend to rigidly maintain the border between something called *affect* – that is, "precognitive sensory experience and relations to surroundings" – and something called *emotion* – "cultural constructs and conscious processes that emerge from them, such as anger, fear, or joy" (Cvetkovich 2012, 4). Cvetkovich herself professes the first branch, deploying a less disciplined use of the term *affect* as "encompass[ing] affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (Cvetkovich 2012, 4). Sara Ahmed calls this second perspective – less

committed to the differentiation between affect and emotion – "feminist cultural studies of affect" (Ahmed 2010, 13).

The Deleuzian approach to affect has been advanced primarily in the fields of poststructuralist philosophy and media studies. Massumi, one of its most prominent exponents, has provided a brilliant exposition of Deleuze's notion of affect, featured in Deleuze's early works on Spinoza and Bergson and in his later collaborations with Félix Guattari, some of which Massumi himself translated for Anglophone audiences. In this section, I will survey the emergence of the Deleuzian branch of affect theory, paying particular attention to its consideration of animality as a clue to how it interfaces with the biological. I want to study the way in which Deleuze brings together different philosophical ancestor figures – such as Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson – into a single philosophical elixir. My suggestion is that there's a tension between these figures as thinkers of affect. When Deleuze's thought is synthesized into a dialect of *affect theory* by Massumi and others, it carries this tension forward, leaving a set of unresolved philosophical problems – and possibly missteps – on the table. This survey will set the stage for a more sustained engagement with criticisms of the Deleuzian dialect in the section "Unbecoming: Criticisms of the Deleuzian Dialect of Affect Theory."

Spinoza, Affections, and Affects

The road to the Deleuzian dialect of affect theory begins with Spinoza, though the exact vocabulary used changes forms many times. In the opening section of Spinoza's *Ethics,* entitled "Of God," he premises his discussion of affects on a discussion of the classical medieval problem of substance and accident, looped through an explicitly theological agenda. Spinoza's theology is monism: God is coextensive with all that is – substance. God, for Spinoza, is "a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence" (Spinoza 1996, 7). Spinoza identifies these attributes of substance as what he calls *affections* (Spinoza 1996, 1). "A substance," he proposes, "is prior in nature to its affections" (Spinoza 1996, 2). Affections, then, are the ensemble of properties attached to the universal divinity field of substance.

This monist view of substance is woven, in the second part of *Ethics*, into Spinoza's theory of the relationship between mind and body. Once again, the emphasis is on collapsing dualist accounts of mind and body (Spinoza 1996, 68). In contrast to Descartes, Spinoza asserts, on the basis of the singularity of divine substance, "that the human mind is united to the body" (Spinoza 1996, 40). Spinoza rejects those philosophical understandings of mind that place its operations outside of the "common laws of Nature" (Spinoza 1996, 68–9).

Perception, for Spinoza, is not a transcendent faculty observing the body's affections but rather a sort of *bouncing of affections off of one another within the body* (Spinoza 1996, 50). In the consummate statement of the monist worldview, Spinoza insists that "[i]f things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other" (Spinoza 1996, 3). A perceiving stuff has to be, in an essential sense, *like* the stuff it perceives.

So far, we get a sense of Spinoza as a metaphysician, a thinker cutting against the grain of the great dualist philosophical-theological schemes. But in the third part of *Ethics*, we get Spinoza the psychologist, integrating his version of philosophical monism with an account of how human beings work. He now begins writing about *affects* (not affections) in a seemingly different register. "By affect," Spinoza writes, "I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained" (Spinoza 1996, 70). The core formation of affect, for Spinoza, is the polarity of *joy* and *sadness* (Spinoza 1996, 77). From this basic continuum, Spinoza spools off a series of meditations on the affects, not only joy and sadness in sections II and III, but wonder (IV), hate (VII), devotion (X), hope (XII), confidence (XIV), despair (XV), gladness (XVI), indignation (XX), compassion (XXIV), repentance (XXVII), pride (XXVIII), despondency (XXIX), shame (XXXI), thankfulness (XXXIV), cruelty (XXXVIII), and ambition (XLIV).

These affects are related to the metaphysical picture of the play of substance-affection to the extent that they follow from Spinoza's monist ontology. But they are also a meaningful departure. Spinoza's characterization of the effects – on groups and individuals – of the different patterns of *affect* has no necessary relationship to his metaphysical monism. We are not in a realm where any particular metaphysical commitments are necessary. The fact that the same genre – a catalogue of emotion words and their meaning – is replicated in Descartes' own late work *The Passions of the Soul* would seem to speak to this.[2]

It's also in this context that Spinoza outlines a theory of animals. Consistent with his monist metaphysics, he refuses to locate animals and humans on opposite sides of a binary division, as Descartes did: "after we know the origin of the mind," he argues, "we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things" (Spinoza 1996, 101–2). But he also begins a sketch of a way of exploring animal psychology, proposing that humans and different animals *feel differently*. "Both the horse and the man are driven by a lust to procreate," he observes, "but the one is driven by an equine lust, the other by a human lust" (Spinoza 1996, 102). Spinoza's theory of animality is a way of recognizing the

[2] That said, the first thing to say about this work is that its metaphysics are complicated and may even reflect a break or evolution from Descartes' earlier works. See Sullivan (2018) for discussion.

embodied particularity of each animal, different organisms – structured biological entities – corresponding to different formations of desire, happiness, and, one assumes, distinct (but by no means unrelated) suites of affects.

Deleuze's Spinoza, Deleuze's Bergson

Deleuze engages with Spinoza continually throughout his career, including a pair of books, written two years apart in the late 1960s, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* and *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Like Spinoza, he stresses the consubstantiality of body and mind: "what is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind. There is no primacy of one series over the other" (Deleuze 1988b, 18). And like Spinoza, he emphasizes the polarity of *joy* and *sadness* as the spectrum on which we respond to that which enables or dissipates flourishing (Deleuze 1988b, 50).

Deleuze even builds an ad hoc theory of animality along lines similar to Spinoza's, which he glosses as a project of *ethology*, or description of animal characteristics. At the end of *Practical Philosophy*, he stresses that to be animal is fundamentally to be a sum of affections: "given an animal, what is this animal unaffected by in the infinite world? What does it react to positively or negatively? What are its nutriments and its poisons? What does it 'take' in its world?" (Deleuze 1988b, 125). Deleuze even syncs Spinoza up with the founder of ethology, Jakob von Uexküll (whom we'll revisit in the section "The Animality of Affect"), proposing that von Uexküll's attention to the "beacons" of the lifeworld is really a map of an organism's affects (Deleuze 1988b, 124). To be an animal, whether human or otherwise, is to be defined by the ensemble of ways that one is affectionately wrapped up with the world.

But at the same time, Deleuze begins to put his own backspin on Spinoza's ontological tableau. You could call it a sort of romanticism – a Nietzschefication of Spinoza that plays up the noble, existential tones of his philosophy – especially as revealed in the prismatic light of Spinoza's biography. For instance, Deleuze makes a sort of proclamatory statement about joy and sadness passing beyond good and evil: "the good or strong individual is the one who exists so fully or so intensely that he has gained eternity in his lifetime, so that death, always extensive, always external, is of little significance to him" (Deleuze 1988b, 41). This is not exactly wrong, vis-à-vis Spinoza, but it's definitely more Prussia than Amsterdam. Even Spinoza's political situation, as a freethinker, blasphemer, and religious outcast, is made into a philosophical touchstone, an endorsement of liberalism according to the coordinates of a kind of vitalist existentialism: "The best society, then, will be one that exempts the power of