Affective solidarity and mediated distant suffering:
In defence of mere feltness

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Abstract: In recent media and political theory the idea of affective solidarity has been treated as a contradiction in terms. Any relation to the other consisting in sympathy or pity cannot form the basis of full subjective recognition of the other, and in practice is often actively dehumanising. Further, there remains the notion that solidarity is contingent upon a rupture of habitual being-in-the-world that produces a revelatory consciousness of the subjectivity of the other. In journalistic contexts this leads to practices that aim at intensive or extensive encounters that transcend the affective livedness of everyday routines. Against these conventional wisdoms, this article argues that solidarity with distant others is not clinched in spite of the merely felt experience of the other in everyday life – an experience characterised by distraction, ambivalence and unreflexive sentimentality – but instead is predicated precisely on that mere feltness. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of findingness, Withy's disclosive postures and Levinas's ascription of ethics to the fundamental priority of co-existence, it is proposed that feeling the *right* way about distant suffering may be immaterial. In practical terms, it concludes with a call to shift our empirical focus away from the question of how media can produce meaningfully solidaristic encounters between distant others, to ask instead what kinds of ordinary mediated affect already existing in the world might afford solidarity.

Keywords: Affect; distant suffering; Levinas; recognition; solidarity; phenomenology

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Introduction

Intuitively, solidarity is a straightforward concept to understand: a standing with others based upon the recognition of the common experience of humanity. It implies a willingness to incur personal costs in acting in common or on behalf of the other, an avowal that your pain is my pain, your battles are my battles. However, phenomenological perspectives on the way we come to know others present a fundamental dilemma. In short, all intentive consciousness, which underpins knowledge of and understanding of others, seeks to make that other identical to itself. Knowledge is predicated on the obliteration of difference, and in this consists the violence of making an other your phenomenological object; in the words of Emmanuel Levinas, "[o]ne does not see that the success of knowledge would in fact destroy the nearness, the proximity, of the other" (1996: 103-4). This applies to all directed consciousness, the drily actuarial as much as the insatiably curious, but especially to the sentimental. In making an other the object of one's pity, one does not so much take on their suffering as one's own, but appropriates it for selfish ends such as the maintenance of one's self-image as a good humanitarian. Further, it is lazy, responding to all the variegated horrors the world has to offer in much the same way, reacting in prescribed ways that require little conscious effort rather than sizing up this injustice against all the others and deciding on an appropriate course of action.

For existentialists, this is the hell of other people, finding ourselves thrown into a baffling world full of countless others we can never hope to understand fully, yet compelled to do so and aware that there are only bad choices to make in making others sensible to us. This can sound like a call to wilful, blissful ignorance, but it is nothing of the sort: it is a condition of thrownness (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]) that we are predisposed to try to make sense of the world. Heidegger takes this further in arguing that we have a moral duty to try to grasp the world into which we are thrown as best we can, including taking responsibility for the complicit self that appears to us as always-already existing rather than something we have consciously carried to this point in time and space. I may find the world bewildering and my own place in it arbitrary, but I can do my best to redress the former and own the latter – this is the moral grounding of solidarity. That intentive consciousness entails annihilation is no excuse, but rather obliges us to scrutinise how we know, what that discloses of the world and with what implications. This article explores the possibilities for solidarity afforded by affective mediated experience, a 'phatic' (Frosh, 2011) relation of mere-

feltness to others. Its conclusion is not that it is better to feel than to know, but rather that the intuitive, distracted and ambivalent experience of others over time – as Frosh (2011: 384) puts it, impersonal, non-intimate and inattentive aspects of mediation – may be more conducive to subjective recognition than intense moments of focus, concentration and cogitation.

In recent political and media theory (Honneth & Fraser, 2003; McNay, 2008) the idea of affective solidarity has been regarded as something of a contradiction in terms. Any relation to the other consisting in sympathy, sentiment or pity cannot form the basis of full, implicitly Hegelian, subjective recognition of the other – and in practice it is often actively dehumanising. It is a debate with much deeper roots, going back to Adam Smith's conjecture in *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759) that the key to recognition of mutual humanity is imagination, which requires more than reason alone to develop. While Rousseau (1758) warned that any attempt to imbue representations of suffering with emotive force risks undermining that which it sets out to achieve, d'Alembert responded that to drily recount the facts of human misery is little short of perverse (see Sennett, 1977). More recently Luc Boltanski (1999) has challenged the idea that pity is necessarily a political dead-end, while Charles Taylor's (1992) social imaginaries take up Smith's arguments to investigate the kinds of spaces that afford the possibility of individuals imagining their way into the lived existence of others.

What Boltanski and Taylor have in common is the belief that didacticism does not work: it is no good telling people they should care more or care differently about the suffering of others. This goes against the media malaise theorists (see especially Moeller, 1999; Sontag, 2003) who decry the indifference exhibited by audiences when confronted with the worst of what people are capable of doing to other people – a lament that goes back at least as far as Proust (1970 [1919]: 200). But whether the solution to perceived cultures of apathy and fatalism is rubbing the public's noses in bloodshed and wretchedness or designing (mediated) spaces in which people can think their own way towards a more ethical relationship with the other, there is a common presumption that what is required is rupture – a breaking through of habitual ways of being in the world too familiar and comfortable to allow for proper recognition of what is going on in the world and how others experience it. Against that conventional wisdom, then, and in line with Frosh's diagnosis of an 'attentive fallacy' (2011: 385) underpinning it, this article argues that solidarity with distant others is not clinched in critical moments in spite of the affective swim that characterises so much of everyday life, but precisely through that quotidian experience, with all its attendant sensations, distractions and feelings.

Levinas on duration as non-intentional consciousness

In "Ethics as First Philosophy" (1989 [1961]), Levinas explores the tension between the fact that in everyday life it is simply impossible to take everything in – physiological stimuli, let alone complex political realities – and the instinctive responsibility many feel to know one's place in the world as best as one can. Thrownness is an experience of profound disorientation, to which the natural response is to grasp towards orientation by whatever means are to hand: in Heidegger's (1962 [1927]) words, we exist findingly [befindlich]. This appears self-interested, especially as the inclination towards orientation tends over time to solidify into comforting rituals of continuity, but taken at first principles it need not be. For Levinas the principle of taking responsibility for the self relies on its displacement from the centre of philosophical investigation (Pinchevski, 2012: 349). The notion of the self as something into which we are thrown rather than something that comes from within us, derives from the claim that existing is ontologically prior to the existent. All this means is that existence does not start from some primal origin and then goes about existing in different ways in the world: we begin with ways of existing in the world with others and only come to understand the idea of existence as a self over time. Taking ownership of our relationality, those modes of existing that have no prior existent, is the key to becoming an autonomous subject.

In everyday contexts such as catching up with the news, though, it can be profoundly annoying that we cannot help but find ourselves engaging in acts of selfhood, incorporating the objectification of others, which we are then judged or judge ourselves upon. "Just own it" sets a high bar which, realistically, most of us will fail to clear most of the time. There is, though, an alternative which does not resort to a rationalisation of indifference. This is Sartre's (2005 [1943]) non-positional consciousness of the self that sits alongside consciousness of something else – think of the latent or residual sense of self you have when reading a book or watching a film, where the things you might be thoroughly engrossed in do not entirely displace your embodied sense of who you are. While normally consciousness is acquisitive, even violent in its demand for objects to be identical with it, non-positional consciousness is more tangential – and could lay the groundwork for a less complicit ethics.

How? First, for Levinas this is not ethics arrived at through knowledge. Ethics comes first, at the point where non-intentional consciousness is thrown into a world before it is knowable. Ethics, in short, consists in the mere fact of co-existence. It is here that Levinas and Sartre before him anticipate the "tune in, drop out" response that it must follow that to live ethically is to live with as little consciousness awareness of others, still less understanding, as possible. Sartre's response

is emblematic of the existentialist school: there is no choice to not choose, all choices are bad yet you are compelled endlessly to make them until death; knowledge is a curse yet ignorance is a fantasy; understanding others entails you acting violently towards them by insisting that they become objects of your consciousness, your empathy. This has been criticised variously as romantic and nihilistic, and for our purposes it is also distinctly self-pitying – which is not to reduce existentialism to the indulgent or sophomoric as is sometimes seen in the literature, but to highlight Sartre's focus on the apparently coherent, reflective self undergoing such anguish.

Levinas, on the other hand, reframes Sartre's claim about the impossibility of knowing and communicating with others as a promising starting point: by remaining ungraspable, the other "demands acceptance and recognition prior to any comprehension or explanation" (Pinchevski, 2012: 345). The logical priority of thrownness into self-ing before any notion of self-hood means that the ethical dilemma of one's insuperable culpability does not arise through intentional knowing; culpability is already there in one's pre-reflexive relationality with others. Understanding that non-intentive relationality may, in theory at least, allow for a reconception of other forms of consciousness that are potentially compatible with relations of solidarity, including the merely felt, inappropriate or indifferent. Specifically, there is an intimacy to the non-intentional which stems from what Levinas dubs 'pure duration' – existing with another over time in such a way that each may act on the other without appearing as an object to it. (By way of analogy Levinas invokes time itself as a force which acts on us without ever appearing as an object of consciousness.) This pure duration is free of the will, implicit time which "no act of remembrance, reconstructing the past, could possibly reverse" (1989 [1961]: 81). Implicit time signifies:

> "other than as knowledge taken on the run, otherwise than a way of presenting presence… being that dare not speak its name, being that dare not be; the agency of the instant without the insistence of the ego, which is already a lapse in time which is 'over before it's begun'!" (ibid.)

As a form of relationality, duration is embryonic, but it is not innocent – "not guilty, but accused", in Levinas' words, "it dreads the insistence in the return to the self that is a necessary part of identification".

This, then, is distinct from the guilt-shaming often implied in critiques of compassion fatigue (Moeller, 1999) or mediated cultures of distraction (Virilio, 2000), and to which many of us subject ourselves, however counterproductively. It is accusatory, but not in Sontag's (2003) account of photography that forces the viewer 'finally' to realise the death and destruction in which she is complicit. It is an accusation that emanates from our pre-reflexive sense of intimacy

over time – from being in the world, not from scrutiny, demand or reflection. This can sound like an appeal to a purer, more essential form of relationality, but in fact it amounts to the opposite as it does away altogether with any metaphysical conception of solidarity. As this article proceeds it will become clear that this is where the practical relevance of Levinas' ethics lies. There is no 'deep' meaning or revelation at some imagined end of being in the world with others, nor any claim to reclaim an originary solidarity long since compromised by the depravities and degradations of modern life. This is (co-)existing as logically prior, simply what we find ourselves doing all the time out of necessity; more than Heidegger's being-with-the-other, it is being-for-the-other (Pinchevski, 2012: 349). And in research into media and its audiences, this frees us from the commitment to imagining new kinds of representation or mediated experience that will break through the fog of our overstimulated, commoditised everyday lives to clinch real subjective recognition of the other.

The following section sets the scene for this shift by investigating how affective postures towards the world represent far more than stunted, merely-felt relations to others doomed to fall far short of solidarity. To round out this section, however, three points bear emphasising. First, and most obviously, the kind of intimate non-intentional consciousness Levinas has in mind is more or less the antithesis of Buber's I-Thou dyad (1937 [1923]), predicated as it is on an unstinting, unflinching gaze into the eyes and ideally the soul of the other (see also Pinchevski, 2012). Second, it is not a rarefied state we should seek to attain: the constant experience of thrownness into always-already existing worlds and always-already existing selves is such that this passive, pre-reflexive relation to others is the default mode of existence – not a deviation from 'true', objectifying experience. And third, it is categorically not sympathy, as it is a relation not to an imaginary self-equivalent but precisely to an other, a mystery.

Disclosive postures of being in the world

Non-intentive consciousness is part of the fabric of our being in the world, then, but it cannot endure in the face of our constant, if ultimately futile, attempts to get to grips with that world. This section fleshes out the possibilities of a consciousness that is positional or more accurately intentional, but in a way that is felt rather than reasoned – in Jan Slaby's (2016) coinage, affective intentionality. The cogency of affective intentionality is predicated on the claim that a principle like solidarity is not something internal to selfhood which we then go and wield upon the world, weighing up the costs and implications to ourselves but making commitments regardless because that's who we are. We find ourselves acting out all sorts of practices of existing before 'we' exist,

so any principle of relationality is tied up in those encounters we navigate as best we can through improvisation, learned shortcuts and simply how we feel. But how, exactly, is what someone feels disclosive of what goes on in the world? (Slaby, 2016: 1). Conceptually, feeling is a dead-end if it is treated deontologically – and this is seen empirically, too, in much research following the 'affective turn' that simply catalogues feelings as though to probe further would be presumptuous or indeed would risk switching into that acquisitive consciousness that is thought to wreak such havoc. As much as affect is not junk data or evidence of an insufficient experience of others, nor is it sacrosanct; for while it is experienced as something distinctly of one's own, often in corporeal ways, affect is also collective and contextual. Just as there are ways of being in the world which precede and outlast an individual's existence, there are ways of feeling that are simultaneously pre-reflexive, ingenuous and materially contingent – as Lauren Berlant (2011: 53) puts it, affect is "sensual matter that is elsewhere to sovereign consciousness but that has historical significance in the domains of subjectivity". Slaby frames this with reference to Deleuzean (1994) assemblages, and also to Spinoza's account of the pre-individual sphere of becoming, in which affect can reasonably be located. Thus, affect is a relational unfolding within sociohistorical settings that are themselves unfolding and enfolding; rather than being a structural determination, it is an expression of relational constellations endemic to a particular place and time. More concretely, Slaby asks: "How do subjects of experience come about – and how do they get molded and transformed, framed and policed – within the meshworks of the socio-cultural arrangements that make up our contemporary lifeworlds?" (Slaby, 2016: 2)

The answer to this question, requiring as it does a balancing of individual experience and contextual affective arrangements, lies in Katherine Withy's (2014) concept of a disclosive posture – or as earlier generations of phenomenologists would have described it, an embodied orientation to the world that naturalises the relation between how one feels about it and what is informed about it. As with Levinas, a disclosive posture is an ongoing process of becoming, one of insistently present formations of self and not a means to maintain or protect an already existent self. Withy starts from a critique of Heidegger's distinction between cognitive and feeling theories of emotion, arguing that each loses sight of what should be the prize target of analysis – pathé understood as "ways in which we are out in the world, immersed and involved in our situation" (Withy, 2014: 23). Pathé as disclosive postures are both the ways in which we find ourselves situated in the world, hence disclosive, and ways of being situated in the world, hence postures.

This is helpful in that is pushes us past Heidegger's language of standing in a situation, with all its emphasis on experiencing and representing and then by extension through chains of ethical inference to assessment, judgement and responsibility. Posture indicates the way that finding

ourselves situated means finding ourselves already in the thick of it, immersed in the world and not detached from it. The work that affect does here is not to reduce situatedness to how we feel about a situation, but nor is it meant as a simple rejoinder to mental calculation; instead it attempts to capture the relational orientation of embodied being with regard to its environment. Slaby reminds us that this has much in common with Heidgger's notion of findingness, but whereas for Heidegger this refers to ways of aligning oneself with one's surroundings, with disclosive postures it is more about finding oneself in alignment – or indeed, misalignment – with constellations of people and things. Previous research on connection and disconnection (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007) has shown that an individual at a given point in time is never simply connected to or disconnected from the world around them, and the same applies here; we find ourselves in resonance with our surroundings in some ways, in others in dissonance. That work also highlighted the empirical risk of presuming what the experience of connection and disconnection is like, and likewise here it is sensible when thinking about designing and carrying out empirical research to be open to the possibility that alignment might feel otherwise than secure, and misalignment angst-ridden.

Disclosure emphasises that finding ourselves situated is not reducible to how we find ourselves feeling, and thrownness incites a drive not just to know ourselves but also to grasp as best we can the reality of our situation. Awareness and understanding of the world, and not just our knowledge of it and our beliefs about it, thus come into play – if only as possibilities that may or may not be realised. As Slaby puts it, "Disclosure names the entire dimension of a person's *potential* openness to the world, including the openness to what is in fact occluded, and also the openness to what is 'there' but nevertheless beyond one's grasp" (2016: 5, emphasis in original). Heidegger sees disclosure as a moral responsibility, not just something we find ourselves doing but something which we are bound to learn how to do well. Levinas's innovation is to recast the necessary incompleteness of disclosure, the failure of communication, as a precondition of moral co-existence rather than an obstacle to it. How useful it is for philosophers, political scientists and media scholars to judge individuals for failing to disclose the world 'well' is very much an open question, one I have previously answered (AUTHOR, 2017) by underlining that whatever someone feels about their duty as citizens or audiences, the condition of selfhood as unending work means that they have an active, always unresolved stake in how that self appears to others and thus to themselves that is likely to sustain an orientation towards understanding our situation at least some of the time. But in that work, as for Heidegger, failure, distraction and ambivalence are the default settings of thrownness. We get disclosure wrong most of the time, but that is not evidence of an absence of a habituated orientation towards it. As Pinchevski (2012:

356) puts it, "[i]t is precisely in moments of uncertainty and in instances of misunderstanding, lack, or even refusal that I find myself facing the Other".

Indeed, to follow this line of argument further, the impossibility of awareness and understanding actually militates against indifference and fatalism, simply because in the navigation of everyday life we have no choice but to be aware of and find ways to live with the fact that the world always exceeds our awareness. Willed ignorance is one option for existing in a chaotically demanding world, but one with consequences for subjectification which is not thereby halted as a project. We have no choice but to subjectify, after all. This is not about the consequences of someone deciding not to try to understand what is going on in Syria, but deciding instead to live as though one's thoughts and feelings have no causal correlate in the world. That is an impossibility over time, as Levinas' duration tries to elucidate, and this means that we do not have to go so far as Heidegger in insisting that full awareness and understanding are moral imperatives – awareness and understanding may be patchy and inconsistent in practice, but they are what make life liveable at the sharp end of ordinary existence, and they are how others become liveable-with (Frosh, 2011: 389). To refract this through the lens of affect, we are always aligned to an 'always more' that affects us in ways we do not and cannot fully apprehend; this is what Levinas terms the interruption of the Said by the Saying. This is what clinches the status of affect as an epistemological object fit for media and political theory. Affective experience means to find oneself situated in an ongoing situation that has stakes, in the midst of affective arrangements that are available to us yet exceed our cognitive apprehension and practical grasp. Thus, Frosh argues, "[i]f most individual strangers on television are viewed indifferently, in routine, unremarkable, non-hostile encounters, then their constant and cumulative presence within the home is a significant historical accomplishment" (2011: 393).

There is an apparent tension between Levinas' non-intentional consciousness and disclosive posture in that, while each operates at the level of the pre-reflective, the former appears seminally and enthusiastically open, the latter compromised and more geared towards coping. On the moral plane it bears emphasising, though, that non-intentional consciousness has culpability baked into it from the outset. And in less freighted phenomenological terms, it too shares the premise that there is no such consciousness that simply exists and then goes about looking for others to recognise without objectifying – it, like the disclosive posture, always finds itself existing. For both, there is no possibility of reasoning our way through to best practice from first principles, and for us that means that it is untenable to think our way from an ideal conception of solidarity to the kind of (media) practices we would like to see in the world. What we have are already-existing ways of being in the world – ways that can be compared and judged, though not held up

against abstractions free of the insistence of being. How, then, do we deal with the casual observation that so much of how people respond emotionally to what they see in the news appears ersatz, imitative and predictable? It is a question that cannot be avoided if the phenomenology of affect is to transcend the merely descriptive to get at the authenticity and inauthenticity that characterises different ways of being in the world.

For starters it helps to move beyond the expectation we sometimes have in our more judgemental moods that people should consistently own their thrownness into a mediated relationality with suffering others. We have seen here that affect precedes individuation, a repertoire of reactions that exceed us but which we internalise as how we personally feel – it is a shared resource that necessitates affective cultures. The same is true of Levinas' pre-reflective consciousness: it is hardly formless, instead always-already shaped by familiar arrangements of stimuli and the comportments associated with them. Without such arrangements to hand, responding at the local level is impossible. In conceptual terms, they follow logically from existence postulated as nothing more and nothing less than ways of being in the world. If people's affective responses seem like second-hand patellar reflexes – "The body weeps when it mimics grief", in Bourdieu's mordant phrase (1990: 73) – then so be it: perhaps a well-calibrated disclosive posture that makes knowing how to respond to tragedy and injustice the most natural thing in the world is precisely the pre-condition of the autonomous, yet situated and relationally constituted subject.

There is a rich tradition in the literature after all of conceiving of all human behaviour, including encounters with others, as essentially performative or mimetic. For Goffman (1959; 1963) our microscopic responses, certainly including the affective, in all manner of situations are about scripts mastered to indicate social competence and collectively to achieve the 'civil inattention' that makes social spaces liveable. This is not intended as derision, either – for Goffman there is no authentic self to be revealed once all the learned performance has been stripped away; we are, in effect, all surface, all script. For Foucault (1990 [1976]) as for Butler (1997) those self-same responses are more a matter of incitement than mastery, the myriad intimate ways we submit to disciplinary regimes of power. But for both, again, there is no ontologically prior self doing the submitting, only the self constituted in acts of submission. Performance models, perhaps less figuratively described as contextual response templates, are perfectly compatible with notions of authenticity, however, and evidence of a performance ritual is not in itself an indication of inauthenticity. Similarly, authenticity is not predicated on the existence of a consistent self, since it is in discontinuously coherent, grasping acts of selfhood that fail to grasp the other that we are most likely to find the kinds of authentic bearing unto the world upon which solidarity as a lived principle is possible.

None of this is to suggest that we should content ourselves with whatever scraps of affect we can lay our hands on as proof that there is still residual empathy in the contemporary world (Frosh, 2011: 387), rather than the tritely sentimental or virtue-signalling that much of it seems to represent, or that we should give up on trying to imagine and create spaces in which new kinds of relations between distant others can crystallise. Indeed, the aim is to posit that affect, the merely-felt, may present the most fertile ground for thinking differently and progressively about solidarity. Previous research (AUTHOR, 2017) focussed on professional cultures of media production, workers who in this context might be thought of as in the business of promoting solidarity, but the point still stands: whatever political principles they claimed were instantiated not in spite of the affective distractions of everyday life, but precisely through them. This is in part about the tension between a sense of self already signed up to a particular commitment and the slog of repetitive labour performed in compromised and compromising ways; it is that ambivalent mode of being in the world that allows for something like non-intentional duration with the other. The apparently mundane experience of *busyness* is not about all of the competing demands on your attention and time that stop you doing the important stuff: that sense of incessant activity is what affords a partially non-directional relation to work's other that is conceivably more substantive and more sustainable over time. Similarly, happy camaraderie at work is not a by-product of coming together with like-minded, principled others; instead, the affective pleasures of repetitive everyday socialising allow for the instantiation of a sensed, not clinched, ethical relation to the suffering others who form the stuff of the professional's work. And the rhythmic ego-rush of self-satisfaction that comes with audiences liking and sharing one's work on social media – as well as the visceral thrill of duelling with the haters – do not get in the way of one's fellow-feeling with suffering others, but rather enable it to coalesce and sustain across time in a more meaningful manner than pious platitudes. What remains to be resolved is exactly what kind of relationality this amounts to, and whether the same provisional paths from affect to solidarity might apply, however haltingly, to audiences and publics more broadly.

Felt awareness and affective solidarity

The subtlety of Levinas' position tends to be occluded by some fairly normative language: duration as a 'pure' state unsullied by the insistence of the ego, or of an idealised subject 'afraid' or 'dreading' its interpellation as someone actively attending to and trying to make sense of the other 'at point blank'. The same might be said of what it means to grasp the 'nakedness and destitution' of the other's face, but there is a point worth holding onto about what is recognised

in the other prior to any particular expression of their part – that is, their expressivity. The riper language suggests an elevation of immediacy, which elsewhere is not at all the point of duration; similarly, 'prior' in these more rhetorical passages has a distinctly temporal tinge, where elsewhere it is unequivocally meant in the strictly logical sense. Cleaving to duration not as originary and immediate but as simultaneous and variously mediated opens up the possibility of a sense of the other as a kind of background hum that sits amongst all the other sense-perceptions one has an any moment in time, the analogue of Sartre's residual sense of self that accompanies all acts of attending. Frosh likewise shines a light on audience inattention not as a political deficiency, but as something which can sustain connectivity through the cumulative experience of myriad phatic, affective or indifferent encounters with distant others.

Levinas' reservations about the bull-in-a-china-shop tendencies of the grasping, curious subject are well founded, but it does not follow that duration needs to be protected from all modes of awareness of the other. The intense glare of a subject determined to see and apprehend may well inflict violence; the ambivalent, provisional feltness of others, embedded among all the other experiences of thrownness, offers something different. Again, this is not to value feeling the other above knowing them – the two are not mutually exclusive, after all. But it is worth exploring the possibilities of the kind of attention that tends to be paid in everyday life: temporally finite, maybe task-related, always interspersed with all manner of other experiences, and with periods, perhaps even most of the time, where the other withdraws to the merely sensorily ambient. If this holds water, it would serve as a corrective to the underlying assumptions of much academic writing, as well as photojournalism, war reporting and humanitarian campaigning, that the affective drone of everyday life is exactly what needs to be ruptured. Instead of forever insisting on the presence of the other, it contends that the withdrawal of the other back into quotidian affect is just as important: *this* is what constitutes the other's excess, an excess which interrupts rather than disrupts. On the part of the subject, it fits better with a conception of thrownness not as something which begins with nothing and then gradually takes form, leaving space for some radically other kind of experience in between, but as always-already shaped by ways of experiencing, by disclosive postures.

The upshot is that feeling the *right* way about the other – the kind of way that we imagine might be most appropriate to affording subjective recognition – might just be immaterial. Feeling indifferent, irritated, sentimental, piteous or self-righteous about a suffering distant other could well be compatible with a long-term relation of solidarity with them. In fact, I would want to go further to suggest that maybe certain of these feelings are counter-intuitively conducive towards such a relation. There may be no reason to assume that this is the case, but the truth is that we do

not know. Solidarity cannot be abstracted from the affective experience of everyday life, and there is no apprehension of the other prior to our sensing and feeling it. There is, however, space for a non-destructive, non-acquisitional, non-identity-insisting consciousness of the other which intermittently senses, feels and knows and whose relation to that other cannot be derived merely logically. By way of analogy, consider the irreverent humour of the surgeon or the outrageously distasteful jokes shared between war reporters: we tend to think of these as coping mechanisms, or perhaps of behavioural displays of professional competence, but might they not also, against the grain, be what ground a relation of empathy to the others of their work? The failure to attend and feel appropriately by professionals is sometimes criticised and sometimes excused as understandable, but if we take Levinas seriously – and here he is in accord with de Beauvoir – then those failures may be the rub of it:

> Therefore, in the very condition of man there enters the possibility of not fulfilling this condition. In order to fulfil it he must assume himself as a being who "makes himself a lack of being so that there might be being." But the trick of dishonesty permits stopping at any moment whatsoever. One may hesitate to make oneself a lack of being, one may withdraw before existence, or one may falsely assert oneself as being, or assert oneself as nothingness. One may realise his freedom only as an abstract independence, or, on the contrary, reject with despair the distance which separates us from being. All errors are possible since man is a negativity, and they are motivated by the anguish he feels in the face of his freedom. Concretely, men slide incoherently from one attitude to another. (de Beauvoir, 1948: 35)

Next steps: investigating residual affective ways of being

All those responses to mediated suffering we tend to think of as falling short of subjective recognition in the short-term and solidarity across the long – messy, hard-to-categorise reactions encompassing sentimentality but also irony, snark, virtue signalling, turning away and facing away – are properly understood as affect insofar as however we might come to rationalise them to ourselves and to others, they intuitively feel simultaneously distinctive and familiar. That makes them functional in the phenomenological sense of maintaining continuity in the world we inhabit and in the sense of self. But the reverse is also true: affect is precisely that which alerts us to interruption – again, both in the world around us and in our intuitive sense of who we are. What might appear on the face of it to be the opportunistic, kneejerk appropriation of the suffering of others in the service of existential comfort – reassuring us that life, and we, continue

today pretty much as it and we did yesterday – can also be read as a reaction to the sensation of discontinuity. We intuit ways of being in the world but are always projecting, again intuitively, causality of how we feel to particular people and things. How we do so is a matter of comportment, but each mode of postural response carries an element of non-intentional consciousness and thus intimate duration. In short, while we usually think of scripted affective responses as evidence of a lack of subjective engagement, this instinctive shorthand may provide the conditions of possibility of a solidaristic relation to the other.

The question that immediately suggests itself is how can this be investigated. What is the epistemological basis for establishing how pre-reflexive ascriptions of causality are made and onto what nature of object? Any evidence we might point to is not evidence of the vulnerable, authentic self we seek to conceal through our learned performances, nor of the thing itself underlying that which we project causality onto. And it is insufficient just to demonstrate that people react affectively to suffering others and infer intimate duration from that, as to do so reveals little about the nature of the relationship and how it might metastasise over time and be held up to scrutiny. The answer returns us to ways of being, of *shared* postures in given contexts or affective arrangements. It has been established that affect is a pre-individual mode of being, something that precedes and outlasts any your or my experience of the world. Commonly-embodied, temporally durable templates of affective response could conceivably count as evidence of the viability of solidarity between others in a given environment – and if such templates still sound empirically elusive then they are no more so than Bourdieu's habitus, naturalised schema for being and doing in the world that are experienced as naturally as breathing, for which there is a longstanding tradition of empirical research.

This kind of research could possibly appear mundanely descriptive of collective modes of affective response, but as with Bourdieu's framework there is scope also for explanation, as well as judgement against principles of social good. The essential point is that solidarity is not something pure that is realised in cheapened though potentially effective form amid the rhythms of ordinary experience – it is *only* in those messy, compromised contexts that it makes sense at all. Solidarity is not inherently eloquent or elegant in the forms it takes, which depend entirely on the subjective affordances of the contexts in which it takes root or not. It consists not in spite of but precisely in the distracted, conflicted, discontinuous practices of being in environments that demand too much and deliver too little, that insist on being understood while forever exceeding our grasp. Instead of stripping away the artifice in the way that people respond to mediated others in banal circumstances to find out what really motivates their behaviour, it is instead about

mapping out shared affective repertoires and asking what kinds of relationality these make possible over time.

To the question of what this would look like in practice, then, the strongest answer starts with a negative: *not* a catalogue of whether individuals in a particular setting respond to, say, news stories about natural disasters or war with trite sentiment, an off-colour snide remark or blithe indifference. The reason why not is because intersubjective recognition is not clinched in critical encounters but the spaces in between. The positive, exploratory response is to ask: what kind of intuitive relationality, persists when a distant sufferer withdraws into the background noise of everyday life? Is withdrawal nothing more than an absenting, or do felt traces remain of a durable, excessive object which might sustain a sense of mutual culpability, and perhaps solidaristic co-existence, over time? Just as we can investigate the remainder of Scannell's (1996) partially implicated selves, everything *else* we are doing as we pay attention to this or that, we can also investigate forms of being in the world with others manifest in inattention. This goes against the grain of some more apocalyptic readings of the kind of interpellation insisted upon by media technologies – think of the Deleuzian accounts of selves "torn to pieces" by algorithms or summoned complete and unquestioning by the neoliberal logics that underpin our technology industries (Lazzarato, 2014: 27). But interpellation does not exceed or exhaust the self, especially if that self is conceived as always-already ways of being a self rather than something more primal. And attention does not entail interpellation, for the simple reason that attention is not categorical, something switched alternately on and off. It is fractured, sometimes scattergun, reluctant, absent or merely ambient. As such it is reasonable to enquire into what else selves find themselves being and doing simultaneously or interspersed with those critical encounters with others that are often reified. Likewise, we can ask what remains of the awareness of the other when you are not paying attention to something you periodically pay attention to, and then to track over time what kind of relationality this might sustain.

This article does not presume to reveal what solidarity looks like in the real world, only that it is likely to be patchy, perhaps incoherent and characterised by a distinct absence of expressions of political principle. These are the first steps towards a longer-term project to take seriously not just what solidarity feels like in everyday life, but the obverse: what kinds of feeling in everyday life afford solidarity. In line with much recent literature this work heeds the call to treat affect as a worthy object of political theoretical inquiry, but also proposes a shift in focus. Normally when considering affect we think in terms of how particular events and phenomena make people feel, and with what consequences – in particular, the debate goes on as to whether sentiment for suffering others acts as a bridge to cosmopolitan engagement or a roadblock. Here, though, the

emphasis is on looking at how the way that people feel in a less focused, more dispersed sense shapes the way they relate to objects, including people, in the world. A political principle like solidarity is not demanded, performed and recognised in discrete encounters but embedded in a disclosive posture or bearing onto the world, ways of being that we find ourselves thrown into, that precede us yet that we have a stake in claiming ownership of and responsibility for. Ways of being are generalised, and it follows that the relation we come to have with others is not something forged in isolation, even if the experience might feel like a solitary one. Mediated distant others are inevitably intermittently experienced, though in their withdrawals from sensibility as well as consciousness a relationality might endure that precisely through its lack of focus and directedness affords greater recognition over time. Not all affect matters, and the aim must be to distinguish feltness that is politically barren and feltness that nurtures particular, collective modes of relating over time. Empirically, though, there has to be a willingness to explore the affective interstices – not just moments of emotional intensity but the bits in between, where the merely-felt may present a way into understanding the conditions of possibility of existing politically.

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