

Affect Theory as Pedagogy of the ‘Non-’

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I want to explore just the tiniest hinge of a little something. It's a hinge that might open onto an adjacent universe, or maybe it hinges back to this universe as an immersive universe of a whole lot of something else altogether. That's my hope at least. I could be wrong. It wouldn't be the first time.

This essay will take up theories of affect in relation to non-philosophy. An easy enough task for me, as I am – very distinctly – a ‘non’-philosopher by way of non-training (my educational background and employment are in communication and cultural studies; I teach in the Communication and Theatre Department at Millersville University, Pennsylvania). But I am a happy interloper into matters of philosophy; I take what I want (ignore what I don't want), I leave, I linger, I bump into things and they bump into me. We are a series of dents: philosophy and I (incidence/coincidence/accidents). Perhaps that is why I have always found something instructive about the entrance to the Philosophy Department at my university. [fig. 1] As you can see, the only way to enter philosophy in my corner of the universe is to simultaneously leave it. The entrance and exit to philosophy operate through the same door. I wouldn't have it any other way. And neither will this essay.

So, I wish to begin this argument (properly now) at the end, at an exit, at the last pages of the last chapter of the last book published by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze: *What is Philosophy?* Indeed, I want to begin with that book's very last footnote. This

final footnote reads as follows: ‘Francois Laruelle proposes a comprehension of non-philosophy as the “real (of) science” beyond the object of knowledge [in his book *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*]. But we do not see why this real of science is not non-science as well.’¹ End of footnote. End of book. What I hope to do here, then, is wander in and out of a few of the spaces, timings and orientations opened up by this invocation of the ‘non-’ and, then, through this wedge of illumination arising between Laruelle and Deleuze/Guattari, try to understand a little something about how affect intersects with disciplinarity: how every discipline intersects with its own singularising ‘non-’. Thus, to cut to the chase, I will argue that to fold affect into or out of any particular disciplinary accounting means, in the first and last instance (and all points in between), to raise pedagogic questions – about the instructively intuitive styles and manners by which any discipline configures and reconfigures its ongoing relationship with its ‘non-’.

For his part, and on behalf of his own claims to be doing ‘non-philosophy’, Francois Laruelle is not especially flattered by this final mention in *What is Philosophy?* nor by an earlier and seemingly complementary footnote from the chapter ‘The Plane of Immanence’, which reads: ‘Francois Laruelle is engaged in one of the most interesting undertakings of contemporary philosophy. He invokes a One-All that he qualifies as “nonphilosophical” and, oddly, as “scientific”, on which the “philosophical decision” takes root. This One-All seems to be close to

Spinoza.² Indeed, Laruelle voices his displeasure by publishing a lengthy ‘Response to Deleuze’, first published in France in 1995.³ However, with these briefest of coordinates (around immanence, science, and decision), perhaps we can begin to parse some of the key resonances and differences in the concepts and procedures that transpire between a Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy and a Laruellean non-philosophy, and then use some of these markers to hint at controversies underfoot in the still-emerging disciplinisation(s) of affect.

First, it can be easily noted (and regularly has been) that Laruelle and Deleuze are both self-proclaimed philosophers of immanence. Yet Laruelle’s critique of Deleuze – and, yes, it is relatively uncharitable (as we’ll soon see, Laruelle also has an elliptical and rather strange 1993 essay entitled ‘Fragments of an Anti-Guattari’ written in the form of a poem) – is that Deleuze remains, in the end, too tied up with actually trying to philosophise immanence... as if immanence will simply yield to philosophical understanding, or somehow become the subject of ‘philosophical decision’, and is, thus, something to be readily and transparently shown. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari draw their ‘plane of immanence’ chapter toward its close by stating: ‘Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought, as the not-external and the not-internal inside – that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought [...].’⁴ And they finish with one further flourish by rather (in)famously proclaiming Spinoza to be the ‘Christ of philosophers’, a philosopher of infinite-becoming who draws up and thinks ‘the “best” plane of immanence’.⁵

This all drives Laruelle (more than) slightly mad. For him, there is no thinking the outside and/or the inside of the non-thinkable unthought in his version of immanence. There is no reciprocity between

thought and immanence – nothing to give or be given back. No cycle, no circle, no eternal return, no reversibility of desire and the concept... or, as he sarcastically remarks in section 1.5 of his ‘Anti-Guattari’ poem:

We have loved these transcendental tautologies
 Stretched out like a temple over our heads
 Worlding world/nullifying Nothingness/speaking
 Speech/desiring Desire
 Merry-go-round spun around by a Leibnizian
 ritournelle.⁶

Laruelle’s claim for his non-philosophy is, instead:

The Enjoyed suspended in its own immanence
 What begins and completes itself with no circle
 Begins there without departing from it
 Completes itself there without return.⁷

In Laruelle, any single entity cul-de-sacs in the densest pitch-black of its own immanence (not at all the infinite gradations of light that Deleuze finds arrayed across the immanence of Spinoza’s three ethics). Or, as Graham Harman remarks, ‘it is not just the night but, even more so, the daylight, for Laruelle, in which all cows are black’.⁸ This understanding of immanence – as a mute, hermetic, and brute facticity of ‘the Real’ – is what initially earned Laruelle admittance into the non-correlationalist/speculative realist school of thought of Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman and Ray Brassier, although Laruelle quickly exited at the very moment of his entry, apparently saying on his way out the door: ‘no, I have nothing to do with that – I just kind of got thrown into that Noah’s ark’.⁹

Laruelle defines his own One as the ‘One-in-One’, which he imagines not as the Spinozist ‘One-All’ (in its full, affectual, nonhuman potentiality) but in the absolute singularity and solitude of the ordinary or generic human.¹⁰ Laruelle’s immanence begins, that is, with the monadic-material singularity of the



Fig. 1: The entrance to the Philosophy Department at Millersville University. © Author

Existent ('the Real') as something that must be engaged always as a cipher to the infinities of a world; whereas for Deleuze and Guattari, everything starts in the middle, in the ceaseless turbulence and motion of a worlding that stretches ethologically across bodies of any and every sort (part-, organ-less and otherwise). Admittedly, it is hard for me not to hear in Laruelle's version of immanence a sort of wilful acephalism; the naïve-ish denial of one's head (even if it is an always, already nonthinking head), and the separation of any reciprocation in capacities to affect and be affected in the void of all but the matter of the living and non-living in their purest state of suspension.

Fortunately, there are other ways to address immanence philosophically and non-philosophically, and, to give Laruelle a bit of credit, he does elucidate many of the real difficulties of immanence in ways that Deleuze will sometimes gloss with a gesture or a glance. But then again, Deleuze does acknowledge that Spinoza's immanence as a third knowledge (following *affectio* or the capacity to affect and be affected as first knowledge, and common notions or relations (*affectus*) as the second) is difficult to attain, telling his students at a seminar in March of 1981:

I would be very much in favor of a mutilated Spinozism. I find at the level of common notions [Spinoza's second kind of knowledge] that it is perfect. It suits me. It's great [...] except for the very simple reason that then there is a condition of being a truncated Spinozism. To be a mutilated Spinozism one must really believe that there is no essence, that there are only relations. If I believe that there are only relations and no essence, then it is obvious that I have no need of the third type of knowledge [...] you can be a truncated Spinozism only if you think that, finally, there is no being, there are only relations.¹¹

So, yes, I suppose – right about now – the big question is: Why bother? Why do both Laruelle

and Deleuze/Guattari, despite their divergences, feel that the practice of philosophy requires any accounting of immanence? And even more for my purposes here, why does this matter at all to the study of affect in and across, other disciplines besides philosophy?

The answer is, quite simply, that immanence both the matter/mattering of philosophy and the motor/motoring of affect. For Laruelle, the matter-ing/motor-ing of immanence provides an absolute stillness, a dense point of the tightest, most contracted infinity. For Deleuze and Guattari, the matter/motor of immanence turns an infinite process, an all-at-once absolute expanse of survey without distance. Here I'd argue that one thing that Laruelle and Deleuze share, across the gulf of their respective conceptualisations of immanence, is immanence as (a) neutrality, as other than human, not anti-human but as an *a*-human-ness that nevertheless is, for us, only accessible in the oscillation of entry/exit of what-counts-as-human. And it is affect-in-immanence that reverberates across/along the cusp of this very oscillation.

That is, immanence is most difficult to grasp because it ushers forth as sheer un-mediated neutrality in its indifference to most standard categories of thought (to thought-representation, to dialectics, to signification, to intellectual cognition), indifferent to perceptual-consciousness and a repressed unconscious, indifferent to 'authentic' human feeling (whatever that is), indifferent to any correlation of subject/object or human/world. In its sheer un-boundedness for Deleuze/Guattari (or in its tightly wound density for Laruelle), immanence is the horizon of potential or dispersion, but without guarantees (beyond good and evil); its tending never belongs strictly to anyone or anything, except to the ontogenesis of belonging (understood at its most generic, perhaps better as simply 'being with'). As lived (by humans and non-humans, or by particles and waves for that matter), immanence is

endured as extraordinariness: on this, I think that Deleuze/Guattari and Laruelle would agree.

This, then, is where I'd argue that there is something especially instructive about those so-called low-level, seemingly inconsequential affects – what Felix Guattari called 'problematic affects' as compared to 'sensory affects', which are those affects that are immediately 'there' and present to the senses, 'a feeling of being', although still without necessarily ever being brought to the forefront of conscious awareness. Problematic affects arrive at an outside-experiential or epi-phenomenological threshold; or more exactly, problematic affects fall perpetually and palimpsestically below this threshold where, Guattari says, 'affect's spatio-temporal congruence dissolves and its elucidating procedures threaten to fly off in all directions'.¹² It is these problematic affects that are more fundamental; they are, Guattari emphasises, 'at the basis of sensory affects and not vice versa'.¹³ Continually slipping above or below a phenomenological threshold one encounters the emptiness or impassivity of time: a time-that-no-longer-passes or, as Guattari says, 'pathic time' is threatened.¹⁴ Hence, often in the realm of such problematic affects, a certain degree of stability, accommodation or resistance is sought through the creation of ritornellisations; i.e., patterns, refrains, recurring spatio-temporal envelopes, or rhythms.

In her *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai locates something similar in what she calls 'the stuplime'. Her notion of stuplimity is a rewiring of the Kantian sublime. In this case, transcendence does not erupt as the verticality of an infinite magnitude tearing away from the tedious ground of the ordinary, but rather, the stuplime is manifest as a supremely stupefying lateral-isation of feeling in suspension, congealing into the stickiness of affectual agglutination; relying, in part, on the typical snowballing of resonances, swerves, and impingements. For Ngai, the stuplime would be but one modality among the

suspended churnings of problematic affects; these are affects that she argues *might* seem indeterminate but are 'actually highly determined' (or better, highly *determinable*). Ngai says:

[W]hat each moment of conspicuous inactivity produces is the inherently ambiguous affect of affective disorientation in general – what we think of as a state of feeling vaguely 'unsettled' or 'confused,' or, more precisely, a meta-feeling in which one feels confused about what one is feeling. This is 'confusion' in the affective sense of bewilderment, rather than the epistemological sense of indeterminacy. Despite its marginality to the philosophical canon of emotions, isn't this feeling of confusion about *what* one is feeling an affective state in its own right? And [isn't it] in fact a rather familiar feeling that often heralds the basic affect of 'interest' underwriting all acts of intellectual inquiry?¹⁵

Later, Ngai adds that these relatively inconspicuous, low-level affects – as manifest in the stuplime's combination of astonishment and boredom – 'might be said to produce a secondary feeling that seems strangely neutral, unqualified, open [...] [T]his final outcome of stuplimity – the echo or afterimage produced by it, as it were – makes possible a kind of resistance'.¹⁶ But perhaps it is exactly this 'kind of resistance' (secondary *in feeling*, though actually first as Guattari would maintain) – over-saturated, exhausted, dispersed, slack, unqualified, open – as a 'strangely neutral' sphere that brings us somewhat nearer to an understanding of affect as plane of immanence.

It is as 'strangely neutral' that, from a slightly different angle, Maurice Blanchot once referred to the 'eternullity' of the everyday.¹⁷ Or in the vibrant voicing of Clarice Lispector, from her *The Passion according to G.H.*, when she registers the very moment of her own stupliminous epiphany:

I am trying to tell you how I came to the neutrality and inexpressivity of myself. I don't know if I am understanding what I say, I feel – and I very much fear feeling, for feeling is merely one of the styles of being. Still, I shall go through the sultry torpor that swells with nothingness, and I shall have to understand neutrality through feeling. Neutrality, I am speaking of the vital element linking things.¹⁸

Perhaps it now seems fair to ask: but is 'the neutral' truly equivalent to immanence? Well, strictly, no. The neutral is, more properly, the in-itself intensity of capacity, the eternal latency of capacity: whether this capacity is One-All ('a plane' for Deleuze) or One-in-One ('generic humanity' for Laruelle). Either way, immanence is, as Guattari says of affect, 'not [some] massively elementary energy but the deterritorialized matter of enunciation' composed of the accretions of bare (often minimal) things, their relations and non-relations.¹⁹ As Clarice Lispector writes at one point: 'The will to accretion is great [...] because bare things are so wearing.'²⁰

Because 'the neutral' is drawn from the lived/living gradients of an empirical field – even if the neutral actually comes to carry these gradients of intensity further away, never to return as personological or somehow representational (that is, the neutral's minimal participation in transcendence does not fold itself over to reduplicate the empirical) – its immanence remains immanence-to-the-transcendent (a power of extraction, of affectedness, of corporeal sensation/sensitivity or vulnerability), a relative immanence but not quite immanent to immanence itself (not quite Laruelle's *radical* or Deleuze's *absolute* immanence).

But this is a moment when I think 'the neutral' might give us insight into the role of disciplinarity in regard to affect, as well as a pedagogy of the 'non-'. The image that I cannot shake (sometimes arriving in a moment of theoretical, if not also pedagogical danger) is Walter Benjamin's

depiction of the translator's task, where translation is 'standing not in the center of the language forest, but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one'.²¹ Benjamin has a variety of carefully chosen critical targets in this essay and in its brief echoing scene, just three of which are of immediate consequence here. One is Benjamin's quick, but crucial slide, *from* the task of translation *to* the capacity for translatability immanent in any act of translation. Second is his critique of any overly romanticised vitalism that links life only to 'organic corporeality', or perhaps extends life only as far as what he says is the 'feeble scepter of the soul [...] or the even less conclusive factors of animality, such as sensation'.²² Finally, given Benjamin's forest-y thought-image, there is the whole matter of translation's production of the echo. Benjamin argues that life must be apprehended as a continua of translations or transformations. He acknowledges that there are whole sets of 'beyonds': the beyond of language, of organic corporeality, the beyonds of sensation and soul... but each beyond is yet-too-narrow. Benjamin understood that there was a wider plane that might encompass them all while also leaving them intact and not dissolving them into non-affectual nodes. Note, too, that Benjamin depicts this process through an image that would seem to lend itself to more immediate alignment with the spatial exigencies of non-human activity: it is *translation* itself that stands at the edge of the wooded ridge, not an actual (human) translator.

Trading the wooded ridge for an open field (where no echo can return), Roland Barthes says the neutral (although here he uses 'neuter') 'opens up an infinite, shimmering field of nuances, of myths, that could allow the Neuter, fading within language, to be alive elsewhere. Which way? I would say, using a vague word: the way of the affect: discourse comes to the [Neutral] by means of the affect'.²³

Opens up? Fading within? Comes to? Where (in what space, in what manner of space) do these lines ultimately resolve themselves? Not, apparently, by the coordinates of Barthes' own equation, within the neutral, but in an 'alive elsewhere'. However, what is perhaps *just as* intriguing in Barthes' formulation here is its last bit: 'discourse comes to [the Neutral] by means of the affect'. Might such a characterisation in the end help us to understand something of what happens when disciplines – as 'systems of control in the production of discourse'²⁴ – come sometimes, each in their own way, to face up to the impassive face of the Neutral (by way of affect), and how their lines of discourse – at least momentarily untied or slackened – ultimately come to resolve in an 'alive elsewhere', in immanence?

'Disciplines', Michel Foucault noted in his lecture entitled 'The Discourse of Language', 'constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules.'²⁵ And, in many ways, affect is no doubt *not* wholly unique in its inconspicuously conspicuous unsettling of different disciplinary practices and identities, since disciplines are, after all, not infrequently struck by a variety of vibrancies: 'turns', returns, and 'fermentations', timely interruptions, nervous exhaustions, tactical interventions, reckless exhilarations. And yet ... and yet, there does seem to be something singularly unsettling, something distinctly *otherwise* about the supple and immanent architectural-effectuations of affect, so that when a discipline comes, by way of affect, to the Neutral (as an impassive delegation born of immanence's own immanence), it produces – simultaneously at the level of disciplinary expression and at the level of disciplinary content – the curious (or not-so-curious?) effect of a certain, yes, hyperconsciousness toward disciplinary boundaries, modes of address, thresholds, organising pre-suppositions, research methods, writing practices and the like, as it also ushers in a differentially pathologised surface-surround of a

felt-relationality toward other (what-had-previously-seemed non-adjacent) disciplines.

And yet... disciplines need to retain their 'non-s'. It is what keeps disciplines from resolving their vibrancies and loose threads and dangling lines of discourse in the most unproductive of ways: by turning into each other. 'Resolve' has many meanings, one of which is 'to become void', but far better to head in the direction of other definitions of 'resolve', such as 'to become separated into component parts' or 'to become convinced'. Barthes cautioned, back in 1978, that the Neutral brings with it 'the temptation of the ultimate or of the "ur" paradigm'.²⁶ More recently, Isabelle Stengers has fretted similarly that, with the cosmopolitical, she has come too close to 'transforming a type of practice of which we are particularly proud into a universal neutral key, valid for all'.²⁷ The neutral (and particularly *this immanent/affective neutral* as 'ur paradigm', valid for the whole of the study of affect) will not do. Disciplines – architecture, philosophy, communication studies, etc. – need their 'non-s' and their 'alive elsewheres'.

At the end of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari speak about how the plane of immanence intersects with disciplinarity, of the interferences that jump from plane to plane between disciplines, of the interferences that lodge some fragment of one discipline in the plane of another, and, finally, of the interferences that slip any disciplinary-localisation to address a discipline from its 'non-' place. 'Even science has a relation with non-science that echoes its effects', they wrote, implicitly directing these words toward Francois Laruelle.²⁸ Pedagogy should set to work – continue Deleuze and Guattari in their work's final paragraph – in a discipline's relationship to its 'non-'. However, they stress that this 'non-' was not present at (nor responsible for) the birth of the discipline, nor will it serve as its termination point; instead, the 'non-' accompanies the discipline at every moment of its becoming or

its development.²⁹ Thus, I tend to hear the call of Laruelle's 'non-' more as a neutral provocateur. But in the collective space of every discipline's own translational echoes, in their resolve not to dissolve, and through the pathology of these singular bodies of knowledge, by way of affect, lies each discipline's 'alive elsewhere'. An 'alive elsewhere' – where affect serves at once: its entrance and exit.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 234.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
3. Francois Laruelle, 'Response to Deleuze' (trans. by Taylor Adkins and Sid Littlefield), *Pli*, 20 (2009), pp. 138-64.
4. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 59-60.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
6. Francois Laruelle, 'Fragments of an Anti-Guattari', trans. by C. Wolfe, *Long News in the Short Century*, 4 (1993), pp. 158-64, section 1.5.
7. Laruelle, 'Fragments of an Anti-Guattari', section 2.3.
8. Graham Harman, review of *Francois Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (August 08, 2011) <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/25437-philosophies-of-difference-a-critical-introduction-to-non-philosophy/>> [accessed 08 May 2012]
9. Drew Burke, 'Autumn of Non-Standard Evenings', *Workshop I: What is a Non-Workshop?* Part IV of V, 18 October 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zylukk5tZ7g>> [accessed 01 May 2013]
10. Marjorie Gracieuse, 'Laruelle Facing Deleuze: Immanence, Resistance and Desire', *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. by John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 42-59.
11. Deleuze's Seminar on Spinoza (17 March 1981) translated by and cited in Terence Blake, 'What Is It Like To Be A Brain? On R.S. Bakker's Blind-Brain Theory', *Agent Swarm*, 10 May 2013 <<http://terenceblake.wordpress.com/2013/05/10/what-is-it-like-to-be-a-brain-on-r-s-bakkers-blind-brain-theory-2/>> [accessed 11 May 2013]
12. Felix Guattari, 'Ritornellos and Existential Affects' in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. by Gary Genosko. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 161.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
15. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 14.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
17. Maurice Blanchot, 'Everyday Speech', in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. by Sean Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 241.
18. Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. by Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 92.
19. Guattari, 'Ritornellos', p. 168.
20. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, p. 133.
21. Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p.76.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
23. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, trans. by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 190.
24. Michel Foucault, 'The Discourse on Language', in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by Rupert Swyer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), p. 224.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
26. Barthes, *The Neutral*, p. 51.
27. Isabelle Stengers, 'The Cosmopolitical Proposal', in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 2005), p. 995.
28. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 218.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Biography

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