

Engaging Affects, Thinking Feelings:

*Social, Political and Artistic
Practices*

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Edited by

Susan Driver, Kara Stone
and Melanie Patenaude

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FOREWORD

It is exciting to see how a proliferation of scholarly interest in affect is transforming disciplinary fields, destabilizing discursive fixations, and reinvigorating interest in materiality and embodiment. Affect theories are increasingly affirmed as elusive yet powerful instigators of change and ingenuity across academic syllabi, conference panels, journal articles, book chapters, and monographs. At the same time that these affective turns gesture in multiple directions toward ephemeral, dynamic, and relational dimensions of life that are never quite captured within the conceptual imperatives of scholarly knowledge, more and more attempts are being made to legitimate affect as a useful element of critical thinking, to render it meaningful within social, political, and ethical terms. Making sense of affect as a basis for theoretical elaboration enables new forms of understanding attentive to subtle, sensuous, and evanescent moments of experience within broader and intricately configured systems of power. In this way, critical thinking becomes an agile endeavor, shifting between temporal and spatial levels of analysis, concerned with provisional intimate small relations without losing sight of the ongoing and contingent historical influences of institutional formations. At its best, studying affect has enlivened critical thinking, becoming increasingly sensitized to the everyday, mundane, and often invisible contours of aggression and violence, while becoming receptive to minute and vulnerable relations that encompass an indefinite affective spectrum of anger, grief and suffering, desire, aversion, pleasure, joy, and exhilaration. Affect theory defies neat lists and definitions to be sure, but it also compels a degree of care and delicacy with regard to subjects so readily disregarded as irrational, trivial, or banal. The emotional contours of our ordinary lives are subtly illuminated as we learn to notice that even the little things matter in how we care for others, struggle with illness, exert our labour, communicate with friends, feed and discipline our bodies, educate our minds, fall in love, and sometimes just barely get by, day by day. Work on ordinary affects has given rise to a remarkable expansion of critical attention that has the potential to alter our ethical and political insights and practices on so many levels.

The challenge of connecting the small yet persistent details of everyday life to expansive social and political visions propels affect theory in ways

that defy predictability or prescription. Critical dispositions encompass negativity that refuses naïve forms of optimism, providing lucid reflections on the ugly feelings, social conflicts, and difficult intimacies that shape our world. At the same time, this antisocial tendency does not tell the whole story nor does it determine the way forward. More hopeful visions of change are emerging, which draw upon the fractured social and corporeal struggles of marginalized subjects, help to guide us toward the future, and even fuel utopian longings. Such critical imaginings hone our attention to the fine details of physical and emotional experience without losing sight of socio-political generalities, and it is the interconnections of the specific and the general that matter as a basis for developing projects of social justice and elaborating visions of collective well-being.

In another vein, affect is increasingly a site for understanding creative processes and artistic work, for unfolding aesthetic relations as richly embodied, technologically mediated, and socially imbricated. Specific and local art projects construct, display, involve, and enact the vibrancy and heterogeneity of affective life-worlds, giving form and substance to textures, rhythms, and emotions on the edge of language and cognition. Open-ended, interactive, and intensely felt art and criticism that recognize and explore affective ties have many effects: they make us cry, lure us to laugh, provoke us to think passionately, move us to silently reflect, or even drive us to protest. Through such artistic encounters, we begin to take account of affective relations with subtlety, intricacy, awe, responsibility, and respect. The encounters become our teachers at moments when words are not enough and we crave imaginative and emotionally charged attachments. And it is the strength and urgency of our attachments that reveal and remind us of our need to grapple with difficult ideas, without forgoing meaningful embodied connections that make difficult knowledge livable. The forceful affective charge of creative works and practices urges us toward playfulness in the unfolding of utterly serious truths, nurturing receptivity and fluid orientations too often devalued or commodified in commercial productive logics that lose touch of play as an end in itself, as a living process. There is so much to learn from affectively attuned and imaginatively playful art and media practices alongside the responses, shifting perspectives, and commentaries they elicit.

And while links between critical thinking and artistic making have so pervasively been severed by institutional arrangements and discursive formulations, the dynamic intellectual turns toward affect as a tool for thinking and creating across academic and aesthetic fields have helped to break down these divisions and have encouraged more permeable and integrated experimental methods and ideas. Perhaps the affective dimensions

of art and critical interpretation are not so different after all, and maybe it is the messy and awkward ways affect theories and creative practices become enmeshed across disciplines, times, places, and media that make them so wonderfully engaging. It is precisely this affective quality of wonder that propels my questioning. Does meaningful affective engagement compel us to embrace criticality and creativity simultaneously? What kinds of writing and other modes of communication will enable us to think through affect with critical and creative intelligence? How might we embrace our ambivalence as we risk the cutting force of our critical judgments while also valuing moments of uncertainty, unrepresentability, and creative flow? Will such critical tensions and affectively nuanced articulations compel us to read and respond in new ways?

This collection of essays encourages such questioning by embracing wide-ranging subjects, methods, styles of writing, and visual texts. These essays criss-cross cultures, times, continents, political movements, technologies, social relations, and bodies. Including analysis of everyday struggles, ordinary objects, spontaneous creative acts, as well as sublimely crafted projects, the book encompasses heterogeneous and at times disjunctive realms of experience, approach, and expression. The essays defy expectations of coherence and promises of similarity, they push us to think otherwise, to wander through research ideas and artistic experimentation that seem worlds apart; and yet in sometimes uncanny ways, the essays resonate together, building upon their mutual differences and eliciting connections that may not be obvious at first glance. In turn, these contributions affirm curiosity and engagement that is not bound by our preconceptions of what we seek to know ahead of time. It is possible to get lost in this book, in the best sense of leaving us with many questions and gesturing forwards and backwards, rather than securing a clear narrative trajectory. Characterized by the possibility to surprise and disarm us of our common sense, the essays lead us meaningfully astray. Affect is being mobilized and theorized within this book in various directions, compelling desires and a sense of urgency to think beyond disciplinary closures and discursive boundaries, to imagine the world in nonbinary ways, to risk recognizing unspeakable haunting knowledges, to attend to complex feelings traced in artistic works, to blur the stubborn lines between our thinking and feeling selves.

I am moved and inspired by the smart and generous ways these scholars and artists risk vulnerability and dialogical openness as they articulate insights across the rich fields of their explorations. An interesting gathering of interpretations emerges as authors address their subjects with tentative and careful considerations that interweave academic with

personal and artistic insights. Through the immediacy of intellectual exchanges that composed the conference event *Thinking|Feeling*, this collection conveys a complex mix of voices eager to share ideas and listen to others in return. Once delivered as talks or presented as installations, there remains a palpable sense of a live event connecting and affectively reverberating across and between these texts. This book reveals a passionate burgeoning of critical and creative work that is not afraid to attend explicitly yet ambivalently to the ways authors feel about their chosen subjects. The public stakes of affect come to life at the level of self-reflexive textual practices that emerge through diverse approaches, styles of argumentation, and modes of address. Young scholars are writing themselves into their work without apology, at the same time as destabilizing and complicating norms of individuality and personal identity at the heart of neoliberal ideologies. This is not an easy task, and the essays are in no way exemplary nor do they strive for academic norms of perfection; that is not the point. It is their remarkable persistence in following faint traces and intricate lines of affect, even when there are no guarantees and the limitations and risk of failures are so strong, that makes these essays so fascinating and worthwhile. They call for thoughtful affective engagement, which I consider to be a welcome invitation to be attentive, creative, and critical readers in a spirit of curious and humble optimism.

Susan Driver

INTRODUCTION

MEL PATENAUDE AND KARA STONE

In our first year as graduate students, we were introduced to the works of Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, Ann Cvetkovich, Jasbir Puar, José Esteban Muñoz, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Kathleen Stewart. These theorists resonated in the ways they demonstrated how it was possible to conceptualize and interrogate the encounters, intensities, and (un)belongings that have been traditionally ignored or dismissed by the academy. We each took to affect theory in our own research, guided by our supervisor Dr. Susan Driver, and quickly saw the possibilities it offered as a theme for a larger conference. Affect presented itself as a useful entry-point for a conference focused on interdisciplinary work with an emphasis on critical race, queer, and feminist thought. This mode of understanding was new to us—and fairly new in terms of academic theories. We grew attached to the ways of thinking about feelings, sensations, and intensities that inform our thoughts, movements, and politics.

Beyond the novelty of this way of thinking, what might have drawn us to it are the things about it that have been criticized and devalued in academia. Its softness eschewing the sterilized, cold, “rational,” and reason-driven philosophies we’ve come to expect. Affect scholarship has been criticized for this very thing—being too touchy-feely, too wishy-washy, for depoliticizing hard issues of social and economic justice so we can talk about our feelings. Of course, we think that our feelings are political, that feelings inform and direct socio-economic injustice, political ideologies, and behaviours. As Jane Bennett says, “There will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects.”¹ It was in this optimistic, determined frame of mind that we decided to organize a conference on our decidedly world-changing topic.

Structuring a conference around an epistemological framework that is at once sticky, slippery, ambiguous, and imprecise posed some conceptual challenges: How do we define affect? What would “count” as affective?

¹ Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter*, 12.

We titled the conference Thinking|Feeling, as an homage to Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling*, an exploration into affect, queer politics, and spirituality. Her title is a play on touchy-feely, a common negative descriptor of conversations on feelings, gender, and sexuality.

The conference took place in March 2014, in Toronto, with Jasbir K. Puar as the keynote speaker. Puar's talk, "Conviviality: New Methods towards No Future," took up the question of disability, debility, and capacity and interrogated disability as a relationally entrenched and affective tendency within neoliberal capitalism. In line with the conference theme, Puar's talk offered an engagement with affective politics and demonstrated some of the ways in which affects are mobilized or deployed politically both within and outside the academic institution.

Somewhat hilariously, the only space that we had access to and that was large enough to host the conference was Ryerson University's sports centre in Toronto, once a part of Maple Leaf Gardens. The contrast between the physical environment and "feel" of the conference was stark. On their way to panels on homonationalism and queer media representations, graduate students, faculty, and artists had to walk past basketball courts, men lifting weights, and a hockey arena to get to our conference rooms that smelled distinctly like locker rooms. It was an interdisciplinary conference with papers on the broad topic of "feelings" but included in this was an art exhibition, experimental workshops, and public performances. Rekha Ramachandran, Julia Gingrich, Dan Browne, and Niomi Cherney headed the art exhibitions yet we all worked closely together with the intention of art research praxis not being separated from traditional academic scholarship. Art creation and research is a large part of the affect theory pool. We view art as an incredible way to communicate the "incommunicable," a way to contemplate how feelings move between bodies and objects, a way of expressing affect without necessarily translating through words, "rational" linear thought, and language. Along with an art gallery down the street from our sports centre holding physical pieces, we had a film, video, and performance screening with art made by our visiting artist-scholars. Paula John and Thea Fitz-James held a knitting circle in the lobby of the conference where attendees could sit and knit a square to add to a larger quilt. Cvetkovich and Sedgwick have both written of the affective power in crafting;² the rhythm, sensuousness, and the slowness create an embodied experience. Performance artist Adriana Disman put on her piece *A Still Life*; she set up

² See Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*, and Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

fifteen-minute appointments for people to meet around the conference and spend their time in silence, hugging. These appointments created an intimate vibe whenever they took place as well as small, personal meditations for those who participated. All the artists with works at Thinking|Feeling were invited to give artist talks alongside the traditional paper panels. Mirroring that format, this book includes artist statements and personal essays, serving as documentation of the work they have done as well as allowing reflection on their pieces.

Affect theory has a fairly short history but it is dense and sometimes contradictory. Early scholars Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari proposed definitions of affect as the somatic precognitive recognition of emotion, as “a force, intensity, or the capacity to move and be moved.”³ Contemporary affect theorist Brian Massumi continues this Deleuzian tradition, adding that affect is an intensity, a moment of gathering force, which may or may never be acted upon. It is a “realm of possibilities, one of which can be summoned into being.”⁴ In this understanding, affect never surfaces in a socio-culturally legible form. The force of affect becomes communicable after being translated into emotions that are, as Massumi remarks, “back-formed.”⁵ It is important to note in this conceptualization that, as Eugénie Shinkle writes, “affect should not be understood as a kind of ‘primitive’ response that acts in concert with more sophisticated levels of awareness.”⁶ Other theorists use the epistemological lens of affect theory but discuss emotions in particular. In “Affective Economies,” Sara Ahmed suggests that “rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective.”⁷ Emotions, here not divided from affect, “circulate between bodies and signs. Such an argument clearly challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals, or even that they come from within and then move outward toward others.”⁸ This affective realm is not “within” people’s minds or in the space in between bodies, but moves and creates “the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds.”⁹

Ahmed and Massumi are only two of the many theorists working

³ In Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 4.

⁴ Laura Marks, “Thinking Multi-Sensory Culture,” 134.

⁵ Eugénie Shinkle, “Feel It, Don’t Think,” 2.

⁶ Shinkle, “Feel It, Don’t Think,” 3.

⁷ Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 119.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹ *Ibid.*

through—and creating—meanings and implications of affect that are not necessarily opposing or even contradictory. Often searching for a concrete definition in fact creates one, and in that solidification, other ways of understanding are excluded. We found Cvetkovich’s explanation of the term *feeling* to be the most encompassing, allowing for ideas and complexities. She writes the following:

I tend to use affect in a generic sense, rather than the more specific Deleuzian sense, as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason)—but with a wary recognition that this is like trying to talk about sex before sexuality. I also like to use feeling as a generic term that does some of the same work: naming the undifferentiated “stuff” of feeling; spanning the distinction between emotion and affect central to some theories; acknowledging the somatic or sensory nature of feelings as experiences that aren’t just cognitive concepts or constructions. I favour feeling in part because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences.¹⁰

Along with purposeful ambivalence, Cvetkovich’s discussion offers a reminder of the nondualistic connection between physical sensation and psychic emotions, body and mind, in affective conceptualizations.

The essays included in this book approach affects, emotions, feelings and methodologies differently. They each wrestle with different definitions and understandings. It is in this multiplicity that we hope a holistic comprehension may develop.

Sara Shamdani’s “To Reach Out and Touch: An Affective Analysis of the ‘Israel Hearts Iran’ Campaign” is an analysis of Israeli Ronny Edry’s act of sharing a picture of himself and his daughter with the caption, “Iranians, We will never bomb your country, we [heart symbol] you.” This image was received with intense feelings, specifically of hope and its “usefulness,” and pessimism and utopia. Shamdani proposes we consider how art can create affective spaces, and what are the possibilities of an emergent political within those spaces.

W. Dustin Parrott’s “Charged Subjects: Controversy, ‘Implicit Censorship and Discursive Agency’ in the Academic Politics of the Humanities Dissertation” queers the dissertation and explores the many risks, unbelongings and silencings encountered by the queer doctoral student. The essay troubles notions of “rational” thought and questions the

¹⁰ Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 4.

myth of the “dispassionate intellect.” Parrott asks, “what happens when dangerous thinking comes up against the feelings of gatekeepers of credentialing?”

Alison Naturale’s recollection of creating the video installation *Safe Drive* is a beautiful and sad example of the power of translating overwhelming feelings into art. She calls this “Creation as a Method for Coping,”¹¹ a process through which focusing on creating art busies a lonely drive, as well as creating a funnel for emotions and a physical output that may help artists understand them. Naturale created a video installation inside a car parked outside our art gallery. Images and sounds of road trips and travel are projected onto the windshield as the viewer is taken on the journey to visit her sick father.

John Nyman’s “The Nonconceptual Structure of Repetition: Affect through Kierkegaard and Freud” asks, “can we include discourse and the structure of thought in our theorizations of affect without succumbing to the pitfalls of a too-rigorous, too-systematic conceptualization?” Nyman examines the relationships between various discursive and material spheres to come to an understanding of affect.

Taijen Ng-Chan’s “Detouring the Map” charts ideas of space, place, mapping, and touring, with a focus on multiplicities and interrelationships rather than binaries. Her project, a multimedia website, explores emotional resonances, the minute and mundane everyday of travel through Montreal, relating personal experiences with cartography.

Rebecca Salazar’s “‘And Tame Things/Have No Immensity’: Embodying Language in the Poetics of Mina Loy” interrogates the ways in which Loy’s writing brings the body into the realm of language. In suggesting that Loy’s use of language enacts, or “makes” feeling, rather than represents it, Salazar troubles the divide between language and embodiment.

Steph Schem Rogerson’s “Queer Feeling and Early Photography” examines the photography of Alice Austen to illuminate the ways in which early photography impacted queer representation. Rogerson’s writing “reveal[s] the experience of photography as an important signifier to our affective lives and the production of queer visual history.” Undertaking an affective and phenomenological reading of Austen’s photography, the essay interrogates the ways in which queerness can reinscribe everyday objects with new meanings.

“*The Choice: Fragmented Experience of a Disappearance*” is Camille Jemelen’s reflection on her video installation. The piece consists of a

digital database film made using the Korsakow system on a computer surrounded by physical photographs, notes, and a magnifying glass. *The Choice* brings forth the feeling of searching for something that has disappeared—in this case, a person she was in a relationship with. It's a personal and intimate piece, searching inward as much as around Montréal.

Kelsey Speakman's "Communicating with Cultured Meats: A Commentary on Art, Agency, and Affect In Vitro" examines the ways in which the possibility of "victimless meat" blurs "the lines between living and nonliving creatures." In doing so, Speakman takes up questions of materiality and consumption within a system of food production that employs "technologies of distancing" to maintain an affective divide between consumers and the animals they eat.

Ruben Yepes's "*Sublime Affects: Colombian Contemporary Art and Horrors of War*" suggests that the works of Colombian artists Salcedo, Morelos, and Arjona constitute aesthetic events that mediate Colombia's history of war and affective experiences of horror. Yepes's essay reflects on the relationship among political violence, trauma, and the aesthetics of the sublime.

Anabel Khoo's essay "The Emergent Political: Movement Building with Two-Spirit, Queer, and Trans People of Colour Media" documents a 2-QTPOC art collective. *Mangos with Chili* is self-described as "the floating cabaret of queer, trans and two spirit people of colour bliss, dreams, sweat, sweets & nightmares." Khoo explores the process of art as an embodied creation and as a spiritual experience that enacts a form of healing from collective trauma. The essay details ideas of haunting, magic, and the metaphysical relationship between political imaginings and realities.

Individually, the essays in this collection interrogate a diverse range of topics including art and artistic practice, photography, literature, food production, science, philosophy, the academy, space and place, and politics. As a whole, they speak to the possibilities that affect theory offers for critical thought and engagement. Affect opens up space to examine the ways in which emotions, feelings, sensations, forces, and intensities inform, shape, and inflect our encounters, movements, thoughts, imaginings, and political orientations. In taking an account of feeling, we are able to situate the ephemeral and the personal within larger political structures. Rather than relegating these experiences to the "private" sphere, affect theory demonstrates the ways in which emotions are "public" affects of neoliberal, capitalist life. The essays in this collection demonstrate the ways the politics of feelings are embedded in our everyday lives and

collective healing, and offer frameworks to understand the traumas of quotidian life, in addition to the “exceptional” violence of war and conflict. The essays examine the ways affects such as hope, optimism, horror, and despair can be productive and shape our encounters with others and the Other. Collectively, the essays in this book examine the relationships among feelings, emotional states, temporality, and cultural production in order to understand how affective life permeates public life and cultures.

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CHAPTER ONE

TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH: AN AFFECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE “ISRAEL HEARTS IRAN” CAMPAIGN

SARA SHAMDANI

In March 2012 Ronny Edry, an Israeli graphic designer, did something unprecedented.¹ After overhearing a conversation in a grocery store about the possible number of missiles with which Israel could potentially attack Iran, Edry took a digital photo of himself holding his daughter. He captioned the photo “Iranians, we will never bomb your country, we [heart symbol] you,” and he posted the image on his Facebook account.² This Facebook post received numerous likes and comments, one of which was from a woman in Iran who had been brought to tears by the image. She explained the intensity of her response, as follows:

As a Persian, I get your message. I applaud your art. It’s so peaceful... Most people here feel no hatred toward Israel and of course Israelis. Maybe, there are some criticism [*sic*] about [the] Palestinian issue, but believe me, no hatred. I hope that no Iranian missile cause [*sic*] any harm to Israelis and further, no Israeli armament take [*sic*] any Iranian lives.³

In his TEDx Talk presentation, Edry described the reciprocal affective responses that both he and his wife, who also wept, had upon reading this woman’s comment.⁴ He explained to his audience that his intention in creating this image was only to *reach out*. This reaching out towards the

¹ Ronny Edry, “Israel and Iran.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

human in the Other was done through the creation of a counter-narrative of love in a political climate that, for over a decade, has been filled with the fear of war, and subsequently with hatred. The simplicity yet the significant affective capacities of this image resulted in a series of unexpected and powerful events, leading to the formation of peace campaigns such as “Israel-Iran: a love story,” “NOT ready to die in your war,” and “War, What War?”⁵ These campaigns, precipitated by art, have attempted to address the state’s fabrication of future threat and co-optation and manipulation of fear.

The narrative of fear about this fabricated threat⁶ of a nuclear war between Iran and Israel has been a topic of many international political debates. Starting in 2006, these debates have resulted in the imposition of sanctions, both mandated and unmandated by the United Nations.⁷ In April 2015, Iran and the five permanent members of the UN’s Security Council,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The narrative of the threat of Iran’s uranium enrichment program and the possibility of the nation acquiring nuclear weapons has been the topic of a global political discourse over the past decade. Operating on mistranslations of statements coming from Iran and the erasure of facts, the United States and Israel have strategically formulated a global state of fear regarding Iran’s military power, its capability, and its futurity as a threat. The very popular yet mistranslated statement of the former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been used as a spearhead for justifying the sanctions to stop Iran’s uranium enrichment program. During a 2005 conference, Ahmadinejad slightly misquoted Khomeini’s statement about the state of Israel. Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, had stated that the “Zionist apartheid regime of Israel is like a cancerous tumor that should be vanished from the arena of time” (Kessler). Ahmadinejad misquoted this statement by saying that the state should be vanished off the “page of time,” rather than “the arena of time” (Kessler). The quote was then grossly mistranslated, the old and the original mistranslations of Khomeini’s statement were dug up, leading to a narrative that Iran was advocating for Israel and its people to be annihilated. Both Ahmadinejad and Khamenei (the clerical leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran) have subsequently stated that Iran has no plans to attack Israel. Although they both have called for dissolving the Israeli state and the return of the Palestinians to their land, neither has called for military action against Israel (Kessler). Moreover, Israeli officials and security experts have admitted that Iran has never stated that “Israel will be wiped out” (Nabili) and challenge the possibility of a real threat of nuclear weapons from Iran, since the Islamic Republic has no meaningful capacity to project conventional military power beyond its borders (Leverett et al.).

⁷ Hillary Leverett et al., “U.S. Policies toward Israel and Iran,” 18-19.

the “P5+1,”⁸ reached a new nuclear agreement. This new deal curbed many aspects of the country’s uranium enrichment program in exchange for relief from a number of economic sanctions. However, the Israeli government has since continued to propagate fear over Iran’s capability to procure atomic weapons,⁹ thus reversing its attempts to stop this narrative of fear regarding the futurity of an Iranian threat. Some theorists have argued that on one level, this obsession with Iran’s nuclear capacity, particularly employed by Netanyahu’s right-wing government, is a calculated action by Israel to distract the world.¹⁰ The perceived Iranian threat is merely another distraction from the peace talks with Palestinian, Lebanese, or Syrian leaders; the negotiations and possibilities of a two-state existence; and any discourse about the conditions of the occupied territories.¹¹ In this sense, Iran becomes a locus of spectacle. Iran as a future threat not only serves as a focal point that redirects attention from the pressing issues of human rights violations, but it also serves to legitimize the narrative of fear that “another Holocaust” is possibly imminent. This fear justifies the continued policies of violence and apartheid, which are presented as necessary strategies of self-preservation.

Although it is crucial to analyze the political and by extension the socio-economic implications of creating a global state of fear about an ever-looming future threat, it is equally important to examine the affective potential of artwork in this political climate. The first time I watched Edry’s “TEDx Talk,” I too felt the powerful sensations that affected my body; similar to others who were overcome with tears, I teared up as well. I did not know what was in this simple picture and in Edry’s words that had elicited such a response. Was it relief at discovering similarities, or love for finding the human in the Other, or fear that was allowed to express itself, or anger at the politics of the region that have claimed many innocent lives? Was it the realization of our equal sympathies and compassions that touched us and intensified our emotions? Whatever the affective response was, something emerged that touched me and the other two women. This paper sets out to explore such questions from a point of impact and curiosity.

⁸ The “P5+1” comprises China, Russia, France, England, and the United States, plus Germany.

⁹ “Everything You Want to Know.”

¹⁰ Leverett et al., “U.S. Policies,” 7, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Through questioning the performative work of art, focusing particularly on Edry's work, I examine how affect as a form of methodology can open up possibilities for experimentation and reorientation of our perception. In other words, what is the significance of engaging with affect and affective potentials of art—especially that which has reached across many geopolitical borders—without projecting and measuring “success” or “failure”? Through a Deleuzian analysis, I examine the sensations and affects of Edry's art, then move to explore the critiques levelled against his campaigns, and finally address the significance of affective potentials in reparation and formation of new relationalities.

Prior to this analysis, it is important to offer a brief understanding of the term “affect” and its use in this paper. Affect is a movement of sensations; it is the force or forces of an encounter.¹² Affect is the prediscursive sensations, intensities, attunements, and moments of connection and release. At times, those responses are narrativized as emotions and feelings such as shame, guilt, anger, joy, excitement, etc. Yet for my purposes, I use affect to refer to moments prior to this narrativization. Affect is the visceral sensations that are felt in and through the body. Affect is a body's capacity to act; it also acts upon the body and is not separable from cognition.¹³ It refers to the “simultaneous power to affect the world and to be affected by it.”¹⁴ It exists in those moments of raw intensity and force that have the potential to diverge in different ways and thus also to be co-opted and manipulated. As Elizabeth Grosz contends, affective attunements are not so much “forms of signification, or units of knowledge, as they are expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation.”¹⁵

Drawing on a Deleuzian concept of art, Grosz asserts art is that which does not generate concepts, rather it addresses problems and provocation.¹⁶ Art produces sensations, affects, and intensities as its mode of making *something* known. It engenders intensities,¹⁷ impacting the nervous system and intensifying sensations. Deleuze claims sensation is the opposite of sensational.¹⁸ For Deleuze, sensations are shared between the subject and the object, and they are not reducible to only the subject or the object and

¹² Gregory Seighworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmer,” 2-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1,3.

¹⁴ Melissa A. White, “Critical Compulsions,” 183.

¹⁵ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affect*, 40.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 30.

their relations.¹⁹ They are part of a “feedback loop, which exists in the oscillation between bodies and/or things, in the ever shifting synaesthetic encounter of bodies with their surroundings.”²⁰

It is through the extraction of qualities of chaotic forces of nature, including one’s political environment, that art forms and produces sensations. Deleuze argues that sensations are not explained through movements, and movements do not explain the level of sensations.²¹ Rather, movement is explained “by the elasticity of the sensation,”²² and what remains of movement is the intensity of sensation. Sensations are invisible forces that act upon the body, because for a sensation to exist, “a force must be exerted on the body.”²³

The body becomes the zone of indiscernibility or undecidability wherein the forces of sensations make themselves known.²⁴ Something happens through the sensation and the subject *becomes* in the sensation.²⁵ Affect and intensities become sites that confirm the body’s immersion and partaking in the chaotic forces of its environment and materiality. Therefore, art not only produces sensations that have yet to be experienced, but it also produces perceptions that could not have been otherwise perceived.²⁶ It sets out to make invisible forces visible.

Sensation sets out not only the possible becomings of a subject-in-process, but also the possible becomings of peoples and universes to come. It is the possibility of the creation of new worlds, and new peoples to live and experience them. The sensations that act upon the body are filled with potential to change the subject. Becoming and formation of new relationalities are possible through not only the forces that touch the body but also the forces that make themselves visible through the body. As Grosz explains, art is that which can be magnified, elaborated, and intensified.²⁷ It is a space in which risks and “innovations are undertaken for their own sake,” without any pre-emptive concepts in mind.²⁸ Art allows for the incommensurability of subject and object to be celebrated,

¹⁹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 8.

²⁰ Marc Lafleur, “Nuclear Hauntologies,” 57.

²¹ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 36.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 21-22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

opened up, and elaborated. Art is that space where life transforms itself: a “zone that all becomings must pass through.”²⁹

In this sense, art is not oppositional to politics, nor an apolitical understanding of life; rather it is politics via other means.³⁰ It is the space of emergent politics, which does not concretize or contain politics; it is a space that leaves sensations, vibrations, forces, and intensities up for grabs. Edry’s art is political, *because* it augments the potentiality for new sensations and attunements. The body is opened up, through its own indeterminacy, to other forces and sensations, and it is precisely this opening up of the body that allows for new becoming and formation of new relationalities. The forces that act upon the body and are manifested in and through the body create shifts within the subject. With these shifts, there is potential for changes in perception, reorientation of our understanding, and connection to the human in the Other.

Edry explains that his intention was only to touch the Other, and what followed as the result of this touch was beyond his imagining and his intentionality.³¹ Although his later posters, pictures, and campaigns prescribed feelings of love and politics of peace much more overtly, the first two posters, which subsequently became campaigns—“Israel hearts Iran” and “NOT ready to die in your war”—were aimed at creating a space of dialogue through intensification of affect rather than its co-optation. In his talk, Edry describes the series of events that resulted in the formation of the “Israel hearts Iran” campaign. He explains that immediately after posting his original picture on Facebook, his friends began requesting personalized posters with the same message on their pictures, indicating that there were others who felt and were eager to express similar intensities and affective attunements. The next wave of posters included Iranians from Iran who began sending their photos to Edry, so that the caption could read, “Israelis, we [heart symbol] you,” conveying the same message towards Israelis. This movement continued with Iranian graphic designers, who created their own messages, posted them on Facebook, and sent them to Edry to be posted on his Facebook page and blog.³² Some of these messages included, “My Israeli Friends, I don’t hate you and I don’t want War,” “I love that blue, that white and that star” (referring to the

²⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

³⁰ Ibid., 76.

³¹ Edry, “Israel and Iran.”

³² Ibid.

Israeli flag), and “Israelis, we do not want a nuclear bomb, we want peace and democracy, we are your friends.”³³

Slowly, similar Facebook pages began to appear, communicating similar messages towards Iran, Israel, and Palestine, but this time from individuals in other nations. Some of these included, “France [heart symbol] Iran,” “Israel [heart symbol] Palestine,” “Lebanon [heart symbol] Israel,” and much more. Edry explains that during a conference in Munich, many Iranians came to meet and speak with him, not just regarding the effects of the campaign: they came just to *speak* as two human beings, in order to connect, to touch, and to understand each other.³⁴

For Deleuze, the body is not simply waiting for something from the material structure. The body is waiting for the forces inside itself; it is inside the body that something is happening.³⁵ As Deleuze writes, “the body exerts itself in a very precise manner, or waits to escape from itself in a very precise manner.”³⁶ Something escapes through Edry’s body and makes itself visible through the artwork. That *something* is the invisible forces, sensations, attunements, and affective responses. That *something* makes itself known, and acts upon other bodies as well. It is that process that embodies change.

The narrative of “Iranians, we [heart symbol] you,” and “Not ready to die in your war,” tells stories of love and compassion that do not prescribe any particular affect in the viewer as much as they communicate something of the body reaching out. The work extends towards a possibility that has unknowable outcomes. The potentiality lies precisely in the unknowability of the affective responses.

Some critics have questioned the effectiveness of such forms of art and their subsequent capacities to produce “meaningful” or “real” changes. In their article, “Israelis and Iranians, Get a room!” Kuntsman and Raji have argued that this campaign functions as a depoliticized “story of love for an unknown Other...away from ideology, national and transnational politics.”³⁷ They claim that the stories of “we will never hate you, we love you,” are entrenched in the problematic of transnational politics where it is exotic and much easier to love the Other from a distance, as opposed to helping those who are near.³⁸ This depoliticization, for Kuntsman and Raji,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 15.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Adi Kuntsman and Sanaz Raji, “Israelis and Iranians, Get a Room!,” 143.

³⁸ Ibid., 147.

operates through the display of everyday and intimate life moments used in the photos, which function to reinstall heteronormativity within a national narrative.³⁹ They argue that these images are haunted by erasure of the violence towards Palestinians, the Israeli citizens who are struggling to survive (such as the poor families in the peripheral towns), and the reality that immigrant and migrant workers face.⁴⁰

If, as some critics maintain, this campaign is a manifestation of depoliticization and erasure, and thus is a failure, what constitutes a “successful” campaign? Would Edry’s work be considered a success if it transcended heteronormativity by including images of members of the LGBTQ community? Would that have been considered another failure then, because it embodied sexual exceptionalism and the annexation of homosexuality within a nationalist discourse, which Jasbir Puar names homonationalism?⁴¹ Would the campaign have been considered a success if it attempted to address the state’s policies and practices towards its own marginalized members, prior to addressing any of the state’s international politics? Or would that campaign then be critiqued as a limiting one, since it operates within national identity politics that do not transcend geopolitical borders? Or is it that all of these “shortcomings” would have been acceptable if the movement were able to bring about immediate changes in Netanyahu’s politics, ideologies, and practices?

The criticism levelled at this campaign often revolves around the importance of “positionality” and collective identity politics, and heavily emphasizes desirable outcomes. Another criticism of Edry’s work centres on the alleged hypocrisy of Israelis who state that they will not bomb Iran, when war is the very reality in the region. When tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed by Israeli security forces, and when Israel’s reality includes the physical and the psychic trauma of war, displacement, and property destruction; the malnutrition of children as the result of lack of access to food, water, and medication; the constant abuse at security checkpoints; and numerous illegitimate arrests and subsequent imprisonments,⁴² how can one preach love and promise peace?

Although it is true that the messages are being communicated by Israelis who know the actuality of war, implicitly the messages are representative of the intentions of the pictured individuals, not their state.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 148-49.

⁴¹ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 1-3.

⁴² “Statistics,” B’Tselem.

It is a personal communication that, regardless of the atrocities their state undertakes supposedly on their behalf, these individuals will not support or participate in war. The “we” and the “you” in the images are meant to transcend the national “we” and “you.” It is a personal communication that surmounts politicized identities, and reaches towards the Other, in hopes of dialogue, reparation, or *something*—however that *something* may unfurl. It is in the unfolding of the ordinary, everyday events that the potentializing forces of affect lie. This potentiality manifests from a plane of sensory experience that “engenders attachments or systems of investment in the unfolding of things.”⁴³ The unknowability in the unfolding is the space that is filled with enormous capacity for political change.

Brian Massumi argues that critique focused on ideological accounts of subject formation and “positionality” signifies systemic structuring that codes individuals, and positions them on a grid.⁴⁴ This positioning takes away movement, because it catches the body “in a cultural freeze-frame.”⁴⁵ Although bodies move from one grid point to another—and bodies move to occupy different positionalities and subject positions depending on time and circumstance—what defines the body in this frame of analysis is not movement itself, but beginning and end-points.⁴⁶ As Massumi writes, “movement becomes entirely subordinated to the positions it connects.”⁴⁷ The intense focus on “positionality”—and its enormous emphasis on end-points and targets—takes away continuity of movements, since the process of passing into, becoming, and the unfolding relations are minimized. Such minimization results in a one-dimensional understanding of reality.⁴⁸

This mode of “critical” thinking that freezes the subject in time and space does not allow for the formation of new relationalities. Edry’s aim, although directed towards narratives and ideologies of peace, was not to induce any predetermined route, political action, or forms of affect. The purpose of his image was not to order and modulate the chaotic feelings that have emerged through the narratives of fear, rather only to touch that chaos in order to create a space of potentiality. The narrative of “Iranians, we [heart symbol] you,” and “NOT ready to die in your war,” are stories of hope for connection and reparation, which do not prescribe any

⁴³ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affect*, 21.

⁴⁴ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

particular affect in the viewer as much as they communicate the affect of the body reaching out. This reaching out engenders a possibility that has an unknowable outcome.

The dismissal of the potentiality of affective responses stems from a desire to regulate and hierarchize.⁴⁹ It is a desire not to let the moment unfold further.⁵⁰ Regulatory desire forecloses on potential, because the potential does not appear tangible or concrete. There is a moralizing undertone in the “critical” method that takes away movement—“the moving dimension of the experience”—in order to be able to pin down that movement and critique it.⁵¹

Such art does not function with a particular set of “goals” that must be achieved, since that approach is based on a pre-set system of judgment. The potential for political emergence takes place through ordinary affects, which as Kathleen Stewart writes,

happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*.⁵²

Engaging with this *something* has the power to reorient our understanding from the fixed conditions of possibility towards trajectories of potentiality. The change might not be visible or palpable within the broader political context, and it might require many more such campaigns to conjure the change in political ideologies and practices of the region. But it starts at the moment of reaching out, engaging with sensations, and not dismissing the potentiality of those sensations and vibrations. Edry himself, in response to some critiques about whether such campaigns can evoke any “real” and “tangible” changes, advocates an ethical responsibility of attempting to *reach the other*, in order “to send a message and *hope* for the best.”⁵³

In an interview with Mary Zournazi, Brain Massumi explains that hope is useful when it is not connected to an expected success, when it is different than optimism, and when it is not a “wishful projection of success

⁴⁹ Lafleur, “Nuclear Hauntologies,” 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Mary Zournazi, “Navigating Moments,” 5.

⁵² Stewart, *Ordinary Affect*, 2.

⁵³ Edry, “Israel and Iran.”

or even some kind of rational calculation of outcomes.”⁵⁴ Hope, when disjoined from prediction, becomes about the present, since looking towards a utopian dream can leave us extremely disappointed and vulnerable to pessimism, which can immobilize any political action.⁵⁵ Massumi explains that the uncertainty of any situation provides a “margin of maneuverability,” which offers the potential for experimentation.⁵⁶ He claims that being captured by a situation—rather than capturing it—can offer a particular kind of freedom, accompanied by a “sense of vitality or vivacity, a sense of being more alive.”⁵⁷ This type of freedom exists in the margins and maneuvers that were invisible to the subject and could not have been thought through. It exists in the potential to expand and change the subject.⁵⁸ This change and becoming is the condition of being alive.

Experimenting with that margin of unknowability is precisely what Edry set out to do. Rather than projecting success or failure onto the unfolding results of these images and campaigns, rather than capturing affect, Edry embraced modes of becoming and formation of new attachments, evident literally through formation of new friendships with Iranians around the world. It is important to note that the Deleuzian becoming “does not produce anything *other* than itself.”⁵⁹ What is “real” is the act of becoming itself, and not the concrete or fixed ways that becoming must come to pass.⁶⁰ Edry’s art is not only the activation of sensations of the lived body, but it also functions as a way of transforming the body into “an unlivable power and an unleashed force” that transform the world along with that body.⁶¹

The operation and the effectiveness of the discourses of Iran as a future threat and the formation of a global state of fear are immune to facts, precisely because they function affectively. When the capacity to affect and be affected is co-opted by hegemonic powers, where narratives of futurity of threat are offered with such certainty that they become a felt reality, art becomes a space that offers the potential for reclaiming and re-expressing those affects. The capture of affect and its potentializing forces by the state fixes the body in a particular temporality, which forfeits

⁵⁴ Zournazi, “Navigating Moments,” 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Valentine Moulard-Leonard, “Revolutionary Becomings,” 245.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 22.

movement. Fixing the body in both time and space impedes political change. Art embodies a space in which movement, new possibilities of attunement, encounters with the human in the Other, and new becoming are made possible. The potential for freedom is possible by allowing the body to be captured by an event, rather than capturing that event. This form of freedom does not break all constraints, rather it operates on a relational basis. This kind of liberation utilizes the potential forces of the present, allowing for the transcendence of identity politics, wherein new forms of relationalities and becoming are constantly negotiated and actualized.

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