TWO

Film Theory's Absent Center

When the history of film and media theory in the 1990s and 2000s is written, it will turn out to have been the long decade of the affect.

Although the affective turn is often referred to in the singular, there were in fact several turns to affects, affectivity, and affection in the discipline's broader early-1990s trans-theoretical revisiting of matters of corporeality, physicality, the visceral, and the material. Deleuze's work on the autonomy of affect began to influence film theory around the same time that cognitivist film theorists began seriously considering emotion, phenomenologists and feminists engaged in a rethinking of the role of hapticity and the body (from the "film body" to the specificity of different bodies), and cultural theorists advanced the need for attention to the multiple senses, moving criticism away from the hegemony of the visual and sonic. One could even persuasively argue that work not theorizing affect was theorizing affect in contemporary film studies, for simultaneous with these rotations was the "historical turn" of Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, and Mary Ann Doane, who traveled various returns to Walter Benjamin's interest in the sensorial shocks and corporeal agitations of modernity. The persistent concern in media studies with the rise of the digital (and the correspondingly avowed end or "death" of cinema, as though it, too, were an animately existent being) has also formed curious connections

to scholarship on affect to the extent that digital cinema's effects are said principally to appeal to skin and body to agitate the corpus in new and exclusive ways. Each time a turning toward affect has taken place, it has demonstrated one thing above all: the intellectual seductions of this very call. An insistent need to attend to whatever constitutes each subdisciplinary investment in affectivity figures the very notion of "affect" as a placeholder for the unthought of this (or of any) discipline.[1] What animates brings things to life: the affective turn is not only directed toward an object of theoretical inquiry; it is also, quite literally, an affective, affect-laden turn, passionate in its insistence that a new approach is required in the study of representation, providing, above all, analytical vitality. The turn to affect thus has been more operation than curve, and what it has generated primarily is a series of polemics for its own tropistic gesture, a repeated insistence that the humanities direct new and urgent attention to the previously ignored concept of _____.

EMOTION, FEELING, EXCESS, AFFECT

Turning to affect provided film theory with a nodal point around which multiple threads of scholarly work from otherwise irreconcilable camps could coalesce, bringing together thought inspired by Deleuze's philosophy with cognitivism, feminism, queer theory, cultural studies, and phenomenology. These disparate positions came together around a shared investment in thinking the embodied experience of cinematic spectatorship and a reluctance about (if not outright hostility toward) an apparatus theory committed to reading for form and ideology, meaning and sign.

Although the recent polemical theorizations of affect (from the likes of Marco Abel, Giuliana Bruno, Lisa Cartwright, Steven Shaviro, and many others) provide the local context for this book, it is important to note that their work is not the first disciplinary consideration of the subject of perception or affection.[2] A great deal of pre-1970s film theory was interested in, even obsessed with, the question of affect, although earlier theory may have used the words "emotion," "feeling," or "sentiment." Hugo Münsterberg's work on film's psychological effect on emotions and perceptions from 1916; Jean Epstein's ecstatic account of the cinephile's sublime pleasures of *photogénie* in the 1920s; Siegfried Kracauer's work of the late 1920s on *Zerstreuung,* mass culture's seductive assaultive distraction; and, in the 1930s and 1940s, Sergei Eisenstein's polemics for the shock and agitation of the spectator, in addition to his work on ecstasy and enthusiasm, are only a few examples of a long-

standing disciplinary investment in the passions.[3] More recently, affect has been central to studies of particular genres taken to have especially strong connections to emotional intensity in relation to the presumed, desired, or actual reactions of spectators: the "body genres" of melodrama, pornography, horror.[4] Here, an affective taxonomy provides a generic taxonomy: if it does not make you weep, it cannot be a weepie; if it does not raise the hairs on the back of your neck, it is not a *horrere*-grounded horror film. We might say that film studies has been haunted by the question of affect since its inception; it has always taken seriously how spectators are moved at the movies. However, the work on affect and emotion from the past two decades that constitutes the "turn to affect" in film studies is novel in its shared sense that 1970s film theory, with its grounding in psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structuralism, lost its way, engaged diligently in the forgetting of affect by remembering too well how to read.

Instead of relegating affectivity to the ghetto of body genres, most contemporary participants in the affective turn in film studies, despite their philosophical divergences, begin with an aggressive suspicion of the disembodied, immobile, textually-positioned spectator imputed to *Screen* theory, which, while known formally as "apparatus theory," is as often these days called "affectless theory." For an example as useful for its early and thus influential polemicism as for its succinct objections, consider Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993). There, Shaviro declares war on a theory intent on reading for depth, arguing for the importance of accounting for "visceral, affective responses to film, in sharp contrast to most critics' exclusive concern with issues of form, meaning, and ideology."[5] He positions his work explicitly against psychoanalytic accounts and in favor of a turn toward the alternative canon of Bataille, Benjamin, Bergson, Deleuze, Foucault, and Guattari. Rejecting the ways in which percept and affect (defined following Deleuze) have been "subordinated to textuality and the Law of the signifier," Shaviro instead insists on attending to the "immediacy and violence of sensation that powerfully engages the eye and body of the spectator."[6] Shaviro's text has had a sizable impact on post-*Screen* film theory, and his more recent *Post-Cinematic Affect* (2010) continues this project for a new media world. He shares with theorists such as Brian Massumi the sense that intensities are necessarily and utterly divorced from all that signifies. Shaviro's "not that, but this" model of theoretical argument is repeated with striking frequency by most parties in the turn to affect, from Elena del Rio to Giuliana Bruno, Anna Powell, and Lisa Cartwright: beginning with a list of the forgettings of apparatus theory, the

theorist then proceeds to insist on another method of approaching film.[7] From the beginning of this recent turn, affect has been theorized defensively—as an omission, a forgotten underside to film and media theory.

While numerous theoretical claims were made for the specificity of a Deleuzian or phenomenological treatment of affect, "post-theory" film research was not indifferent to matters of corporeality or emotional provocation. Cognitivist film theorists participated in a simultaneous return to the problem of feeling at the turn of the most recent century, generating a large body of work on emotional responses in (largely narrative) film, reaching back to Aristotle's theory of catharsis to argue for the role of judgment and belief in emotion.[8] Despite the philosophical differences between the cognitivist and Deleuzian or phenomenological film theorists—they, for example, repeat a twentieth-century analytic versus continental philosophical split—there are important points of connection between the two groups. First, cognitivists shared with Deleuzians a penchant for positioning themselves against psychoanalytic theory as a corrective disciplinary endeavor. Second, both camps used the word "affect," which may be surprising, given that "emotion" and its cognitive associations since Aristotle certainly inform this post-theory school. Assuredly, their use of "affect" is not in the Deleuzian-Spinozan sense of *affectus*. But Noël Carroll defends this choice to write "affect" because "the ordinary notion of *emotion* can be exceedingly broad and elastic, sometimes ranging so widely as to encompass hard-wired reflex reactions (like the startle response), kinesthetic turbulence, moods, sexual arousal, pleasures and desires, as well as occurrent mental states like anger, fear and sorrow."[9] That is, the use of the word "emotion" or "affect" does not function as a theoretical tell, coded to lead a reader back to the philosophical orientation of the thinker.

While the "not that" model is de rigueur in much academic criticism, it is particularly virulent in the case of theorists of feeling in their approach to psychoanalysis. Giuliana Bruno, for example, figures her work most aggressively against the Lacanian-informed film theory of the 1970s, which for her left the unpleasant legacy of a frozen spectator, unmoved, in its unmoved, unmoving theory. In that tradition's emphasis on the gaze, she writes, we are given only the spectator as a voyeur; her revision will account for the film spectator as a *voyageur,* traveling and mapping but also moving and being emotionally moved.[10] In fact, numerous accounts deploy the very language of psychoanalysis that they seem to so despise in order to pathologize affect's omission from psychoanalytic film theory. In her Silvan Tompkins-inspired approach to affect, Lisa Cartwright damns those who remained silent, writing, "Feeling

is a suspect area of research for media and film scholars, who, since the time of Brechtian distanciation and Althusserian apparatus theory, have worked to institute models that allow us to resist the seductive pull of the medium as it moves us to feel for the other."[11] Given that Cartwright's argument is that affect allows us to develop what she calls a "moral spectatorship," she is accusing structuralist and psychoanalytic film theorists not only of instituting models that frigidly stave off the seductions of the medium, but also of working actively to avoid feeling for the other. This is not merely a theoretical-historical accusation; it is also an ethical one. At stake in Cartwright's insistence that affect was forgotten is a parallel insistence that its forgetting had a principled, purposive coldness and cruelty. Like Shaviro's designation of psychoanalytic film theory as "phobic," there is an aggression in the turn to affect, as though writing on affectivity compelled linguistic force in its own theorizing.[12] The disparate theorists and post-theorists in film studies—these strange and otherwise hostile bedfellows of Deleuzians, cognitivists, psychologists, and phenomenologists—have united through the shared suspicion that 1970s film theory led the discipline astray by omitting a serious consideration of sensation, embodiment, and materiality. The net result, though, was that in rejecting *Screen* theory in favor of immediate seductive feeling, these theorists severed discussions of affect from any consideration of textuality. The affective turn in film theory perhaps recovered the visceral, but only at the expense of reading. Anne Rutherford goes so far as to advocate for her notion of an embodied affect by claiming that the aroused body is "the underside, the suppressed underbelly of film theory, lost for decades in detours about the formal, the signifier, the subject, desire."[13] That *formal* meditations would be positioned as a disciplinary *detour* suggests the heart of the turn to affect's evasive take on close reading: it constitutes a wrong turn, a digression off-course, a temporary roadblock, too circuitous.—It is what is not the point: *des-* (aside), *tourner* (to turn). The theoretical map is penned clearly here, routing the turn to affect on a track that travels brusquely away from the formal.

On this there is no debate: *Interpretation is indeed the long way round.* Tarrying with a text's specificities is, in a manner, nothing but restless detours, strange delays, awkward encounters, and endless alternative routes—a constant possible going otherwise that traces the unpredictable path of what is unexpected.

This concept of "affect" that is all formless-feeling/what-is-not-structure thus has become a general term for any resistance to systematicity, a promised recovery of contingency, surprise, play, pleasure, and possibility. It is therefore

a concept that functions today much as "excess" did for film scholars of the 1970s and not unlike what cinephilia was to theorists such as Paul Willemen: a flexible abstraction that "doesn't do anything other than designate something which resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks."[14] That affectivity is what has been taken to have been excluded and rejected by hegemonic film theory, and the renewed polemics for attending to "X" (emotion, feeling, excess, affect), suggest that it is the exuberantly generative nature of this negative term more than positive formulations that has mobilized a renewed interest in affect for the past thirty years in film studies. "Affect" in this general sense is the negative ontology of the humanities.

AFFECTIVE FALLACIES

The poster described above currently faces me, hanging on the wall above my computer, drawing me into a zone of proximity with its prominent face and the affective charge it forcefully exerts on me.—Marco Abel, *Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation*

How can I write about sadness, about my cinematic griefs?—Tim Groves, "Cinema/Affect/Writing"

While the use of the word "affect" in place of "emotion" and the aggressions against 1970s film theory are two points of connection among contemporary theorizers of affect, there is a more significant *point de capiton*: these divergent treatments of affect have insistently linked emotion to concerns about spectatorship and spectatorial experience. The affective turn in film and media studies has produced repeated versions of the reification of the passions: films *produce* something in the audience, or, sometimes, in the theorist, or, sometimes, in the theorist all alone. It is often *her* felt stirrings, *his* intense disgust that comprises the specific affective case study. These accounts, whatever their philosophical orientations, insist on the directional property theory of affect: that it is intentional, that it is effective. Affect is taken as always being, in the end, *for us*. The theoretical consequence of this assumption is an approach to writing theory that emphasizes the personal experience of the theorist. Because of the polemical agitations of much work in the turn to affect, there is a performative dimension to the theory that repeatedly traces spectatorial movements, ruptures, rumblings, and passions—but this performance is also

always a solipsism. As a result, a great deal of contemporary work on cinema and affect relies on an excessive use of "I" expressions in relation to experienced emotions or personal narratives of sensorial disequilibrium (as in the epigraphs above). The turn to affect thus risks turning every film theorist into a phenomenologist, each critic a mere omphaloskeptic.

However thrilling it may be to write and even read the personal accounts of any theorist's tremulous pleasures and shudderings, it is a signature of work on affectivity that must be resisted, for it tells us far more about being affected than about affects. Ironically, in accounts of affect that attempt to focus on the immediate, visceral, and corporeal, such an introspective style retains a notion of classical interiority merely redescribed as the interiority of the feeling theorist, even as the written theory attempts to reject and move beyond that metaphysical framework. Perhaps the greatest danger of this approach is that it emphasizes the successful *consumption* of affect and thus makes theoretical accounts of each private feeling experience complicit with the explicit marketing of feeling from the commercial side of film production. One suspects, from these furiously recorded diaries, that the theoretical qualification for such work is to be a better consumer of feelings; if affect does not need to be interpreted, just recorded, then the most affected theorist wins. After Foucault, should we not be very wary of exactly such confessional models as standards for philosophical truth-bearing?

Even in the most subtle theoretical treatments of affect—for example, Jean-François Lyotard's aesthetic injunction to provide a *compte rendu d'affect*—a report of the affect provoked by the work of art, a report that must transmit and not merely objectify or describe the affect—there is nevertheless a reliance on the assumption that what affect is must involve provocations.[15] Ironically, given that many of the worst offenders of the intentional affect model are otherwise mired in poststructuralist theory, the effect is to preserve a kernel of humanism in any discussion of affect. Thus, despite their claims to radically revise approaches to representation, even Deleuzian treatments comfortingly assume that affectivity has something to do with warm bodies in the theater. Take, as just one example, these lines from Marco Abel's *Violent Affect:* "the problem is that we, as spectators, are not privy to the actual, but to us invisible, forces that impinge on the body." The question he regards as posed in the films of the Coen Brothers is "how to make *us* sense these invisible forces, or how to actualize what is merely virtual in the frame."[16] The typographical emphasis is in the original, and it makes clear that when all is said and done: this affective stuff, it tolls for me. What matters in even the most radically

anti-representational accounts of affect and violence is what it all means for a body's sensation, what intensity it actualizes directionally and intentionally for a viewer.

The consequence of this tendency to devolve into brute and final description of one man's movements or one woman's felt pressures is the compromising of the speculative etymological roots of *theoria.* This loss of generalizability is no secret; some theorists celebrate it. Shaviro, for his part, insists that "the consuming obsessions of writing theory . . . cannot be separated from the bodily agitations, the movements of fascination, the reactions of attraction and repulsion. . . . I am too deeply implicated in the pleasures of film viewing . . . to be able to give a full and balanced account."[17] Instead of positioning an exploration of affect as a mind/body problem, such writing makes affect a *my mind/my body* problem. With the loss of theoretical generalizability comes a loss of new readings and new questions or problems. So the methodological issue remains: how is scholarly dialogue to engage with accounts of affective shudderings that are particular to the writer/experiencer? For those who insist that we are after- or post-theoretical, this will not feel like such a loss. But for those who care deeply about speculation (of which I am one), these accounts are ends, not beginnings, of theoretical inquiry.

Like many debates in film studies—and the discipline ignores this at its peril—this one has its origins in far older debates in literary studies. New Criticism famously argued for an "intentional fallacy," highlighting the way in which authorial intention was wrongly said to offer privileged insight into a work's meaning. These days, we have (and must subject again to scrutiny) a new version. This intention is not authorial but Husserlian—"intentional" in the sense of that philosopher's theory that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something and that objects of consciousness are intentional themselves. Like the phenomenological contention that each mental act is of or related to an object, this new intentional fallacy suggests that each instance of cinematic affect is of or related to a spectator, that affect by definition represents or gives over something as some thing to an other. In other words, this fallacy assumes that spectator or theorist (it matters little which) is *noetic* (the experiencing) and that affect is *noematic* (that which is experienced). My critique of "intentional affect" argues not against the idea of affect as authorially purposive (although I would resist that, as well) but against the idea of affect as intentional in this second sense. Affect, as I will argue in this book, is non-intentional, indifferent, and resists the given-over attributes of a teleological spectatorship with acquirable gains.

It is worth resurrecting a bit of New Critical history to recall that the seminal "intentional fallacy" was one of a pair, although the influential takedown of Authorship certainly would receive the greatest share of subsequent critical attention. This second fault was W. K. Wimsatt's charge in 1946 of an "affective fallacy," an error of assuming that a text should be judged as having (or failing to have) value for its emotional or affective effect on a reader. The target was a Romantic criticism that focused on the subjective impressions and unrepeatable assertions of the critic, a criticism that confused what a poem is (New Criticism's target) with what it does: in other words, "a confusion between the poem and its *results*."[18] Wimsatt called this "a special case of epistemological skepticism" that tried to derive criticisms "from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism."[19] The poem as a unique, objective object of critical judgment disappears in this attention to readerly movings. This criticism is as appropriate today as ever: "the report of some readers . . . that a poem or story induces in them vivid images, intense feelings, or heightened consciousness is neither anything which can be refuted nor anything which it is possible for the objective critic to take into account. The purely affective report is either too physiological or it is too vague."[20] One does not have to accept entirely Wimsatt's claims of an "objective" criticism—certainly the most vulnerable and troubling spot of such an assessment—or make the assumption that reading itself is unproblematic to want nevertheless to take to task the way in which subjective, vague accounts of a reader's or critic's feelings shut down critical inquiry instead of opening up avenues for thought and investigation. In particular, note the charge that such critical readings are irrefutable: while one can reject tout court a theoretical model that argues for reading against signification and for particular, visceral experiences, it is not the case that subsequent claims can be challenged, as they are purportedly the record of some theorist's or spectator's kinesthetic strivings and pleasures. Film theory on affectivity has confused the two fallacies: it has surrendered to the affective fallacy in relation to the theorist's spectatorial responses, and it has done so under the expanded meaning of "intentional." That is, today's theorist of affect errs in reporting the emotional jolts of the film and errs in doing so via the assumption that emotional jolts are definitionally, necessarily, and essentially intentional in aim, direction, and effect. They always land, without fail, let us say in the lap of the awaiting critic.

Does an analysis of tone or mood get us out of this bind? In *Ugly Feelings* (2007), Sianne Ngai considers aesthetics and politics in relation to affects in order to theorize "aesthetic emotions" or "feelings unique to our encounters

with artworks."[21] While the text has been most influential for its interest in minor emotions (such as envy and irritation; I am less inclined to agree with her grouping of anxiety and disgust under the banner of the "minor"), the strength of *Ugly Feelings* is also its greatest limitation. Ngai's argument centers on a theory of mood created through formal techniques, "a literary or cultural artifact's feeling tone: its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world."[22] However, despite Ngai's promise to read for those minor, "weaker and nastier" feelings through formal techniques ("exhausting repetitions and permutations" in the case of bored shock; first-person subjective shots in film), she commits to the minor and to the affective but remains firmly on the side of experience. The value of forms ultimately resides in how "these affective values [can be regarded as meaningful] to how one understands the text as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations."[23] Thus, forms are attended to solely insofar as they explain the ugly feelings felt by a reader or spectator. (And reading for form is further put to work for the sake of the political critique of the minor that brackets the book.) Those "exhausting repetitions" and subjective shots, in other words, are mere formal means to felt affective ends. Similarly, although Jennifer Barker writes that attention to "the sensual aspects of the experience" of film does not involve an attendant dismissal of "narrative, theme, psychology, and history," she insists that "those aspects of a film cannot be separated from—indeed, are conveyed and understood through—our sensual, muscular experience of the films." In the case of Buster Keaton's comedies and action films, "We *feel for* Keaton's earnest characters and the frantic heroes of chase films precisely because we *feel with* them."[24] Although Barker's *The Tactile Eye* is replete with references to specific films and specific shots or scenes in specific films, its emphasis on "muscular empathy" and the visceral exchange between film body and spectatorial body puts those formal traits to work for this sensuous relation, for that "we" who feels. As with Ngai and Barker, though under the sign of Deleuze, Abel routinely enlists form to serve affectively an affected spectator. In his reading of the mise-en-scène of the Coen Brothers' *Miller's Crossing,* he notes that due to the "intense presence of thick layers of brown . . . we, as spectators, sense Caspar's sensation."[25] Such a tautological claim, and the argument it supports, tells us little about, and pushes back not at all against, the notion of muddy tawny overtones. One could find many more examples in the literature of putting form to work for a spectator who feels, senses, or is affected—the choices of Ngai, Barker, and Abel have the advantage of demonstrating that political, phenomenological,

and Deleuzian commitments equally take this approach. These deployments of details to support readings that emphasize the exchange between cinema and spectator use a bit of form to argue for sensation, but use does not constitute thought. The instrumentalizing of form to privilege affective experience is an utterly different approach from a reading that lingers with the many questions posed by textual form itself.

READING FOR AFFECT

I charged in the previous chapter that the second (stillborn) tear in *Psycho* is indifferent to its *from* and indifferent to its *for,* and therefore is inscrutable to existing work on affectivity that would return that wet fold to the legible interiority of a character, a narrative or thematic expression, a mimetic instruction to a viewer, a force that moves a spectatorial body, or that would deny altogether that this drop might be a tear and rend it from affectivity to settle the argument. It is the central claim of this book that theorizing affective *replis* involves thinking a construct that can never be returned to the thinker in its for-me dimension: a *repli* that does not reply. I will therefore treat affect not as a matter of expression, not as a matter of sensation for a spectator—in fact, not as a matter of spectatorship at all. Thus, not only is this book not offering a contribution to theories of spectatorship; it should be regarded as a de-contribution to spectatorship studies, an attempt to dethrone the subject and the spectator—and attendant terms, such as "cognition," "perception," "experience," even "sensation"—for affect theory. Rejecting accounts that regard affective displacements as a property of the film given over to another, a thrilling little gift to the spectator, a theorist's private buzz, this book treats affects outside the expressivity hypothesis. In place of affect as a matter of expression, communication, address, spectatorship, experience, or sensation, affect will be regarded as a fold, which is another way of saying that affects will be read for as forms.

Treating affects as having and inhering in form does not require that affect be read through the lens of neo-formalism as defined by cognitivist film theorists, as in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's use of a taxonomy of visual strategies meant to guide a spectator comfortably through narrative straits. Indeed, one advantage of treating affect as a problem of form is precisely in how it demands the total redefining of formalism in and for film studies. Specifically, given that Bordwell explicitly positions neo-formalism against what he terms "Grand Theory," my approach to affect recovers and reintroduces the

insights and problematics of continental theory in dialogue with form instead of necessarily opposed to it.[26] Not neo-formalism but *radical formalism*. This I mean quite literally: heeding its own etymological *radix,* radical formalism returns to roots, presses on what is essential, foundational, and necessary in formalism itself. A radical formalism in film and media studies would take the measure of theory for form *and* take the measure of form for affectivity; this vital formalism, in the sense of what is both affective and urgent, returns to the roots of formalist analysis, and extends their reach. One wager of this book is that affect is the right and productive site for radically redefining what reading for form might look like in the theoretical humanities today. First and foremost, this approach requires beginning with the premise that affective force works over form, that forms are auto-affectively charged, and that affects take shape in the details of specific visual forms and temporal structures. Reading for form involves a slow, deep attention both to the usual suspects of close analysis that are so often ignored or reduced to paraphrase in recent work on affect—montage, camera movement, mise-en-scène, color, sound—and to more ephemeral problematics such as duration, rhythm, absences, elisions, ruptures, gaps, and points of contradiction (ideological, aesthetic, structural, and formal). Reading for formal affectivity involves interpreting form's waning and absence, and also attending to formlessness.

Specifically, this book makes two moves regarding form: *reading for form* is the methodological strategy, and *reading affects as having forms* is the theoretical intervention. Reading for form enables the specificity, complexity, and sensitivity to textuality that has gone missing in affect studies and is sorely needed to defend the theoretical stakes of the second move. Reading affects as having forms involves de-privileging models of expressivity and interiority in favor of treating affects as structures that work through formal means, as consisting in their formal dimensions (as line, light, color, rhythm, and so on) of passionate structures.

It is the conviction of this book (and a fervent one at that) that arguing for affect as having form and reading for affect as it inheres in form does not empty the word of its forceful, striving meaning; it does not deflate or depassify passion or weaken its kinetic lure. The myth of asignifying affective immediacy offers the fantasy of superficial flashes of brilliance and insight, but its very antithesis to the durational mediations of reading inevitably leaves it with no specificity that might durably ground its affective claim. Affect is thus left a mere shiver, a tingle, the capacity to find brute responsiveness to flashes of light, loud noises, startling surprises. If affect as a conceptual area

of inquiry is to have the radical potential to open up ethical, political, and aesthetic avenues for theoretical inquiry, then, quite simply, we have to do better than documenting the stirrings of the skin. My argument is that *it is only because one must read for it that affect has any force at all*. The intensity of that force derives from the textual specificity and particularity made available uniquely through reading, the vitality of all that is not known in advance of close reading, the surprising enchantments of the new that are not uncovered by interpretation but produced and brought into being as its activity.

My rethinking of the relationship between affect, form, and reading diverges radically from previous work on affectivity and formalism in film studies and critical theory. As part of this departure, I contend not only that a serious treatment of affect in film does not require repudiating the philosophical roots that informed 1970s film theory, but that the problem with that theory was that its provocations were not taken far enough. Since the harangues of Bordwell and Carroll in the late 1990s, the cognitivist rally has been under the sign of "post-theory," but we should be wary of taking this historical moment as an after, end, succession, triumphal beyond. Like Lyotard's critique of the prefix as it appends "modernity," we should regard post-theory as a moment for the reconsideration of theory, for looking again instead of feeding into a chronology of what is lost absolutely. The preferred prefix in Lyotard's work changes the play: "the 'post-' of 'postmodern' does not signify a movement of *comeback, flashback,* or *feedback,* that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in 'ana-': a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy, and anamorphosis that elaborates an 'initial forgetting.'"[27] This redescription is instructive here: for this book, a turn to affect is not part of a post-theoretical moment (or does not have to be), but is an ana-theoretical exercise that extends rather than repudiates the most valuable insights of structuralist and poststructuralist thought, recollects and re-creates that theory instead of imagining it has all come and gone.

This revitalization of both theory and affect is especially urgent at this moment, arriving well into the era of the turn to affect and at the early days of a series of aesthetic turns. The necessity for this intervention now is that, although the turn to affect was meant to be a radical reinsertion of forgotten matter(s) into film studies, the hostility toward form and reading that marked the turn has netted little more than a reassuring uselessness and generality whereby every film comforts for doing and being affectively the same intense thing each time. As a result, as of this writing, the turn to affect is making the final lap of its historical journey, coming to a turned close, as it has not engen-

dered the potentialities that it claims the object of its theorizing necessarily put forth. Instead of producing new readings and new questions, the turn to affect has largely been a series of reminders that the movies move some "us." The only course of action is to tie affect to a process of reading and rereading, returning, and rethinking. The name for that process is the ever-speculative theory. Thus, affect cannot answer a question posed by apparatus theory; it cannot be a mere plug in a historical hole. Affect's potential is in pointing out the non-questions and non-answers at play in any theory. Treating affect as a form is another way of demanding that we read for and speculate on these non-answers.

We may well be at the beginning of what will eventually be called the twenty-first-century "return to form" in the humanities. There has been a growing sense of frustration and disenchantment (affects both) with textual digest, the banality of tropes (hegemony, power, the other), and a lack of interest in formal processes. Calls in the past decade for a return to reading in literary and cultural studies, and recent growing interest in work on aesthetics from philosophers such as Jacques Rancière, suggest that after a long historical stretch of criticisms, disparagement, and outright hostility, we are ready to get back to texts, forms, closeness, attention, specificity.[28] But reading for form does not involve a retreat from other theoretical, political, and ethical commitments. As Ellen Rooney wonderfully words it, all that is required for taking formalism seriously is "refusing to reduce reading entirely to the elucidation, essentially the paraphrase of themes."[29] To the many advantages to reading that Rooney describes for literary studies, I would add that reading affect for form allows a richer language for describing the concept (beyond violences or frenzies or intensities); avoids the tendency of thematizing affect; and allows for a nuanced articulation of the ineluctable specificity and complexity of individual texts and individual affects as a way into something new and not as a confirmation of prior, static models. Of especial value in her polemic is Rooney's insistence that reading for form does not involve a retreat from theory: "rather, the renewal of form as an operation intrinsic to reading enables literary and cultural studies fully to take the pressure of those interventions."[30] To this list of interventions better taken stock of through the renewal of form I would add work on affect, despite its penchant for being defined as intrinsically the antipode to form or structure.[31]

If the project of theoretical speculation is to tackle affect in such a way that it remains open to the surprises attendant on reading a specific film without succumbing to one theorist's intimate record, then affect must be regarded not

as a matter of spectatorship but as a problematic of form in a text, which is another way of saying: as a problematic that cannot be determined in advance of or outside of interpretive labor. This book's approach, while a polemic, is also a panic. The danger in ceding the specificity of affects or the generalizability of theory or the persuasiveness of textual interpretation is potentially to risk both the loss of disciplinary rigor brought about by 1970s film theory and the critical insights of that theory. Some readers, certainly, will not regard this as a risk but as the fitting death throes of continental philosophy's grip on American academia. But for those who share my concern with protecting theory's insights, methodology, and hermeneutic suspicions, it is imperative to rescue affect for theory in advance of the realization that the heralded turn has come to a whimpering close.

It will almost certainly be objected that my reading of affect with and in form has a central problem, which is that the turn to affect in film theory was undertaken specifically as an attempt to think the sensory, material body back into a discipline that, under the sway of sign and structure, had "forgotten" the (heavy, lived, real) body. Thinking affect as a form does not obviously offer insight into meat and corporeality in the same way that a phenomenological or Deleuzian turn offers, and thus I am appearing to act in ignorance of what motivated these polemics in the first place. It could be argued that this book is ignoring precisely the value of a turn to affect: that it reintroduced the excessive, irrational, corporeal dimensions that a cold, dry analytic of ideology shunted aside. In a sense, this objection is fair: taking affect away from spectatorship studies, positioning affect as a matter of aesthetics, form, and structure, undeniably removes corporeality, experience, physicality, viscerality, and skin shudderings from the discussion. However, that objection cannot be the final word on the matter, for it assumes one great thing: that in advance we can know what the terms under its objection are; that we have already determined that forms and bodies have nothing to say to each other; that the question cannot be posed whether form can inform what it is to be, have, or fail to be or have a body. In other words, to assert that treating affect as a form ignores the body is to refuse to question what forms and bodies might mean to each other, what form might cause us to rethink about bodies, that form might deform matter or our theory of skin in productive ways—or whether, indeed, the body itself is a kind of form. Because form and affect have been taken as antonyms in the post-1970s battle over the discipline of film studies, this book will insist from the outset that *we have not yet asked enough of form;* that we do not know what forms are capable of; that in the

strident pulling apart of form and affect, it hitherto has been undetermined what the body can do to form and even what form can do to a body. Those matters become provocative only under the pressure of specific encounters between particular affects and distinct forms, which is to say, only through—and, yes, its labor involves detours, departures, unpredictable wandering—the unfoldments of close reading.

MISE-N'EN-SCÈNE: FORMALISM AFTER PRESENCE

The approach taken here, to link affect with textual form, is not without disciplinary precedent. However, to see this requires recovering a history of the study of affectivity that leaps back to before the "turn to affect" proper. Take V. I. Pudovkin's account of his most famous "experiment" with Lev Kuleshov, in which identical close-ups of the actor Ivan Mozzhukhin with the same impassive face ("quiet close-ups," says Pudovkin) were juxtaposed, in turn, with a plate of soup, a dead woman in a coffin, and a little girl playing, each of which in turn was praised by an audience for the emotional nuances of the actor's expressive faciality.[32] As early as these trials in the 1920s, emotion in cinema was unlinked from classical tropes of expressivity and communication, displaced onto the expressivity inherent in the plastic processes of montage. One could argue, indeed, that the entirety of Soviet montage filmwork and film theory was organized around an affective center: the enthusiasm and passion for montage itself, an affective *technē*. Nevertheless, Soviet montage retained an interest in examining how montage, in its juxtapositions and productive connections, acted on and worked over spectators. Eisenstein's theories of emotional intensity and film likewise retained an interest in exploring how affective jolts could be wrenched out of spectatorial bodies and minds.

Although amid Romantic views of the sentiments in film theory's brief history one can find treatments of affect that undermine the expressivity hypothesis, it is not until the insights of structuralist and, later, poststructuralist thought in film theory that its treatment takes the question of the subject out of the equation altogether. In 1970s film theory, attempts were made to consider affect independent of a subject under the guise of the theoretical concept of "excess." In some ways, this concept is a precursor to the idea of a formal affect. The term can be dated to Roland Barthes's treatment of *Ivan the Terrible* in "The Third Meaning." There, Barthes found that even when he had done away with the informational/semiotic level and the symbolic/signifying level, "I am still held by the image."[33] This third meaning, "evident,

erratic, obstinate"—linked so idiosyncratically to "a certain compactness of the courtiers' make-up"—exceeds generalizability and meaning, and yet it is there, compelling "an interrogative reading."[34] This excess is the theoretical precursor to Barthes's late work on the pleasures of the text and his final work on the photographic punctum in *Camera Lucida.* Exactly as "affect" does for theorists such as Shaviro, what excess undoes is a certain approach to theory; it remains with the stubbornly contingent "I," and what it "disturbs, sterilizes, is metalanguage (criticism)."[35]

The concept of excess spoke to the ways in which a text's contradictions, ruptures, and non-coherences could be more important to a reading than its apparent seamlessness. Although film theory, not unlike Barthes, moved between structuralist and poststructuralist phases, this insistence on the too-much dimension of films, the always-beyond quality that cannot be reduced to coded narrative structures, is a central poststructuralist problematic. In the history of film theory, one shorthand for this switch to poststructuralism would be the shift from codes-in-texts to texts-in-process. One could find multiple versions of this move in this large body of theoretical work, but Stephen Heath's was foundational and remains representative: "narrative can never contain the whole film which permanently exceeds its fictions."[36] Heath, influenced by the Barthes of *S/Z,* writes of the displacements of textual play, its shifts, processual slippages, and inevitable losses or failures. Such slidings produce gaps, rends, holes, contradictions, and an excess that works against organization, homogeneity and motivated representation—works, in other words, against the codes taken to systematize and order classical cinema. The excessive terms of a text are precisely those that lie outside of its unified structures, and thus it is with the turn to excess that film theory moved squarely to a decentered poststructuralist mode of reading. When I argue, then, that my project does not repudiate 1970s film theory but ana-theoretically returns to it, reexamines it to take it further, it is in part because the motivating principles of concepts such as excess can be put in productive dialogue with contemporary scholarship on affect. Theories of excess, however, were not without their problems, not least that they failed to generate inventive questions after the heyday of *Screen* theory. In addition, one can glimpse in excess theory the seeds of solipsistic or idiosyncratic reverie that would germinate into the full-blown indifference to theoretical reach in contemporary work on affect. "Excess," like "affect," was also routinely invoked in the singular, general, universal as the capacity of a text to fail in relation to structural systematicity. Thus, simply returning to excess cannot solve the problems borne out by affect today.

Of course, there has been some work on emotion in film studies that intertwines with formalist concerns. In his influential "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," Thomas Elsaesser focused on melos and pathos in relation to mise-en-scène. Although he is certainly a product of the ethos of 1970s film theory—attentive as the essay is to the Marxist and Freudian dynamics in the genre—Elsaesser is particularly sensitive to how the "dynamic use of spatial and musical categories" plays the spectator's emotions in a "subtle and yet precise formal language."[37] It is precisely work such as this that makes untenable any neat opposition between pre-affect film theory and pro-affect film theory, for it is not simply because his subject is the emotionally laden genre of melodrama that Elsaesser turns to emotion. Like more recent work on affect, Elsaesser approaches the melodramatic as having a resistant or disruptive charge against the more formal signifying material. His interest was in how melodrama functions as "a particular form of dramatic mise-en-scène," whereby style can puncture signification. Nonetheless, Elsaesser maintains the spectatorial assumptions of affect, writing of the "direct emotional involvement" and "identification patterns, empathy, and catharsis" of Hollywood cinema.[38] Thus, even in his productive attention to the importance of form for producing emotional effects, he does not take the next step and ask how form might imbue itself with intensities that are not teleological in their aim of moving an emotionally involved spectator. In the end, Elsaesser's interest was more in how ideological contradictions play out in the formal mise-en-scène than in how mise-en-scène might play out the forms of affects.

More recently, Anne Rutherford has attempted to cross the bridge between formal analysis and embodiment and affect. At first, she seems to move away from any intentional or humanist view of emotion when she writes of Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* that the "affective power of the film is neither equivalent to, nor dependent on, empathy."[39] But her objection is less to the communicative model of emotion than to its mental empathic organization; thus, she pulls affect back into a matter of spectatorship but relocates it in the corporeal self: "affective intensity is . . . diffracted, dispersed across all of the available sensory registers; it is not detachment that ensues, but a more embodied engagement."[40] To make this argument, Rutherford rehabilitates what she regards as the lost conceptual treasure of mise-en-scène analysis, unearthing in some of its earliest theorizations a richly affective emphasis. She extends, for example, Alexandre Astruc's understanding of mise-en-scène as "a conceptual process," quoting Astruc on how what seems to involve a fixity or determination (what is placed into the theatrical scene) actually involves

"interrogation and dialogue."[41] Astruc's materialist mise-en-scène entails "a certain way of extending states of mind into movements of the body. It is a song, a rhythm, a dance"—thus, its affective expressivity is not the movements of a mute collection of investments but itself an expenditure of energy and potentialities.[42] This kinetic engagement is ultimately aimed at an embodied viewer for Astruc—"the *mise en scene:* to make the spectator feel the moment of disequilibrium where everything suddenly falls apart"—thus, it does not move us far from the goal, aim and direction model of emotional intensity.[43] (Indeed, there is something in this account that calls into being three decades later the Deleuze of the *Cinema* books; when Astruc writes that mise-en-scène "is a look which forces people to act," he sounds a great deal like the philosopher of immanence and the sensory-motor schema.[44])

While Astruc's late-1950s model is an innovative reinvigoration of a concept taken for bruteness; while Elsaesser's early-1970s reading of style for its relation to emotion productively asks how form matters to feeling; and while Rutherford's early-2000s scholarship compellingly links together embodiment, affect, and an embodied, mobile mise-en-scène, each remains beholden to a model of emotional intensity that assumes its energetic vector leads to an energetic spectatorial sensorial reaction. Despite the value of these various turns to cinematic form, they remain invested in a functional and instrumentalized notion of it: as outwardly affective, spectatorially bound, and productive to analyze only insofar as it leads us to insight into how texts affect, move, displace, jerk, tear at, mimetically instruct or unnervingly unsettle bodies or subjects. Thus, even when form and affect have been considered together, the marked stubbornness of the theoretical interest in how form affects spectators ultimately has made the study of *affects* in the history of film theory into little more than the study of *effects*.

These accounts across half a century have one further shared problem: their treatment of mise-en-scène. It remains bound to sets, costumes, props, lighting, the battery of theatrically derived things-put-into-the-scene that passes for much visual analysis of film. Despite Astruc's interesting redescription of the term as processual—and despite Rutherford's analysis of "sounds, rhythms and colours" in relation to temporality—the turn to affective intensities has not troubled the logic of mise-en-scène as fundamentally a logic of *presence*. Form itself has not been sufficiently treated to a poststructuralist logic, form itself has not changed conceptions under the pressure of its encounter with affect, and what it is to read for form is taken for granted. If affect and form are to be ana-theoretically considered, one must attend to how

the terms speak back to theoretical modes of reading, change each other in their encounter, and even compel a grappling with things gone missing, with aspects of film that do not hold forth in advance and disclose their secrets as surface appearance or immediate impression. Mise-en-scène as a logic of presence is one powerful, pervasive way in which film theory remains on the side of metaphysically dominant terms. Accordingly, one sub-argument of this book is that the encounter between form and affect is a productive site for a critique of the metaphysics of film theory. One way that that critique takes place here is through a dismantling of presence as the founding given of formal analysis. Derrida's famous rereading of the absent origin in his critique of metaphysics suggests the new possibilities thusly afforded: "as a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediateness is thus the sad, *negative,* nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean *affirmation* . . . would be the other side."[45] This joyful critique asks us to think the absent center as something other than a loss, think loss as something other than an absence, and take seriously the creativity generated by affirming the undoing of presence. The critical imperative is a positive one: to imagine how new readings, and new possibilities for readings, are opened up by dismantling and expanding the terms by which an analysis of form may take place.

Though its appearance in this text is now long gone, the body cleaned and dried, the droplet lost in the shuffle of the cover-up: regard, one last time, the shower scene in *Psycho* and the tear that is not quite a tear. This tear that does not disclose its origin, aim, or ontology troubles, even refuses, the available models for thinking about affect in film theory and the theoretical humanities. Such a tear that does not drop but folds points to a subjectless affect, bound up in an exteriority, uncoupled from emotion, interiority, expressivity, mimesis, humanism, spectatorship, and bodies. It stands to reason that such a bead of resistance would press back not only against theoretical approaches to affect but against methods of cinematic interpretation as well. We must reconsider the plural ways one might read for cinematic form, refusing to assume that mise-en-scène holds to metaphysical logics. Mise-en-scène may be the foundational unit of formalist or neo-formalist analysis, but it is not the ground of radical formalism.

Freud taught us how to take grammar seriously. In his theorization of the *unheimlich* as naming what was once familiar and is now strange, he writes, "The prefix '*un*' is the token of repression."[46] In a similar fashion, in order to interrupt and complicate the assumption of formal analysis for presence, I

will insert the sign of negation into the building block of cinematic analysis: a little *n*. In bringing together form and affect, this book will read for what I am calling *mise-n'en-scène*. This phrase is a grammatical impossibility; it is an error in French. Fittingly untranslatable, the term is useful less for what it represents than for the possibilities it sets loose. Mise-n'en-scène suggests that in addition to reading for what is put into the scene, one must also read for all of its permutations: what is *not* put into the scene; what is put into the *non-scene*; and what is *not enough* put into the scene. Formal affects, affects with and in forms, affects after interiority and after spectatorship—these trouble the very philosophical binaries that hold apart presence and absence, interiority and exteriority, self and other, excretion and reception. It is only fitting to follow the logic of the fold into one that upsets a reading method that has only ever looked for presence and so often only found what it knew it would see. One critical pressure that affectivity in particular brings to bear on form is in the way that negative affects exert negative stresses on, even distentions of, cinematic construction, undoing grids, schemas, orderings, all aesthetic plans. The genealogy of non-unities written by an attention to the mise-n'en-scène is a fitting anti-narrative for an approach to form that reads for its impersonal impresence and structural destructurings.