

TEXT SUMMARY

In the first chapter, Massumi differentiates the quality of an image, that is the content of the image itself or its socio-linguistic understanding, and its intensity that is the strength or duration of its effect. Where the reception of qualification deploys itself in the depth of consciousness, the reception of intensity is autonomous from it, it is outside of the narrative continuity construct of the mind.

The levels of intensity and qualification resonate or interfere with each other. Intensity is a state of suspense, of potential disruption: it is to be linked with non-linear processes, whereas qualification connects with expectation.

He then explains how affect may be a key concept in understanding what he calls our information and image-based late-capitalist culture, but observes a lack of vocabulary specific to it in the cultural theory language which roots are strongly tied with structuralism. He concludes that an important point is the differentiation of emotion and affect: emotion is qualified intensity, its entry point into function and meaning.

In the second part of the essay, Massumi introduces the important notion of the virtual, which is a realm of potential. The coexistence in the body of the virtual and the actual is where the concept of affect finds its *raison d'être*, extending the body's activity and expressivity into an incorporeal dimension of potentiality. For Deleuze, affect can be understood as the turning point of potentiality or the "nonlinear causality underlying theories of complexity".

Massumi then explains the views of Gilbert Simondon, getting to the core of his own definition of affect: the "simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual", or "the virtual as point of view". Therefore the *autonomy* of affect is its participation in the virtual, or its ability to escape the body.

Massumi then moves to an analogy of affect with quantum mechanics in order to make a point against social constructivism or the theories diminishing nature as not having its own dynamics outside of discourse. For him, there is an important need to come up with a better theoretical articulation of the connection between nature and culture.

In the third part, Massumi takes Reagan as the personification of a then new political paradigm in which the operational deployment of affect, via the technologies of image transmission, the media and the American societal apparatuses, led to the rise of the virtual in postmodern politics. To him, the Reagan era was announcing our late-capitalist times, with for example the increasing fracturation of visual information in consumer oriented culture and the decrepitude of ideology as the core of power dynamics.

Finally in the last section, Massumi concludes his essay by pointing out the implications of affect as a transversal, key component to understand our late-capitalist system. A world where virtual indicators have overtaken rationality in economics and politics elevates affect as an important actor of reality.

DEVELOPMENT

Twenty years later, it is very easy to identify the current condition of image and information consumption as a natural extension of Massumi's observations of postmodern society. Indeed, we could describe our socio-political era as a flood of uncertainty, irrationality and ultimately, virtuality. This last term I think is central in understanding and expanding affect theory in the context of thinking about art. Getting into this domain I would like to use this quote by Marcel Duchamp: "It is not what you see that is art, art is the gap". In french he uses the term *trouée*, which has a property that cannot be extracted from the word gap: *trouée* indeed implies a physical gesture, it is the active quality of a gap.

I believe that in the age of infinite scroll, where the feed has replaced all other forms of information and radically transformed the temporality of life, this definition is more than ever significant. This condition is the definitive domination of affect under which the present has no more sovereignty over the mind. Our time is the annihilation of the present, the imperialism of the flux. In that context more than ever, what the artist must achieve is a *trouée*, to alter the virtuality of the ambient constructed reality to his own form of narrative.

In *trouée* there is also the idea of space. I have always been fascinated by the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana who, in the fifties and the sixties, developed his vocabulary with these simple, gestural interventions. In 1948 he wrote: "Art dies but is saved by gesture". Nowadays art is definitely dead again, commodified and integrated to the mechanisms of the system. See for example the hilarious but acid analysis of Beaubourg by Baudrillard in his *Simulacra and Simulation*. At the same time, when Joseph Beuys famously said "Everyone is an artist" in 1972, it was the emergence of video art, marking the beginning of the expansion of access to the tools of art-making. I'm thinking obviously of my generation's labor of designing, for example, instagram stories, to fill the infinite, ever-growing data centers of our digital culture. In a world where it has become mandatory to act both as artist and curator of his virtual identity, to participate in the global visual flux in which meaning has definitely less importance than intensity. This all makes affect a relevant filter to apprehend our world.

So, art is physically expanding but has never been weaker, it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Sixty years after Fontana, what gesture can save it ? I can't tell for sure. There are many potential strategies; playing with temporality is one. In my work, I have been exploring ways to reveal substructures of our image consumption and production¹. Either slowing things down or increasing visual speed makes it easy to reveal patterns and shift the audience's perception. As a last quote, Sjoerd van Tuinen writes in *The Cosmic Artisan: Mannerist Virtuosity and Contemporary Crafts* : "In a culture of rapid change, likewise, slow movement does not equal a lack of speed. Rather, slowing down is a particular assemblage of speed, an a-synchronisation of the present and thus a reclaiming of time from rational homogenisation". This is something I want to investigate.

¹ if you are curious, see:
www.consistentambivalence.com,
www.simplecorporateslideshow.com,
www.theoretical.fun