

**Halos: Making More Room in the World for New Political Orders**

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## **Introduction**

**This chapter represents a small part of a more general attempt to struggle over the hill of various Western philosophies, social sciences, and forms of politics in order to see a new, more open vista, one in which, through the articulation of an ontology of achievement, different associations are able to be made and made manifest, different togethernesses are thereby able to be forged, and different landscapes of possibility are subsequently able to be uncovered.**

**In order to limit what is clearly an enormous number of lines of enquiry I have therefore fixed upon just one aspect of this attempt, namely the politics of the imagination. However, I make no apologies for choosing this as my touchstone for different imaginative dispositions and propensities might well be thought of as the basis of political-moral authority<sup>1</sup>. For example, it can be argued that, if power means the capacity to make somebody do what she would not otherwise do, then whoever possesses the capacity to influence others' imaginations has a good deal of power. To put it another way, political power is not only about controlling the means of coercion, but also about controlling the means of imagination, where imagination is understood as the ability to express possible/play/pretend beliefs<sup>2</sup> and emotions that might become the basis of a better world. Equally, it is about working on so-called 'imaginative resistance', the possible beliefs and emotions that we resist imagining and accepting – either because we cannot imagine a possibility or because we do not want to imagine it (Nichols, 2006)<sup>3</sup>.**

**Most particularly, I want to express the significance of this political project through one particular unifying visual device - the halo -**

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, the imagination has routinely been figured as something that cannot be conventionally controlled but there are many reasons to think that this is only partially the case and that it can indeed be engineered, especially in an age of manufactured vision in which 'we now know ourselves in our mind's eye mostly by projecting a camera's eye view' (Warner, 2006, p).

<sup>2</sup> Imagination actually fires in the same area of the brain as belief and can generate equally strong affective reactions. Thus, most philosophers now count it as a 'distinct cognitive attitude', different from beliefs in some respects but not others.

<sup>3</sup> Imaginative resistance can range from simple presuppositions, such that nursery schoolrooms can be called a Kangaroo Room or a Bumblebee Room but not a Dung Beetle or a Vulture room, through more serious cases such as resisting stories in which female infanticide is counted as morally right to the resistance of the German population in the Second World War to thinking about the annihilation of the Jews (Herf, 2006).

which stands for a change in the nature of the spatial representation<sup>4</sup> of imagination, on the grounds that a good part of the political consists of the establishment of an effective imaginary (Castoriadis, 1997).

I will introduce the central conceit of the halo in the first part of the chapter. The three succeeding sections of the chapter then proceed to develop an argument through three different uses of the halo: as a means of approaching affective imitation and its ramifications, as a means of understanding the generation of semiotic intensity and thereby affective traps, and as the construction of forms of community which attempt to generate affective affinity in new ways. In each case, my purposes are political. Respectively, they are; to displace prevalent models of political activism, to understand new forms of inhabitation and their possibilities, and to generate new locatives.

### Halos

In using the device of the halo, I have three inter-related goals in mind. To begin with, I want to trace out some of the changes in the political contours of our time, but I will do so by understanding ‘social’ process as a mass of material entanglements slowly changing within daily practices, often without intentionality: ‘the mass seems to move with a life of its own. But the movement is built from the little micro-details of life ...’ (Hodder, 2006, p258). Specifically, I will be tracing out, perhaps in accelerated form, the further history of entanglement with material objects, a history in which these objects come to have greater and greater purchase on our lives, not only as the ability to construct continuity and to initiate change, but also as small things too easily forgotten (Deetz, 1996). At the same time, I have a second goal in mind, and that is pointing to certain ways in which Western academic thinking is fracturing, with interesting consequences. It is fracturing because it is realigning the roles of concepts, percepts, and affects, reworking space and time, and taking on new partners (animals, materials). The result is a different take on the human, society, and imagination which is difficult to disentangle but can perhaps be made sense of as a generator of different kinds of ‘radical’ politics (Tønder and Thomassen, 2005). The third goal arises out of the previous two. I want to think about the possibilities

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<sup>4</sup> I take representation here to be able to be understood as doings rather than a relation between an inner and an outer. Our basic grip on the world consists not of inside out but of representing deeds: deeds are themselves representational (Rowlands, 2006).

of new creatures, understood as new compounds<sup>5</sup> of life that act in unforeseen ways, and the new spaces in which such life can flourish, spaces which provide new lures to feeling, new powers to force thinking and invention, new schemes of purposefulness – or purposelessness – that can provide different means of moving us/them<sup>6</sup>. In particular, I want to think about the kinds of model of affective agency that might be possible and, simultaneously (since they cannot be understood apart) how they might be fostered by speculative spaces which call to, provoke and invoke these agents. In other words, I want to talk about new forms of intelligibility.

I will try to achieve these three goals by using the conceit of the halo – standing, in general, as a means of beginning the process of considering and constructing new imaginative plausibilities. More specifically, I will use the word ‘halo’ because it conjures up an image that has several kinds of grip. If I was to frame my argument in quasi-religious terms then what is being sought through the agency of the halo is a device which will not so much unite as bring into correspondence that which is different without trespassing on that difference and without trying to reduce what is puzzling to a predictable encounter. Rather, since ‘each party may entertain its own version of the agreement’ (Stengers, 2006, p20), the art is in the achievement itself. For my purposes the conceit of the halo opens up three specific dimensions of this art of achievement<sup>7</sup> (Stengers, 2006), each of which is important for what I want to lay out in front of you, namely, the emergence and nurturing of infectious relationships, the design of spaces of inhabitation as both semiotic intensities and affective traps (Gell, 1998), and the construction of new kinds of locative community.

### The First Halo

**In its most familiar guise, the halo is a staple of Christian religious iconography. Yet, the halo is pagan in origin. Many centuries before**

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<sup>5</sup> I prefer the word ‘compound’ to the word ‘hybrid’ because it implies familiar concepts fused rather than genuine concept creation.

<sup>6</sup> Or, as Stengers (2006) might have it, ‘I and I’.

<sup>7</sup> And achievement of the kind that I want to describe requires diplomacy. As Stengers (2006, p20) puts it, intent on describing the practice of shuttling between parties that disagree, ‘the art of diplomacy does not refer to goodwill, togetherness, the sharing of a common language or an intersubjective understanding. Neither is it a matter of negotiation between flexible humans who should be ready to adapt as the situation changes. It is an art of artificial arrangements that do not exhibit a deeper truth than their very achievement – the vent of an articulation between protagonists constrained by diverging attachments and obligations in situations where contradiction seems to rule, a rhizomatic event without a ground to justify it, or an ideal from which to deduce it’.

Christ, it is thought that various peoples of the Mediterranean decorated their heads with a crown of feathers (Fisher, 1995). "They did so to symbolize their relationship with the sun-god: their own 'halo' of feathers representing the fan of beams splaying out from the shining divinity in the sky. Indeed, people came to believe that by adopting such a 'nimbus' men turned into a kind of sun themselves and into a divine being." Various Pharaohs and Emperors followed suit. Later, the halo appeared in the art culture of Ancient Greece and Rome<sup>8</sup>, before being incorporated into Christian art sometime during the fourth century, adorning first Christ, later angels, and eventually saints<sup>9</sup>. Subsequently, the halo has had a rich history as the aureole that appears to emanate from beings of particularly intense spirituality, a history with its own shifts in representation – for example, during the Renaissance, when rigorous perspective became essential, the halo changed from an aura surrounding the head to a tilting disc that appeared in perspective, floating above the heads of saints, and then to a thin ring of light<sup>10</sup>. In later work, haloes would often appear by allusion or insinuation - as a circular pattern that falls behind a head, or as an arc of a doorway.

In this chapter, I want to understand the halo, first of all, as signifying the construction of new forms of empathy, that are simultaneously acts of identification with the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another and the imaginative ascription to a natural object or a work of art of feelings or attitudes considered to be present in oneself. The reason is that I think that something quite interesting is happening in Western thinking of late. It is, I believe, a result of the joining of certain strands of thought as a result of more general changes taking place in the nature of the apprehension of space, thus pointing the way to a new kind of political settlement, one which might allow a different kind of spiritedness to emanate, one based on an ethos of craftsmanship of the moment that can produce

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<sup>8</sup> As the Roman emperors began to think of themselves as divine beings, they wore a crown in public to imitate the sphere of light from the sun.

<sup>9</sup> Here, the halo could have a very detailed iconography. Thus, round halos were used to signify saints. A cross within a halo was used to signify Jesus. Triangular halos were used for representations of the Trinity. Square halos were used to depict unusually saintly living persons, still bound to earth and so not able to obtain the perfection of the circle. Allegorical figures such as the virtues wear hexagonal haloes. And so on (Fisher, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> But it is important to point out that the halo is not confined to Western religious history. For example, it has been widely used in various forms of Buddhist iconography since at least the first century AD to depict the Buddha or Buddhist saints, a direct importation from the West to the East.

**‘instant’ affective communities. In making this claim, I therefore want the halo to stand for an affective ambition which is the achievement of an infectious relationship.**

**To stake this particular claim, I want to fix on the haloes to be found in the works of one the very finest orchestrators of glances, gazes, and stares, namely Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337). I will start by examining one of Giotto’s remarkable frescoes, The Meeting at the Golden Gate<sup>11</sup>. In this fresco, the ageing Joachim and Anna, Mary’s mother and father to be, look each other straight in the eye in an atmosphere of solidity and stability. The halo which unites them is an expression of this atmosphere of happy encounter. Nothing could be more different in another of Giotto’s other finest frescoes, The Betrayal of Christ. There, only Jesus and Peter have haloes. Judas does not: he remains a lonely and inner-directed subject, cut off from the affective flow. But I do not want to draw the obvious conclusions here about Euro-American Cartesian subjectivities, and the like. Rather, I want to fix on the face and how it is figured in these and other representations.**

**The uncanny semaphore of the face is a crucial element in both paintings and it will be an important recurring motif in this paper. After all, ‘the living face is the most important and mysterious surface we deal with ... Babies just nine minutes old who have never seen a human countenance, prefer a face pattern to a blank or scrambled one’ (McNeill, 1998, p4). Almost from birth, the gaze is fixed on the face, especially the eyes, as the baby constructs joint attention and intentional understanding (Eilan, Hoerl, McCormack, and Roessler, 2005). In other words, the face, like language, is an aspect of public thought.**

**That fact can be illustrated in three ways. First, faces are one of the chief means by which affect is generated in the world. Their 46 separate muscles, the eyes, the mouth, the nose and the ears allow a range of expression which is without peer in the natural world and they produce or certainly enable many of the characteristics which are most notably human. Second, there is a history of the representation of the face. Certain facial states come to be increasingly represented over the course of history. For example, the smile figures more and more as a result of the increasing portrayal of the open mouth from the eighteenth century onwards due to changes in social attitude – and better dentistry! (Jones, 2005). Third, there is**

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<sup>11</sup> The example is taken from Sloterdijk, 1998.

**a technical history of the face, perhaps best illustrated by the history of cinema and its effects on our perception. For example, the close-up is a crucial way station in the history of the modern face, providing new means of attending to the face and new possibilities for relation, not least those arising out of the close-up's peculiar ability to generate both intimacy and threat, not least as a disembodied affect. The face itself becomes a frame but it can also be located outside the subject in the world of technically assembled images (Hansen, 2004). What seems evident is that the face is a crucial element of politics and the political. It was always thus, one might say. But the modern media have extended the range of body language in ways hitherto unforeseen, most especially by providing a set of stock affective scripts for which the face provides both the template and the chief means of operating<sup>12</sup>.**

**Most importantly, of course, the face is our chief means for producing and scripting affective effects. Through its medium, we exercise the capacity for mindreading that probably does most to distinguish us from animals<sup>13</sup>. Other creatures undoubtedly have pains, expectations, and emotions but having a mental state and representing another individual as having such a state is a second-order phenomenon which, so far as we can tell, other creatures do not have or have in an attenuated form (Grandin, 2005, Hurley, 2006)<sup>14</sup>. Currently, the favoured explanation for mindreading is the so-called simulation explanation which effectively argues that;**

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<sup>12</sup> As this instance shows, the idea that a politics of radical difference has to entail a choice between networks of signification or networks of embodied matter seems overdone. Rather, recent work argues that embodied matter always has sign content (Wheeler, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> It is now generally accepted that the brain developed in response to and as a function of social interaction and especially the ascription of intention - that is the attribution of actions, motives, intentions, and beliefs to fellow interactants - and that what we perceive is set up by the wiring of interaction produced by the set of most notably human abilities that plausibly evolved together, all of which were boosted by the enhanced communicative interaction arising from the paraphernalia of language - parsing, turn-taking, repair, and the like. The brain, in other words, has become an instrument of shared activity - an interaction engine (Enfield and Levinson, 2006) - rather than an individual setting. And, within broad parameters, this shared activity is remarkably heterogeneous, aided by the fact that the brain is in any case plastic so that particular experiences of shared activity act in particular ways, by the fact that systems of shared activity generate emergent properties and by the fact that cultural variation is therefore more than just incidental but central to how interaction.

<sup>14</sup> Although, periodically, an animal will be found that has some of these features. For example, most recently, Dally et al (2006) found that Western scrubjays can keep track of which birds were watching them and what they might be thinking. If another scrubjays sees them hiding food, they move this stash when that particular bird is not present. They can distinguish individuals and imply a motivation: the desire to steal their hoard.

**People fix their targets' mental states by trying to replicate or emulate them. It says that mindreading includes a crucial role for putting oneself in others' shoes. It may even be part of the brain's design to generate mental states that match, or resonate with, states of people one is observing. Thus mindreading is an extended form of empathy (Goldman, 2006. p4).**

**In turn, the phenomenon of mindreading points to the importance of what I have called the infectious relationship, founded in the production of chains of imitation. This is a phenomenon that was noted early in the history of philosophy and psychology. For example, both Hume and Smith detected it in their writings on sympathy. In particular, understanding infectious relationships means understanding affective contagion, a central concern of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century social science in the form of the study of imitation and suggestibility. Imitation and suggestibility took shape as particular kinds of object through a hypnotic paradigm which was worked out through an interest in particular forms of psychopathology (such as hallucinations and delusions), even an interest in spiritualist forms of communication (Blum, 2007). Imitation and suggestibility were sites for exploring all manner of issues, such as consciousness, memory, personality, and communication. In particular they signified a 'taking over' of the subject that defied normal economies of subject-object relations. However, subsequently, a move to psychoanalytic models of desire, or to more discursive approaches to subjectivity, ruled imitation and suggestibility out of court and they fell into disrepair as a way of approaching social structuring.**

**But, of late, imitation and suggestibility have been making a return, boosted especially by the rediscovery of the work of Gabriel Tarde on a somnambulist society and more general work on the construction of collective intelligence. Within cultural theory, viral models of contagion have been posited as explaining the workings of a range of phenomena, including ideology, governance, self-cultivation, and even resistance but often in highly speculative ways that posit a kind of performative energetics without specifying what the source, content or form of that energy might be.**

**What do we know about affective contagion (Thrift, 2007)? To begin with, it means understanding affect as in large part a biological**

phenomenon, involving embodiment<sup>15</sup> in its many incarnations, but a phenomenon that is not easily captured via specular-theatrical theories of representation (Brennan, 2004, Gumbrecht, 2004). It brings together a mix of a hormonal flux, body language, shared rhythms, and other forms of entrainment (Parkes and Thrift, 1979, 1980) to produce an encounter between the body (understood in a broad sense) and the particular event. Thus, affective contagion is best understood as a set of flows moving in a semiconscious fashion through the bodies of human and other beings, not least because bodies are not primarily centred repositories of knowledge – originators - but rather receivers and transmitters, ceaselessly moving messages of various kinds on; the human being is primarily ‘a receiver and interpreter of feelings, affects, attentive energy’ (Brennan, 2004, p87).

This understanding points in turn to one more important aspect of affective contagion, namely the importance of space, understood as a series of conditioning environments that both prime and ‘cook’ affect. Such environments depend upon pre-discursive ways of proceeding which both produce and allow changes in bodily state to occur (Thrift, 2006). Changes in bodily state require understanding that essentially autonomic hormonal and muscular reactions are continually transferring between people (and things) in ways that are often difficult to track. At the same time, they challenge the idea that the body is a fixed component of humanity. Humans might be more accurately likened to schools of fish briefly stabilised by particular spaces, temporary solidifications of affective pulses, most especially as devices like books, screens and the internet act as new kinds of neural pathway, transmitting faces and stances (as well as discourse<sup>16</sup>), and providing myriad opportunities to forge new reflexes.

Thus, concentrating on infectious relationships requires a cartographic imagination in order to map out the movement between corporeal states of being which is simultaneously a change in connectivity. But only a very limited range of spatial models currently exist which can understand flows of imitation/suggestion. Alongside familiar cartographic motifs from diffusion studies, these

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that in this paper I will be taking embodiment to be a linked, hybrid field of flesh and accompanying objects, rather than a series of individual bodies, intersubjectively linked. I take the presence of objects to be particularly important because they provide new means of linkage (Zielinski, 2005) – new folds, if you like.

<sup>16</sup> For example, it is possible to write about the history of facial expressions like the smile (Trumble, 2003) because media have been invented which can transmit these expressions.

include certain very general metaphors that have arisen from the recent emphasis in social theory on mobility, a range of ways of staging space to conduct affect that can be found in performance studies, a set of artistic experiments with sites of affective imitation, often using the possibilities of modern electronic media, and various kinds of conversation maps (Abrams and Hall, 2006). However, it is also clear that certain technological advances, and especially those to do with mobile telephony and the web, are making it easier to visualise flows of imitation, not least because they are themselves prime conductors.

Now we can also add in what we currently know about imitation and suggestibility. For imitation has become a paramount concern of the contemporary cognitive sciences, and this work is worth exploring in a little more detail, since it contains many insights. In particular, imitation is now understood as a higher level cognitive function<sup>17</sup>, mirroring both the means and ends of action, and highly dependent upon the empathy generated in an intersubjective information space that supports automatic identifications. For example, just as Hume and Smith might have predicted, hearing an expression of anger increases the activation of muscles used to express anger in others, especially those muscles to be found in the face. There is, in fact, only a delicate separation between one's own mental life and that of another, so that affective contagion is the norm, not an outlier. What differs between different cultures is rather what is regarded as the result of agency. Thus, for Western cultures it can be a painful realization to understand how little of our thinking and emotions can in any way be ascribed as 'ours'; it is very hard for Westerners to accept that broad imitative tendencies apply to themselves, both because they are unconscious and automatic and because the preponderance of apparently 'external' influences threatens the prevailing model of an agent as being in conscious control of themselves.

At the same time, it is important to stress that imitation is more than mere emulation. Imitation is different from simple emulation in that it depends upon an enhanced capacity for anticipation, so-called mind-reading (Thrift, 2006b)<sup>18</sup>. In particular, much of human beings

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<sup>17</sup> Thus, imitation has proved to be the rarer and cognitively more demanding ability in animals than trial and error.

<sup>18</sup> There is, of course, a lively debate in the cognitive sciences and primatology about what exactly is meant by mind-reading (so, for example, some would have it that it requires the construction of full-blown beliefs about others' cognitive states, for example, something I think unlikely). And equally how far it stretches. (so, for example, some apparent mind-reading might consist of sophisticated behaviour

capacity for mind-reading (whether this be characterised as inference or simulation) develops over years of interaction between infants and their environments, and involves processing the other as ‘like me’, and the consequent construction of high-level hypotheses like deception. That is, it involves a form of grasping which is innately physical and non-representational since our privileged access is to the world, not to our own minds.

What seems clear, then, is that human beings have a default capacity to imitate, automatically and unconsciously, in ways that their deliberate pursuit of goals can override but not explain. In other words, most of the time they do not even know they are imitating. Yet, at the same time, this is not just motivational inertness. It involves, for example, mechanisms of inhibition, many of which are cultural<sup>19</sup>.

So it is that imitation generates a spectrum of affective states and most especially empathy, not only because the self-other divide can be seen to be remarkably porous but also because across it constantly flow all kinds of emotional signals. But this is a kinetic empathy, of the kind often pointed to in dance, a kinaesthetic awareness/imitation which is both the means by which the body experiences itself kinaesthetically and also how it apprehends other bodies (Foster, 2002).

Having considered the infectious relationship through the medium of the face, I also want to use Giotto’s Christian iconography of Joachim and Anna’s gentle gaze to reflect upon the possibility of forming new kinds of activist which are not the militant, even martial activists we have too often lighted on: those who are ‘self-confident and free of worry, capable of vigorous, wilful activity’ (Walzer, 1988, p313). In particular, I want to get away from the remains of the model of what Benasayag calls the ‘sad activist’, always intent on configuring a centre from which to think radical practices (Collectivo Situaciones), a model which puts so many off – not just the committed but also the uncommitted, for whom it can often appear that activists are ‘know-it-alls’ (Eliasoph, 1998). In other words, I want to talk about how it might be possible to face up to the world by generating

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programmes). But, as Sterelny (2003, p65) puts it, though imitation may not always be a ‘theory of mind task, it is a cognitively sophisticated one’.

<sup>19</sup> It may even be, following Tarde, that memory and habit are forms of imitation: ‘engaged in either, we in fact imitate ourselves, instead of another person: memory recalls a mental image, much as habit repeats an action’ (Potolsky, 2006, p116).

new models of the activist which are not like Walzer's constant hero strong of mind and will and which may well be more effective for that in their desire to generate affective affinities which are open-ended, emergent capacities to empower, rather than fixed programmes which can be handed down.

Most particularly, I want to think about generating new moral-political stances (using this word to point towards the political and the spatial as aspects of each other) which express a different model of the political subject, stances which blur the boundary between mover and moved<sup>20</sup> which is so crucial to prevailing models of active agency. The feminist literature (especially the literature on feminine nature), anthropologists, and others have been attempting this re-engineering of the subject over many years and it raises intriguing questions about many things we hold dear. Specifically, does passivity have virtues as a means of seeking political change?

In the midst of current world events, this question will no doubt sound discordant but passivity, or so it seems to me, points to a different way of doing things, one which dates from early modern times, and one which relies upon a very different model of agency and a very different rhetoric of passions, both of which are dependent upon understanding subjects as transmitters and receivers of infectious relationships. So far as the model of agency is concerned it is crucial to understand that for 'new creatures';

Agency admits of more positions than 'autonomous agent ... In addition to the autonomous agent undermined by recent discourses, an 'agent' can also refer to one who acts for another ... This deputized 'agent' is not a 'sovereign ruler' but a subject licensed by another authority to perform predetermined actions. The gap between 'agent' and 'autonomous agent' is crucial to seventeenth-century writers, who often deny 'autonomy' but insist on 'agency', both descriptively (each individual has agency) and prescriptively (all individuals must act in the world). As 'agents' or 'instruments' of another, individuals are simultaneously 'acted by another', in Thomas Hooker's phrase, and enabled to act in the world. 'Acted upon, we act,' summarizes John Cotton. These writers desire agency only insofar as it differs from autonomy: they desire not 'shaping power' over their identities

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<sup>20</sup> This distinction can be traced back to Aristotle.

and actions but to be shaped by another power (Gordon, 2002, p23).

So far as the rhetoric of passions goes, what is important in becoming a new creature is the mobilization of passions like pride and humility politically, ‘with the apparently ‘active’ vice of pride condemned for its ineffectiveness and the ‘passive’ virtue of humility serving the most dramatic revolutionary ends’ (Gross, 2006, p110). The religious model of a radical that was prevalent in the early modern period was connected to the practice of a feminized humility: the agent was an instrument, ‘the product of humiliation, anxiety, and soulful, feminine passivity, in the best sense of the word’ (Gross, 2006, p93), an agent ‘humiliated for collective sins past and reformed for the time to come’: this is a ‘feminine’ passivity but not, I hasten to add, in any pejorative sense. It is fragility as a precondition of grace, passivity as a precondition of change.

What difference might this make? I am not sure. But take one classic example of a moral-political code in which the model of a constant, militant hero currently holds sway: courage and bravery<sup>21</sup>. Yet such a model varies markedly from what is considered seemly in other cultures. Our model of courage and bravery has its genesis in Greek notions of character. For example, for Aristotle, for every character trait, there is a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency.

Aristotle says that true excellences of character – what are called the virtues – have in common that they strike the mean between excess and defect. Given a particular life-challenge, a courageous person will act in a way that avoids the excess of foolhardy recklessness, on the one hand, but also the defect of cowardliness, on the other. The courageous person will in any given circumstances, be able to find an appropriate way to behave courageously. That is what it is to strike the mean: to find an appropriate way to behave in circumstances in which it is possible to do too much or too little (Lear, 2006, p17).

In other words, bravery is a virtue falling somewhere between rashness (bravery in excess) and cowardice (bravery in deficit)<sup>22</sup>. But what constitutes bravery and what constitutes too much or too little

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<sup>21</sup> Any web search for courage or bravery immediately produces vast numbers of military examples, showing the centrality of this conception of courage and bravery to our judgements.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle does not mean that bravery is simply an average. Rather, the golden mean is different for each person, depending on their character and situation.

of it varies massively across cultures and through time. Since for much of the time bravery and courage are clearly forms of ‘thinking without words’ (Bermúdez, 2003), depending very much on taking a stance to a situation, they rely upon material symbols arranged as determinate spatial patterns for articulation. In other words, bravery and courage tend to be carried in particular material cultures which both illustrate and compound particular convictions: materials matter. I want to highlight two particular, contrasting examples of material cultures of bravery and courage, in which these virtues are thought through and as particular exceptional things/spaces, to make this point (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, 2007)<sup>23</sup>.

For the warlike North American Crow, to take one instance, bravery was materialized in the, to us, excessive practice of counting coup by planting coup sticks, that is, tapping an enemy with a coup-stick before killing him<sup>24</sup>, and then counting the coup in a ceremony after the incident in the form of a feather for each incident, which could be worn in the hair or on a shield. But this was a particular kind of bravery<sup>25</sup>.

Obviously, the practice of counting coups valorized bravery – a trait that was necessary for the Crow to survive. Honor was accorded to the brave men, along with access to women, extra food, and other material benefits. Imaginative-desiring-erotic-honor-seeking-life was organized around this kind of bravery. ... If the survival of the Crow tribe as a social unit had been the primary good, one might expect that the highest honor would go to the warrior who killed the first enemy in battle, or the warrior who killed the most. But to count coup it was crucial that, at least for the moment, one avoided killing the enemy. There is a certain symbolic excess in counting coups. One needed not only to destroy the enemy; it was crucial that the enemy recognize that he was about to be destroyed (Lear, 2006, p15-16).

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<sup>23</sup> I could no doubt have chosen other examples – the warlike honour code of the Pushtun comes to mind as does the history of Gandhian non-violence but these two examples seem to me to be striking enough to make the point.

<sup>24</sup> Counting coup could also mean taking an enemy’s weapons while he was still alive, striking the first enemy to fall in battle, no matter who killed him, stealing a horse tied up in an enemy’s camp, and so on.

<sup>25</sup> Crow culture was, for all intents and purposes, annihilated when the US government not only killed many of the tribe but also crushed the space in which Crow meanings might survive unchallenged, the very intelligibility of the terms in which people understood things to be happening – for example, by equating making away with an enemy’s horse with horse stealing.

Take another instance. But here, the example is passive and arises out of a long tradition of non-violence, or, more accurately perhaps, the bravery of hesitation. I am thinking here, in particular, of standards of excellence lived by and instantiated in the Quakers.

If hesitation gathers practitioners, it is because rules and norms are discursive expressions tentatively formulating something that has no definitive, authoritative formulation and, hence, does not communicate with obedience – which I call ‘obligations’. Obligations communicate with the possibility of their betrayal. If ever a practice exhibited this possibility, it is that of the Quakers who ... did not quake in front of their God, but in front of the possibility of silencing what was asked of them in a particular situation, answering it in terms of pre-set beliefs and convictions (Stengers, 2006, p11).

Just like the Crow culture of bravery, so the Quaker culture of bravery is instituted by a material culture: the material interface is the meeting house which affirms the value of hesitation through the construction of an absolutely democratic space. In particular, the early North American meeting houses were built to a circular plan, thus producing an egalitarian acoustic in which everyone could be heard with the same volume wherever they spoke in the building (Rath, 2003).

These are radically different, even opposed examples. But, in combination with the previous discussion of passivity, they lead to some intriguing questions. What should we count as bravery? Is there a political economy of bravery? Might it be possible to re-engineer bravery towards a ‘passive’ affective model again, so that many more exemplary acts could be included?<sup>26</sup> What kind of material culture would be able to achieve this? What does bravery look like in a conglomerate of relationships which includes all manner of material and animal correspondents? Whatever the answer might be, space will be key, and so it is to space that I now turn, and especially to the multifarious spaces being formed by various forms of contemporary information technology, and most

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<sup>26</sup> I am thinking here of movements like the International Solidarity Movement which produced ‘passive’ heroes and heroines like Tom Hurdall and Rachel Corrie. ‘Their acts of solidarity articulate a practical riposte to the despairing twentieth-century voices that wanted to discredit this sort of gesture by arguing that the openness and undifferentiated love from which it derives is tainted, ignoble, and unpolitical’ (Gilroy, 2004, p90) It also points to another Halo: the Halo Landmines Trust.

especially to the spaces being formed by ubiquitous/ambient/pervasive/persistent interfaces of various kinds, interfaces with which it is possible to have unconscious or semiconscious relationships (Bickmore and Picard, 2005).

### The Second Halo

Nowadays, the word halo means as much to a Western audience as a best-selling series of computer games and associated comics<sup>27</sup> and graphic novels<sup>28</sup>, with a fanatical – and I do mean fanatical - fan-base. Based on the old science fiction conceit of humans versus aliens on a halo-like ringworld, the Halo series first appeared in 2001, very much associated with the co-operation between Microsoft's X-Box<sup>29</sup> and the games developer, Bungie Studios, and will reach Halo 3 in the last quarter of 2007. To give some indication of the popularity of this series, Halo 2, launched in 2004, has sold more than seven million copies worldwide so far. In all, 14.7 million copies of Halo titles have so far been sold and more than 800 million hours of the online element of the Halo 2 game have been played.

Halo signifies the construction of world upon world. It is a series of terraforms, models of possible worlds<sup>30</sup>. This seems extraordinarily important to me in that it presages the kind of world that is now coming into being, one based upon new disciplines like reflexive architecture, interaction design, environment art, and various forms of gaming which aim to re-design interaction. These disciplines allow passions that would have been difficult to express collectively to come into being through the design of new kinds of environments – synthetic worlds - that both facilitate play and close it down. I think it is no coincidence that there is currently so much attention being paid to new, more active forms of materiality: in a sense, these are the building projects of the twenty-first century since they presage a time when 'there really is no barrier to a complete translation of every human interpersonal phenomenon on Earth into the digital space' (Castronova 2006, p48) with all manner of results, from new zones of economic activity through to new forums for interaction. After all, as Castronova (2006, p69) puts it; 'What happens in these worlds is not just play, and not just communication. It is a complex thing, a combination of real interaction and a play-like context'.

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<sup>27</sup> Halo was also a fictional superheroine published by DC Comics in the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>28</sup> A film is also planned for 2008, with the involvement of Peter Jackson.

<sup>29</sup> Although there are PC and Macintosh versions.

<sup>30</sup> 'Art was intended to prepare and name a future world: today it is modelling possible universes' (Bourriaud, 1998)

Thus, in Halo, the purpose of the game is to move the characters through vast outdoor and indoor environments that have been imagined in great detail. Whilst the environments are designed by concept artists and executed by teams of designers who want to make these worlds ‘look and feel real’ (Trautmann, 2004, p71), they are also open to fan feedback. The environments are themselves characters in the game, what the designers call ‘silent cartographers’. Objects are always also locations. What we see is the construction of new fields of occurrences and the construction of new entities that can count as events (Newman and Simons, 2007).

I want to suggest that Halo stands for a particular aspect of the modern world, namely a shift in the nature of mediation towards ‘worlding’ enabled by new material cultures which allow the affective priming of space to be systematized in ways which were not possible before. The game is symptomatic of the new ‘stickiness’ that is now possible in three ways.

At one level, it stands for how modern business has moved on from a focus on producing objects to a focus on producing worlds which must also inevitably be spaces. Thus, the business enterprise does not create its object but the world within which the object exists. As a corollary, the business enterprise does not create its subjects (as happened in the older disciplinary regimens) but the world within which the subject exists. As Lazzarato (2006, p188) puts it:

The company produces a world. In its logic, the service or the product, just as the consumer or the worker, must correspond to this world; and this world in its turn has to be inscribed in the souls and bodies of consumers and workers. This inscription takes place through techniques that are no longer exclusively disciplinary. Within contemporary capitalism the company does not exist outside the producers or consumers who express it. Its world, its objectivity, its reality, merges with the relationships enterprises, workers and consumers have with each other.

The corporate aim is to produce and harvest what might be called decisive moments of affectively inspired semiosis which can be played in to through the re-design of environments. Such engrossing moments have a deeply engrained cultural history, of course. The decisive moment was, in large part, an invention of Renaissance

painters trying to depict major turning points in history. They would build up scenes in great detail in which the disposition of every person and object counted as a part of a moment straining towards realisation. The motif was subsequently taken up by photographers, and especially photojournalists. Famously, for Henri Cartier-Bresson, the decisive moment (the title of his exhibit at the Louvre, the first photographic show ever to be so honoured) was the instant when a shutter click can suspend an everyday event within the eye and heart of the beholder producing a confluence of observer and observed. It is the ‘simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organization of forms which gives that event its proper expression’ (Cartier-Bresson, 19 in). Then, the decisive moment is still very much a mainstay of modern drama and, most obviously, in film. Cinema can be understood as a series of practical meditations on summoning up decisive moments: ‘truth 24 times a second’, as Godard (cited in Mulvey, 2006, p15) once put it. Cinema is able to produce not just speed but delay and deferral, preserving the moment at which the image is first registered in a kind of extended present.

On another closely related level, I argue that this game is symptomatic of the general rise of suggestible environments which can act to concentrate and guide infectious encounter by constructing traps for the affective flow of everyday life<sup>31</sup>. In turn, encounter can become specie, an insight that is drawn from the final writings of Althusser (2006) in which he refers to the genesis of a state of encounter, in which encounter is more and more able to be engineered so that it can be thought of as a kind of currency with a face value. But perhaps, rather than drawing on a monetary metaphor, a metaphor of cultivation might be more appropriate. For there seems to me to be a direct line of descent between the knowledges of semiotic arrangement and disposition that landscape gardeners like Humphrey Repton thought to be so crucial to their art of making fictions manifest and the games of today<sup>32</sup>. These knowledges of arrangement and disposition are currently going through a new round of both strengthening and extension as evidenced by, for example, the general rise in cartographic awareness in all spheres of life and most especially by the experimentation with new forms of inter-relation between mapping and the senses (e.g.

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<sup>31</sup> To some degree, large cities have always acted in this way, allowing ‘epidemics’ of imitation to be marshalled and directed but what I am suggesting is something with a much greater element of design.

<sup>32</sup> If Repton had been alive today, I suspect he would have been hard at work designing games.

Jones, 2006) which are allowing infectious relationships to be both represented and engineered as never before.

On a final level, these heavily corporatised suggestible environments signify a new sense of narrative which is not linearized (Fleming, 2001). A good example of this sense of narrative is provided by many modern games-influenced movies. Take Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men's Chest;

the film has no concern with cogent storytelling, and neither do today's youngsters. For them, fiction, like gaming, is an eternal present and plots a perpetuum mobile. The only narrative is to get to the next level. So while *Pirates 2* spools for older people like a story whose reels have been muddled – a nightmare of botched narrative – for children and young adults, up to say, 20, the film advances to higher things on stepping stones of incremental surrealism (Andrews, 2006, p51).

Derrida spent a considerable period of his career considering the way in which writing had imposed a particular form of linearization of time and space upon the world which was, in effect, the infolding of space and time known as 'book'. But Derrida was at pains to point out that linearization represents 'only a particular model, whatever might be its privilege' and he notes the increasingly obvious inadequacy of this model of arrangement to the 'delinearized temporality' and 'pluri-dimensionality' of contemporary thought; 'what is thought today cannot be written according to the line and the book, except by imitating the operation implicit in teaching modern mathematics with an abacus' (Derrida, 1988, p) The linearization provided by writing and its consequent inadequacy for certain kinds of thought can be thrown into relief by writing schemes that do not deploy the linear norm<sup>33</sup>, so-called non-discursive writings. There are many of these emblematic genres. For example, take the language of flowers, an early modern schema which used a variety of somatic registers – layout (eg the circumference), colour, texture, smell - through which to display the special indistinction between natural objects and rhetorical figures (Fleming, 2001). This language made its way into many aspects of life as actual material objects, each of them understandable as utterances, from posy rings to nosegays, in a society which associated flowers with moral and

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<sup>33</sup> This is to ignore the fact of where the act of writing took place in early modern England, which Fleming (2001) has argued was predominantly not in books but on walls and everyday material objects like pots.

other qualities. Viewed from our current perspective, such schemas as the language of flowers may appear to be inefficient codes, impoverished by a general lack of grammar and an unregulated three-dimensional, multi-sensory syntax which ‘cannot be further combined into a restricted and therefore consequential utterance’ (Fleming, 2001).

But, equally, from the perspective on linear narrative that is offered by some of the current developments, it is conceivable that a new forms of narrative will be generated that is very close in form to the premodern prototype, one in which conviction is carried in material objects and actions (rather than what today is called the mind). Further, this is a sense of the world in which non-discursive writing is not readily distinguished from other human-made or naturally recurring patterns, wherein lies the recalcitrance to full referentiality which constitutes its particular force<sup>34</sup>.

This ambition is incarnated in Erasmus’s celebrated description of a country house<sup>35</sup> in which the walls, doors, galleries, flowerbeds and wine cups are all decorated with improving messages, an imaginative development intended to move on from the extant holders and transmitters of religious knowledge like the stained glass window to something all-encompassing.

‘Who could be bored in this house’, asks one guest, when among so many painted forms there is ‘nothing inactive, nothing that is not saying or doing something?’ Writing is positioned throughout the house and gardens to catch at the eye and activate the memory: religious texts and images remind the host and his guests of the way to salvation, and encourage them to pray; emblematic plants and animals carry various moral lessons; and painted birds and other trompe l’oeil effects cause wonder at ‘the cleverness of nature ... the

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<sup>34</sup> This is, of course, a sense of the world that has long been familiar to anthropologists and archaeologists in cultures where symbolism and daily life are intertwined in a network of entanglements which are both means of empowerment and dependencies, typified by Hodder’s recent (2006) study of Catalhöyük with its sheer amount of elaborate wall art, stimulated by a lime-rich plaster that needed continual resurfacing and might be thought of as a prototype of the constantly refreshed screen.

<sup>35</sup> In fact, in 200 four artists did construct a philosophical garden as an appendage to Erasmus’s herb garden in Anderlecht which is constructed on these premises, taking the text ‘The Religious banquet’ as the key.

inventiveness of the painter, [and] in each the goodness of God' (Fleming, 2001, pp139-140).

And it has never quite left the world. As Derrida put it, the linear norm 'was never able to impose itself absolutely', not just because acts of cognition can occur outside it but because the linear norm is set to function as a limit and so opens the very questions it appears to close: the contingencies of graphic phoneticism, and the philosophical system that relies on it, depend upon an imposition that leaves in its wake all kinds of out of sequence gatherings that cannot be made to fit and that might be made to remind readers of the material practices that went into the production of the text. The ambition was kept in gardening, in some aspects of folk design, in parts of architecture. But there is more to this fugitive history. To illustrate this, I want to begin with Charleston House in Sussex, the famous home of the Bloomsbury set, notable especially for Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's rich decorative style. Inspired by Italian fresco painting and the Post-Impressionists, the two artists decorated the walls, doors, furniture and garden at Charleston to the extent that the house and garden became a living work of art in which every surface was semiotically enhanced, thus reproducing Erasmus's dream of a country house that would speak out from every corner. In doing so, Bell and Grant produced a mock-up of what the modern world is becoming like, a space in which even the marginalia are semiotically charged<sup>36</sup>.

But whereas their house and garden was an imaginative booster rocket which can be regarded as largely positive within its own bounds, much the same kind of ambition can also have profoundly negative consequences, as many totalitarian states have proved since<sup>37</sup>. On this dark side, what is crucial is to understand is the degree to which so much of the modern world consists of marginalia made central by so-called reactionary modernist forces.

Of course, since the earlier part of the twentieth century, new visual technologies have run riot, technologies which both extend the means

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<sup>36</sup> There could, of course, have been many other starting points, for example, Le Palais Ideal of Ferdinand Chéval.

<sup>37</sup> Thus Herf (2006, p274) notes the way in which Nazi Germany attempted to design environments which would produce a total political experience by using media like radio, mass meetings, print media, and especially weekly wall newspapers which 'stared out at the German public for a week at a time in tens of thousands of places German pedestrians were likely to pass in the course of the day'.

of representation (as in the proliferation of screens, the wall newspapers of the twenty-first century) and the registers which it is possible to decorate with images (as in the inhabitation of the precognitive domain by sigils like brands), thereby producing something closer to an electronic version of Erasmus's house in which every surface gives off continuously modulated messages, such that an exchange of qualities rather than just a transmission of information takes place - what Bruno (2004, p7, p12) suggestively calls a 'pandemic of images' that produces an 'aggregate mnemonic structure' that consists of multiple levels and planes of stimulation, disposition, and recollection, all jumbled together in various living re-appropriations that constitute a kind of choreography, rising and falling to rhythms of its own<sup>38</sup>.

There is evidence to suggest that this process is gathering pace as a result of the intervention of large-scale parallel and distributed computation in all its forms (Rotman, 2000) which has allowed previously separate visual media – live action cinematography, graphics, still photography, animation, 3D computer animation, typography, and so on - to be combined in novel ways, producing what Rotman (2000) calls 'rampant visualism' and Manovich (2006) calls the 'velvet revolution'. The underlying logic of this revolution which produces new media forms out of combination is one of remixability in which the computer simulates all media, thereby inducing a transformation of visual language towards 'motion graphics' that is 'designed non-narrative, non-figurative based visuals that change over time' (Frantz, 2003, cited in Manovich, 2006, p8). What counts is the arrangement of elements like size, aspect, a line of type, an arbitrary geometric or other kind of form, and so on, into a kind of dance: 'we can compare the designer to a choreographer who creates a dance by 'animating' the bodies of dancers – specifying their entry and exit points, trajectories through space of the stage, and the movements of their bodies' (Manovich, 2006, p12)<sup>39</sup>.

This is, as I have tried to make clear, much more than some putative society of the spectacle, that is an intensified deployment of the apparatus of the production of appearances. Rather than such a state of fallen grace, what I am trying to describe here is a reinhabitation,

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<sup>38</sup> As I have tried to point out, the difference with the past is that these images are able to be interactive: their calls can produce responses which can act on their nature.

<sup>39</sup> Such developments arise out of new practices combining with new outlets of expression (for example, most recently, YouTube).

one based on making the environment – a word which itself becomes a contested one under the new conditions - into a semiotic soup but one in which most of the signs are non-discursive<sup>40</sup>. This reinhabitation is akin to the biosemioticians' notion that the basic unit of life is the sign (Wheeler, 2006)<sup>41</sup>. It is not a direct imposition on a passive substrate of humanity but a reworking of what counts as through, a processual 'haptic spatiality' (Hansen, 2004). In other words, a non-representational mode of writing that utilizes non-linear deployments of time and space is again gaining a place in the world, with clear effects on what we regard as perception.

In turn, this change provides a pressing political task in a society in which this rampant visualism is coming into being. It poses obvious risks – but it also provides opportunities for building new kinds of locative community.

### The Third Halo

In its third manifestation, the halo is a standard scientific term, used to denote various optical phenomena that appear around light sources. It is therefore a natural term in sciences like meteorology, physics, and astronomy. For example, the galactic halo is a region of space surrounding spiral galaxies, including our galaxy, the Milky Way. It consists largely of old stars, gas and dark matter. It is believed that the Galactic halo is a consequence of the hierarchical evolution of sub-galactic clumps seeded from cold dark matter density fluctuations.

I want to use this image to return to the matter of imagination, understanding materiality as a series of occasions which are always moments of knowledge. At the same time, I also want to think about the changing shape of knowledge itself after the onset of information technology, as knowledge increasingly takes on a significant non-paradigmatic halo which cannot be centred<sup>42</sup> or made a part of the whole, the result of not just the expansion of knowledge but its increasing ownership by communities that have little or no relation to formal knowledge structures. In other words, in this paper the third manifestation of the halo is as a whole series of knowledges thought to be of little or no consequence which form clumps of

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<sup>40</sup> A development that is only forced by developments in ubiquitous/ pervasive computing.

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, I think that it is quite possible to historicize the argument of Hoffmeyer and others that 'signs, not molecules, are the basic units in the study of life' (cited in Wheeler, 2006, p123), making it into a symptom of the present.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, one might argue that there is no longer a centre, only a halo.

various kinds, a background which turns out to be fundamental in seeding the universe of knowledge rather than incidental. Why? Because I am convinced that these petty knowledges are a resource that can be tapped to form a new political genre or genres<sup>43</sup>, one which calls to and relies on affective contagion and which might be used to re-engineer affective qualities like bravery and courage in productive ways. This politics consists of clumps of like minds arranged loosely and indistinctly in semi-directed practices which move beyond understanding affective contagion as simple contact towards understanding affective contagion as a kind of fluency practiced by design<sup>44</sup>. Let me make it clear: this is not to suggest that if these practices were aggregated they would suddenly form a new political force, but rather that they can form a different kind of choreographic strain, a contrary motion which both works with and against the grain of 'being-toward-movement' and which might allow us to sense and even construct new affective strains.

Set against those who think that 'our stunted imaginations have largely lost the ability to think what a society other than capitalism ... might look like' (Smith, 2007, p2), I think we are living in a time of extraordinary imaginary outbursts if only we had the nous to touch and feel them, imaginary outbursts founded in the co-operative symbiosis provoked by new situations, imaginary outbursts that force thinking by producing affective affinities. These outbursts have already had considerable purchase on the world of mass daily practices but, on the whole, we are not picking them up because they are based on 'discontinuities of pattern, the tiny causalities of chance, the reparative and tender (as opposed to deadly and terrifying) features of intricate connection' (Orr, 2006, p18). They do not fit the standard categories – active/passive, micro/macro, passion/calculation, interested/disinterested, objective/belief - we use to describe the world.

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<sup>43</sup> For example, it would be possible to take a leaf from the art of landscape gardening again and suggest that what has become crucial is a knowledge of arrangement or disposition, of finding (search), which is currently going through a convulsion as the kinds of nonlinear, nondiscursive thinking and representation that I outlined in the previous section is brought back into play. Gardening may seem an odd metaphor to work from but I am sure that it fits the bill - passionate, sensuous, self-evolving, multi-sensory, synaesthetic, the favourite of Klee (Harrison, Pile and Thrift, 2004, Tilley, 2006), the premier art of cultivation.

<sup>44</sup> One thinks here of Artaud's influential 1938 essay, 'The theatre and the plague' (Orr, 2006).

**These outbursts could be named in all kinds of ways, no doubt. But I want to draw on modern performance studies to try to describe them in more detail. Performance has always understood the power of affective contagion and sometimes has highlighted it. Think only of Artaud's alchemical theatre;**

**What modern social science tried to make intelligible, Artaud tried to make real: the contagion of gesture, the communicative power of a scream, a mimetic theatre of collective seizure and frenzied emotion, Artaud's intent was not to start a panic but experiment through performance with features of the social – never far from the alchemy of the theatre – that collective terror also opens toward. 'The mind's capacity for suggestion' which Artaud identifies as one source of theatre's transformative power, is precisely the capacity that modern social science locates as one source of the social itself (Orr, 2006, p8).**

**I will call these outbursts 'dances that describe themselves' (Foster, 2002) in order to give me a means of naming them and as a place to start from, as a piece crafted spontaneously in performance – in the moment. The phrase comes from the work of that well-known dancer-choreographer of improvisation, Richard Bull, and his allegiance to thinking on your feet, by choreographing while you dance, thus producing a leaderless community. But his Dance was not just a piece of random improvisation, worshipping 'liveness'. Far from it. It was an act of possession - and command. The premise was that a set of dancers would come together and over several weeks would slowly tune their worldview to the presence of The Dance That Describes Itself. This tuning was intended to unite their bodies (and, to an extent, those of the audience)<sup>45</sup> in the flexing, undulating mass of The Dance.**

**They moved in and out of 'possession', enjoying the shift in perspective, the different sense of agency that becoming inhabited by the dance allowed. The Dance told them what to do and they necessarily complied, yet they also created The Dance, determining when and how it might take control of their dancing. The contradiction between these two selves, one**

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<sup>45</sup> 'As dancers open their physicalized imaginations to entertain the possibility of any and all next actions, they also track the results of acting upon or rejecting those impulses. As viewers watch, going with the flow of events, they also critically engage with that going. Throughout the performance, both dancers and viewers ask themselves, what is going to happen next? And what difference will it make to this performance's significance' (Foster, 2002, p16).

possessed and one in command, opened an ironic tension that reverberated throughout the entire performance, a tension compounded by the fact that the dancers described, often with clinical precision, their actions.

Typically, the act of possession entails a loss of speech and the inability to describe during or afterwards what happened while dancing. The Dance That Describes Itself plays upon this venerable and ancient trope of giving oneself to the dance, becoming one with the dance, or being free in the dance. Yet it constructs a different kind of possession. Dancers are asked to remain highly conscious of their circumstances and to describe their actions verbally. Rather than serve as mute embodiment for cosmic forces, indescribable in their proportion and power, these dancers comment adroitly on mundane motives, frustrations, or desires. The collision between two incommensurate images of dance – one speechless and transcendent, the other analytic and pedestrian – reinforces the irony inherent in the initial proposition of being possessed (Foster, 2002, p11).

I would argue that the practices that I want to describe are akin to this stance in that they involve a careful tending of knowingness through the design of empowering situations which are based on producing new and speculative locatives, indications of place and direction and affinity, which privilege an openness of form which is still, however, able to shape and mould and comment upon that process. At the same time, these locatives produce new time frames, new notions of ‘calendarity’.

What would these new locatives look like? The history of performance undoubtedly gives us some clues, where performance is understood as the construction of socially and technically informed living entities, since in many ways it has been born out of an impulse to remap spaces and, in particular, to escape the constraints of enclosed theatrical spaces and the kind of conventions they abide by: discrete physical locations exploiting particular kinds of sound and lighting, linear manipulation of timelines through devices like reminiscence and premonition, Indeed Norman (2006) argues that the vestigial geometries of these spaces and times still hamper our ability to craft other kinds of social encounter. We keep on beating the same bounds, often unconsciously.

Perhaps the most important step has been to get away from an obsession with exact localization. In the early nineteenth century, in the famous Preface to Cromwell, Victor Hugo (1827) had already pointed out the benefits of the strategy of localization in inducing a sense of reality, but also its risks in dictating imaginative content. The problem, of course, is that too often the reaction to the risks associated with localization has been to fall back on a notion of spontaneous gatherings of individuals, along with the common graphic vernaculars for depicting these instant multitudes - the crowds of which various forms of flash mob are often considered to be the latest manifestation (Schnapp and Tiews, 2006). The generation of apparently primal spontaneity has had a long history in performance, dating from at least Wagner's 'free associations of the future', and it has had obvious political downsides. However, at the same time, it has also led to a very large amount of thought about how performance works at the preindividual level and how the performer acts as an enhanced transmitter of various forms of sympathy, culminating in many acts of ecological theatre which try to conjure up a sentient unconscious, if that is not a contradiction in terms, through creative engagement of the feelings of the audience in the exploration of space (Banes and Lepecki, 2006).

The tension between these strategies of localization and spontaneity, and the knowledges that they produce, is currently being worked out in 'postdramatic' (Lehmann, 2006) artistic performances that pull all sorts of beings into a communion of direct living perception that develops with and within time (Zielinski, 2006). In particular, these performances explore the dynamics of affective emergence by constructing 'living organizations' out of the new locative media. That task involves maximum experimentation across many registers of the senses (Banes and Lepecki, 2006) in order to 'feel' all the data available in a particular universe that might belong to an emerging entity<sup>46</sup>, using the full range of modern locative technologies as vital intermediaries. In turn, this task has generated what is often a calculated indifference to where performance is meant to take place. For example, performance can even be located in outer space, in the domain of so-called 'metagestural proxemics', as in the spacesuit that will be crammed with communication electronics and thrown out of the International Space Station to burn up in the atmosphere, or tometaxy.net's, attempt to produce a collective public sculpture to

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<sup>46</sup> The link to Whitehead's notion of prehension is clear.

world peace in orbit around the Earth and ultimately a moon installation or Nam June Paik's moon. In other words;

**Locative media performances encompass participants and forge identities ranging from the most intimate to the most distant; the propensity of such performances to go global is equalled by their aptitude to inject highly localized, often time-bound events into overall connected fabrics. It is this tension between localized input on the one hand and web-borne, purportedly universal resonance on the other, that gives mobile systems their complex social and artistic potential (Norman, 2006, p 4-5).**

**In practice, this means that postdramatic theatre attempts to produce performances across many sites simultaneously in what we might call a choreopolitics which is backed up by a range of different practices which blur the divides between what used to be known as art, as politics, as social science method, and as information technology, in a concerted attempt to batter down particular imaginative resistances through a mixture of 'displacement, dislocation, distribution, and disorientation' (Jones, 2006, p3)<sup>47</sup>. This blurring first occurred in the 1960s but, after a forty year history, it now provides a body of formal and informal knowledge of considerable sophistication, ranging from the kind of project that simply utilizes user-led functional cartography (for example, Michel Teran's *Life: A User's Manual* which tries to technologise Percec) through Jonah Brucker-Cohen and Katherine Moriwaki's *UMBRELLA.net*, and on to all manner of projects that chart out movement (such as Teri Rueb's *Choreography of Everyday Movement* where trails of dancers moving through the city are tracked with GPS to obtain real-time dynamic drawings which are then printed on to acetate which is sandwiched between stacked glass plates that grow taller and more complex with each addition). One might argue that such projects act as nothing more than twinkling marginalia. That would, I think, be a mistaken judgement. Rather, I think they are attempts to call up the outlines of spaces which can produce affective shifts which, though they may appear to be minor, can have major effects, for example spaces that administer a shock to irritation so that it moves from a space in which over-annoyance is accompanied by insufficient anger**

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<sup>47</sup> For example, think of the ubiquity of Chernoff faces which use facial features to represent data, or the growth of 'choreogenetics' (Lapointe, 2005) which uses genetic algorithms to generate choreographic sequences.

to something more affectively productive - such as the bravery required to actually intervene (Ngai, 2005, Gallop, 2005)

To end, I will fix on just two examples of this new form of mobile acting up, examples which tap into a long tradition of artists acting as agents-provocateurs investing wider communities (Hampton, 2007), examples which aim to produce politically charged works of art that exist outside any extant paradigm as a kind of kinetic outcropping or even stray which exhibits no deeper truth than the achievement of an affective phase-shift (Barthes, 2005). But that, of course, is the point.

The first example is the Displaced Emperors project. Displaced Emperors was the second relational architecture project. This installation used an "architact" interface to transform the Habsburg Castle in Linz, Austria. Wireless 3D sensors calculated where participants pointed to on the facade and a large animated projection of a hand was shown at that location. As people on the street "caressed" the building, they could reveal the interiors, which corresponded to Chapultepec Castle, the Habsburg residence in Mexico City. In addition, for ten schillings, people could press the "Moctezuma button" and trigger a temporary post-colonial override consisting of a huge image of the Aztec head-dress that is kept at the ethnological museum in Vienna.

The second example is Ballettikka Internettikka. Ballettikka Internettikka is a series of tactical art projects which began in 2001 with the exploration of internet ballet. It explores wireless internet ballet performances combined with guerrilla tactics and mobile live internet broadcasting strategies. Its internet guerrilla performance has mainly consisted of invasions of particular arthouses, such as [The Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow](#) (March 2002), [La Scala in Milan](#) (November 2004) and [The National Theatre in Belgrade](#) (October 2005) and the mounting of alternative internet performances within their confines, on the premise that the passions of opera can be transferred to the 'passionless' internet, so producing radical emotions. In 2006, the two main artists, Stromajer and Zorman performed a new guerrilla net ballet, this time in the men's toilet in the basement of Volksbühne Berlin, using a flying cow, a group of small robots – and a toilet seat. The artists utilized low-tech mobile and wireless equipment for the invasion and live broadcast: a public unprotected wireless internet connection point, available for free at the Rosa-Luxemburg Square in Berlin, free RealProducer and Live

LE software for streaming video and audio live manipulation<sup>48</sup>.

In one sense, interventions like these are simply the latest chapter in the long history of trying to produce grammars of movement, of the kind to be found in the history of dance since at least the sixteenth century. But, at another level, they are embryonic political interventions, affective utterances which, through the production of spatial and temporal coherences which are also new forms of imaginative assay<sup>49</sup>, are intended to boost encounter and thereby provide new means of animatedness and attentiveness. In particular, they are trying to struggle out from a notion of a place which is bounded – an ‘environment’ – towards notions of place as relationships with space that are rather like that of the face in their ability to be expressive and to reveal what the other is thinking: space as ‘the eyes of the skin’, so to speak (Pallasmaa, 2005). Thus space becomes richly emblazoned with signs of thought. In a sense, space becomes face.

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<sup>48</sup> Ballettikka Internettikka: VolksNetBallet took place on the same evening and at the same time as another people's festivity -- the final match of the World Soccer Cup 2006, which also took place in Germany.

<sup>49</sup> On another level, these performances are a part of general tendency to ‘move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre’ (Lehmann, 2006, p186).

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