

## Affective mediality and its aesthetic transformation in Christian Marclay's *The clock*\*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay brings together a traditional philosophical theory of affect with mediaphilosophical considerations about the various non-anthropocentric roles that affects may play in aesthetics and especially in film-aesthetic regimes. In a first part it deals with the logics and functions of affect as they are made explicit by the philosopher William James. With this theoretical tool at hand the second part tries to overcome the anthropocentric implications of the introduced definitions of affect by confronting them with aesthetic transformations as they are technically evoked by filmic artworks. To be able to describe those transformations adequately, the philosophical conceptualization of 'affect' has to be critically complemented and enlarged in the light of mediaphilosophical reflections. In applying some aspects of James' affect-theory to what is triggered, imposed and negotiated as affective effects by the film-installation *The clock* (2010 by Christian Marclay), different kinds of hybridizations of technical and organic elements can be identified. They lead to the introduction of the neologistic term and concept of 'Anthropomediality'. The latter is supposed to figure as a new substitute concept for 'the man', while merging 'anthropos' and 'mediality'. It describes a hybrid mode of existence that may be analysed as a nonreducible form of being in future endeavours within the (still young field of research) of Media Anthropology and Philosophy of Techniques.

**KEYWORDS** Affect; William James; aesthetics; tactility; cinematography; anthropomediality

### Introduction

The main focus of this essay is to reflect, with a special reference to film-aesthetics, on the processes and functions of affective operations from a media-philosophical point of view. In the widest sense of the word 'affective' every form of perceivable movement can be called an affective operation that brings about a change in a state of affairs, whether this change is due to causal, intentional, or otherwise functional powers. Whereas cognitive and volitive modes of gaining access to the world (and therefore also to art) are widely analysed in their functions and processes in the context of

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philosophical aesthetics and epistemology, affective modes are rarely, if at all, analysed with respect to their influence on understanding and/or epistemic perception. Although most aesthetic theories rely at least implicitly on concepts of affect-arousal and aesthetically elicited forms of affectivity, they rarely elaborate on this, or make their concepts explicit. Therefore, the main questions to be dealt with here are: what are affective operations, what can affective modes and functions contribute to the nature of an aesthetically arranged audiovisual artwork, and how do they shape (aesthetic) perceptions?

When it comes to questions of the aesthetics of audiovisual artworks, such as movies or film-installations, it becomes of utmost interest to figure out in more detail *how* the implied organic and technical elements get intertwined in the medium of affect-arousal. This last question is set out concretely in regard to the aesthetic experience of the film-installation *The clock* (2010) by Christian Marclay.<sup>1</sup> The focus of analysis lies especially on the combinatory/connecting and the separating/distinguishing functions of affective procedures. These affective functions can be further diversified, so that functions of amalgamation, of cross-fading, of penetration, of contrasting, of affirmation and negation, of increasing and decreasing, etc. may count as such as well. From a media-philosophical point of view, it is not to be considered to be a categorical mistake if affective functions are not solely ascribed towards organic systems but also to technical systems. In their material instantiations, figurations and appearances, even entities such as pictures and sounds, can be equipped with the power 'to act out' in affective ways. Therefore even audiovisual arrangements of pictures and sounds can be identified as *affective/affecting agents*. The pictorial and/or acoustical manners of 'acting-out affectively', so to speak, consist, among other things, in the repelling and/or attracting effects they (the pictures and sounds) may exert on other entities and organisms. Affective qualities, operations and devices do therefore belong to human *and* non-human entities and systems as well and can migrate between things, programmes, spaces and/or situations. Because, for example, in cinema the affective powers figure as conjunctions of and for heterogeneous elements, simply by vibrating between off-screen and on-screen, the heterogeneous technical and organic elements get aesthetically transformed by the same token. This aesthetic transformations of the technical and organic elements that are implied in the process of cinematographic experience give rise to the emergence of something else, a third entity. That emergent entity is the ephemeral aesthetic body of the whole cinematographic scenario and embraces both the bodies of the spectators and the technical-material aspects of the cinematographic apparatus, as shall be pointed out in more detail below.

Because the terms 'affect', 'affective powers' and 'affective operations' are key concepts in my argument, they require an explanation. Theories of affect, as they are developed in the fields of philosophy, neurophysiology, and

psychology, have debated the ontological qualities of affective phenomena exclusively from the point of view of their evolutionary and culturally orienting function for human organisms, associations, and interactions. The more technological and aesthetic aspects of affective organizations, as well as the dependence of the latter on technical media and mediations of different kinds, have been widely neglected. Moreover those theories of affect do normally not take into account that affective procedures are able to generate mediating effects by themselves, for example, by *combining or separating, by strengthening or weakening* the states and conditions of organisms and other entities. The fact that affects and affective qualities can figure as mediating forces in aesthetic and non-aesthetic scenarios as pointed out before is something that should be kept in mind while we lead over to more general ontological questions of affect and to the affect-theory of William James in particular. Although James' focus is anthropocentric too, the relevant characteristic phenomenological functions and features of affects and affectivity may be gleaned from his conception nevertheless. Subsequently, these phenomenological characterizations of affects will be reflected in the light of the aesthetic construction s of the 24-four-hour film-installation *The clock*, by Christian Marclay. The media-philosophical framing in this essay aims at a twofold-perspective on its main topic: (1) a more thoroughly *technically grounded* and less anthropocentrically grounded understanding of 'affect' and 'affectivity' (2) a more *affectively* grounded understanding of cinematographic technique, and of aesthetics in general.

### The activist facets of affects

Before discussing James' affect-theory, it may be instructive to reflect on some common uses of the terms 'affect', 'feelings', and 'affectivity'. First, the Latinate term 'affect' (from *affectus*) is in most cases used interchangeably with the English word 'feeling' and the German word 'Gefühl': they do function as interchangeable designators of the entire spectrum of affective phenomena. This spectrum extends from phenomena of low-threshold and subliminal kinaesthesia to language-dependent, judgment-based emotions, moods, and even to generalized affective dispositions towards life as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

When we start talking about *feelings* or *affects* in an everyday-live context, an association with purely passive phenomena related to suffering is quickly established. As presumably passive phenomena that serve to make those who experience them passive as well, feelings/affects appear to be distinguished, *per se*, from volitional impulses and cognitive operations of knowledge. And in most cases only the latter are considered to be *active* forms of processing perceptual impression and information. This presumption leads to a 'division of the mind' into two more or less disconnected and even incompatible systemic functions. This dualistic theory of the mind can not only be traced back

historically to Plato and Descartes. Dualistic theories of the mind dominated the traditional eighteenth century, and reverberate up to the present (Mendelssohn 2006, Kant 1790/2000, Baumgarten 1750/2007). Only the capacities of thought and volition, according to this dualistic tradition, shall grant us freedom because they are supposed to be self-produced and bootstrapping, rather than arising from environmental factors, or from the corporeal demands and drives of an organism, as feelings are supposed to be. Emotionally transmitted perceptions are meant to operate pre-predicatively and a-conceptually. They are therefore traditionally made into phenomena that weaken the will, as in the thought of the Stoics and in Plato, and are held to account for all other arrational and irrational human action and thought.

Yet this mental divide consigns feelings/affects all too firmly to the category of physical reflexes, passive impulses, and reactions. This reduction however serves to obscure their productive functions in mapping reality, as well as it hides their genuine rationality and their epistemic functioning.

Etymology alone already indicates that 'affect' contains the verb 'afficere', which means something like 'to stimulate', 'to add or enrich', or 'to operate'. In the same vein: 'facere' also belongs to the verbal constellation of 'affect', and literally means 'to make', 'to do', or 'to add'. And also the etymology of 'feelings', derived from the old English 'félan', and with its roots in the Old High German 'fuolen', meaning 'to grope' or 'to fumble', hints at the fact that affects operate beyond the antagonistic differentiation of active and passive forms of movement. Where affective powers come into play, the passive *and* active facets of movements seem to be more interlocked than contrasted. This phenomenological interlocking of the active and passive qualities of movements, or ways of being-moved, may be rendered a function of the *tactile* – and less of the *symbolic* – order set up by affects. And in fact, the broader denotation of 'to grope' or 'to fumble' brings a searching and tentative form of touch into view. Perhaps it is this tactile basis of affective movements that allow us to get in close contact with matter and (even with our own) materiality, and perhaps it helps orient ourselves as corporeally constituted beings existing in time and space.

### **William James' feedback-theory of affects**

It is especially the corporeally orienting function of affects that leads James (1884) to emphatically include them in what he called the 'aesthetic sphere of the mind'. In his essay 'What is an Emotion?' – the founding text of the philosophy of affects – James identifies affects with the perception of physiological changes. Where no physically discernible arousal is perceptible, according to James, there is also no affect. But affect is not only identified with a physical quality, but also with an embodied way of looking at the world in an

evaluative manner. The fact that affects are accompanied by sensory self-perceptions should be reflected in their neurophysiological instantiation, as James makes clear in the following passage:

The purpose of the following pages is to show that [...] emotional brain-processes not only resemble the ordinary sensorial brain-processes, but in very truth *are* nothing but such processes variously combined. (1884, pp. 188–189)

While the ordinary intuition dictates that affects initially arise, as it were, from ‘inner’ states of the mind, and only express themselves visibly in the body afterwards, James presents an opposing thesis:

My thesis on the contrary is that the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion. [...] one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, [...] the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth. (James 1884, pp. 189–190)

James considers the nervous system, which dictates the entirety of our behaviour, to be a network of dispositions that makes an organism capable of an adapting to its environment. Affects, too, are among such dispositions, and are unique, according to James, only in that they are capable of being triggered by the *direct* perception of environmental influences. The circulatory system is seen as functioning as a kind of resonance space capable of provoking a reaction from organic and chemical shifts and eliciting at least subliminal perceptions of change (kinaesthesia). In James’ opinion even cases of weak stimuli lead to measurable physiological differences, and therefore to a change of a feeling-quality (this is why affectivity is a kind of movement).

The emphasis on the directness of affect-arousing impulses may suggest that James holds a deterministic position. But James counters this suggestion with the following argument: a certain tendency towards nervous emotional discharge can be elicited by all possible objects as soon as this tendency has been learned. There might be an affective memory that enables us to learn from experience generally. That should not, however, be taken to imply that our affective reactions are tied to certain inputs. And it certainly does not imply that our affective range is strictly determined by the influence of external impulses only. Imagination, too, has the capacity to provoke emotional reactions. Even imagining emotional states can produce an emotional state, such as when we feel fear of fear.

To complete this thought, let me point out that the experience of fear is certainly not limited to contexts of our everyday life; we also experience it

in aesthetic fields and spaces, as in the cinema or museum, for example. Confronted with fiction we frequently enjoy the sensation of thrill, suspense and pleasurable fear. In these cases we produce so-called 'second-order' emotions: we enjoy our fears, for example. Aesthetically produced affects are somewhat different from otherwise produced affects. First of all, to be able to react with fear to a fictionally depicted threatening scenario, the precondition has to be met that we recognize this depiction as appropriately falling under the category of (what is stored structurally as) a cause of fear. However, it is only because we know that we are in a safe space like a cinema that the cinema-related fear is less intense than when we are in a situation of actual life-threatening danger. Because we are conscience of our security in the cinema, the sensomotoric system is only latently impelled to flight, though the subjectively experienced physiological changes, specific to fear in general, remain distinct enough. Fear experienced in the cinema is therefore always weaker than in situations of actual danger because the sensomotoric system is stimulated more weakly. And this is due to the automatic *and* yet reflexive realization of the aesthetic character of the situation.

James' emphasis on the measurable physiological signature of affectual stimulation and perception leads to a demystified understanding of feelings, as they no longer are seen as radical, subjective, and locked-in-phenomena, accessible only from a first-person-perspective. Feelings/affects become, instead, tangible as phenomena identifiable from a third-person perspective as well. To sum up: In James' conception, feelings/affects are understood as measurable changes and movements that are both perceptible subjectively and observable objectively, and as both physical and imaginative (implying cognitive).

Moreover, he offers a dynamic conception of the causality involved in affective arousal by pointing out its special feedback-mechanism. This is the reason why his theory is also known as the *feedback-theory of affect*. The *causes* of affective movements, as James put it, could only *analytically* and *post festum* be differentiated from the affective *effects* on the organism. In fact the causes and the effects of the affective changes and movements are bound together inseparably *in the medium of their experience*.

Yet another aspect of James' conceptualization of affect is important here. According to his conceptualization, affective reactions bring with them a sort of pre-conceptual schematization, insofar as they translate their inputs into a sensory resonance capable of distinction. When feelings are triggering, their inputs or stimuli get instantaneously translated and categorized in affective terms. Though this is not, as it were, identical with explicitly predicative forms of identification and (re-)categorization, it is nevertheless a means of generating distinctions that has immediate effects on the identity of the perceived. This epistemic aspect of the distinct qualification of the affectively perceived leads James to a radical reversal of the standard conception. He

chooses an example to illustrate this: When we encounter an object, such as a bear approaching while we are wandering through the woods, this would not cause us to fear because the bear would be inherently threatening. Rather, as James puts it, the bear would be categorized *as* threatening because we respond to him that way. The supposedly affective *reaction* to the bear – that of fear – becomes the *cause* of an affective categorization of the bear *as* a scary object.

With reference to James' feedback-theory and the etymological indications as to the meaning of 'affect' and 'feeling' provided above, an initial claim can be made: where affective perceptions or movements are activated, our responses to and views of the world get tinted. These colouring effects of affective arousal correlate with varying qualities of sensation. One affect can be distinguished from another merely by its different feeling-qualities. But whatever is perceived or encountered in an affective mode is per se endowed with a positive or negative value according to whether pleasurable or unpleasurable reactions are elicited as well. Affectively perceived reality is then presented to consciousness as always already evaluated on a scale ranging from the joyously positive to the unpleasant negative. Therefore an affectively schematized objectivity is not simply given as an unchangeable primordial nature or world. It is much more a changeable effect of the affective transformation in a given situation.

## The spectrum of affectual phenomena

Affective phenomena differ in regards to their modes and intensities of progression, their effects, the conditions of their transmission, and their immanent 'logic', that is, their intentional objects, their feeling-tones, and their evaluations. The five central subclasses of affects, which I will introduce here without making any claim to comprehensiveness, are: (a) hedonic feelings (ranking from pleasure to unpleasure), (b) cognitive/narrative emotions (e.g. infatuation, guilt, shame, jealousy, etc.), (c) corporeally diffuse or localizable sensations (such as: stitches, queasy feelings, rapid heartbeat, etc.), (d) moods (e.g. sadness, euphoria, etc.) and (e) atmospheres (stiff or erotic atmospheres or even suspense, etc.).

James himself did not differentiate, say, between sensations and hedonic feelings. But there are phenomenological differences between, for example, a stomachache and a diffuse negative feeling. And it is important to note that *hedonic feelings* in particular serve a special function for other affects as well. Hedonic feelings as pleasure and unpleasure (or better: positive and negative feelings) equip the diverse affects (like emotions, moods, and atmospheres) with a positive or negative affective value. This means they are always part of affect-arousal, no matter what. It is *hedonistic colouring*, that is,

colouring through concomitant positive or negative feelings, that first makes a perceivable (bodily) change or movement into something affective.<sup>3</sup>

The subclass of *emotions* constitutes a special type of affect. They are cognitively/narratively structured and based on judgments that can be made explicit in propositional form. Anger, happiness, feelings of guilt, gratitude, and infatuation are all directed towards a special narrative scenario in a situation, and require, furthermore, a certain amount of time before their experiential, cognitive, and behavioural components are fully evolved. Emotions progress in a dramaturgical vein, passing different phases of development: a rising activation initially, followed by an increased level of intensity and focus, and finally a declining phase before they have dissipated again. In regard to their involved judgments, emotions offer more or less rational motives and reasons for action. Annoyance at an insulting gesture may lead, for example, to a gesture of retribution; a reaction of joy at a gift may lead to a demonstration of gratitude directed at the giver, and so on. Furthermore, emotions are developed and learned in and through processes of cultural and linguistic socialization. Historical as well as cultural changes in the causes and evaluations of emotions like shame, guilt, and pride, among others, confirm the cultural dependency of emotional scripts and emotional understandings in general.

In contrast to emotions, *sensations* such as hunger, being thrilled, and goosebumps belong to the non-cognitive subclass of affects. Sensations are more or less corporeally localizable and correspondingly overtake the function of physical signals for an organism. Hunger, for example, is a direct demonstration of a need for nourishment; being thrilled can indicate a tensed preparedness for concentration or activity; goosebumps can be a reaction to cold. In contrast to emotions, these sensations do not have any representational content, and are also observable in beings that are incapable of speech, like babies and animals.

*Moods* (such as euphoria, sadness, boredom, etc.) also constitute an affective subclass of a unique type. They must be differentiated from emotions as well as from purely physical arousal and sensations. Moods are a matter of comprehensive psychophysical changes, which are usually not corporeally locatable, frequently extend longer than emotions, and employ a diffuse or global intentionality. In their intentional diffusion and tendency towards universality, moods tint the more global relations and modes of reference to the world and also go along with positive or negative feelings. From the perspective of boredom, everything seems uninteresting and tough, whereas euphoria makes everything seem rosy and accessible. The mood-specific function of colouring the world-views in positive or negative ways can also be transferred to others who are around and keep in touch with whatever is moved by the atmosphere at hand. This effect of instantaneous transference mirrors again the basic tactile mode of affective functioning.

*Atmospheres* constitute another unique affective subclass. They are less distinct in their capability of altering perspectives than are moods, though they are more encompassing than the aspectualizing emotions. Atmospheres have a centrifugal power, and they form whole situations by disseminating their perceptible and hedonic frameworks. The affective qualities of atmospheres can differ. An atmosphere may be more strict or tense, stiff or relaxed, inspiring, erotic, threatening, etc. Entering physically into such a hedonic framing of an atmosphere makes one an ephemeral habitant of it. A special light in a room, or the texture of any material or thing may be responsible for an atmospheric change and quality. Also any form of behaviour, facial expression, or even the mere sound of a word or speech-act may also be responsible for disseminating an atmospheric quality. But generally, the origins of atmospheres can never be conclusively determined. Atmospheres, too, demonstrate a perceptible positive-negative valence, and this is exactly what makes them affective phenomena. Additionally, atmospheres are also capable of uniting, and even merging, human and non-human spaces and/or entities in their course.

Between the pole of non-cognitive affects (such as sensations and atmospheres) and cognitive affects (such as emotions), there exists, from a phenomenological perspective, a twilight zone of fluid transition. The transition between a mood and an emotion, for example, may sometimes only be a question of the intensity of their feeling-components. Different affective states frequently merge with one another and alternate between strengthening or neutralizing one another. This is the case, for example, when a sad impulse meets an already existing depressive mood and serves to strengthen the latter, or when a cheerful message neutralizes a threatening mood. These functional modes of mutual superimposition, diminishment, or enhancement are all characteristic affective modes of operation and processing. And, as was said before, these affective modes supervene among human and non-human-systems in equal measure. Where an operational logic of affectivity is at stake, there is always a possible gradation in the intensity of energy levels at stake as well. A tension-filled situation or mood can be elevated or diminished, a fear of something specific can be diminished and diffused into a generalized mood of mere attentiveness, or it may, on the contrary, lead to a blind panic-attack. This also means that the question of the intentionality of affects is not an easily determinable all-or-nothing issue. It is rather a question of the gradations of energy-levels underlying the respective affective occurrences in a given situation.

While an affective access to the world of any sort is always, as James suggested, a matter of an *amalgamation* of causes with effects – signs with their meanings, subjects with objects – an affective access differs from a purely cognitive access to the world in some respects: the latter aims primarily to enable clear-cut conceptual distinctions, and a semiotic or symbolic representation of something otherwise absent. In non-affective forms of

cognitive operations, a categorical gap is opened up between the corpus of representational signs and that which is being designated by them. It is exactly this representational gap of non-affective cognitive operations that the affective modes of reference bridge and subvert at the same time. The affective modes of mapping and/or perceiving the world transport the world into the presentist positivity of their own hedonic-somatic-logic. Whenever a 'logic of affect' becomes the dominating principle of perception in a given situation, an evaluative reality that is *intuitively* accessible simultaneously is brought into a presence. Four aspects of affective forms of access to the world may be distinguished analytically, even when they operate in conjunction normally or overlap:

- (1) The *cybernetic-amalgamating* aspect of the affective access. (This aspect mirrors James' bio-cybernetic subject-object-feedback-loop in affective forms of being-moved.)
- (2) The *contagious* aspect of the affective access. (This aspect covers the more or less instantaneous migration of perceptible qualities of affects and their dissemination in time and space among human *and* non-human entities.)
- (3) The *haptic-tactile* aspect of affective access. (This third aspect designates all forms of affective mediations serving to connect a perception of something with (self-)perception in direct physical contact and touch.)
- (4) The *evaluative-presentative* aspect of the affective access and perception. (This fourth aspect designates the more narrowly representational content of affective modes, and especially their power to endow reality with a positive or negative value.)

Because of their cybernetic-amalgamating functioning, affective interventions lead to short circuits, mixtures of states of affair, and situational embedded entities. They thereby generate new phenomena (e.g. as value-laden states of affair). The contagious modes of affective interventions allows moods and atmospheres to arise all of a sudden, and to change a whole situation by merely setting it temporarily under the condition of a special mood-quality. The haptic-tactile aspect of affects allows affective qualities of different subjects and/or objects to communicate with and determine each other simply by getting literally *in touch* with one another. And the evaluative-presentative aspect of affective operations, finally, lead to the charging of an object with affective value, in a semiotic sense, that also can be even made linguistically explicit in some cases. Affective operations work within human bodies, for example, by moving the organic, endocrine, peripheral, and cognitive functional areas. And they also take place within non-human entities, such as in movies, where affective operations also serve to combine or separate relevant acoustical and visual elements. As could be demonstrated with the help of the well-known Kuleschow-experiment, one

shot of a movie may shape and determine the atmospheric quality of the next shot, and vice versa. This can be interpreted as an example of the contagious aspect of affective operations, being responsible for the transformation of parts, or of whole conditions of, organic and non-organic systems in their meanings or expressions. Although films are obviously lacking the processing of organic resources, they are nevertheless machines of affect-production, affect-transformation and affect-transmission. Therefore it is interesting to figure out in more detail how a technical and organic system may interact affectively and aesthetically, when it comes to their encounter in cinematographic settings.

### ***The clock as a reflexive medium of affect-transformation***

A reflexive treatment of the aforementioned affective modulations in and of filmic interventions and cinematographic settings can be found in Christian Marclays artistic work *The clock* (2010). The work in question is a 24-hour film-installation, for which Marclay edited thousands of clips from across the range of genres and from 70 years of film history, with the aim of finding sequences in which clocks appear. The remarkable point of the installation, which is going on around the clock, is a performative one. That is because the installation does not merely point out what various kinds of dramaturgic, semantic or symbolic functions clocks may inhabit in a movie and in the history of movies. Much more than that, the film-installation *is* also a chronometric device by itself, or, briefly stated: this film-installation *is* also a clock. Whether in New York (Paula Cooper Gallery), Paris (Centre Georges Pompidou), or Venice (2011 Biennale), its own 24-hour rhythm is always precisely tied to the local time at its place of presentation. The presented time in *The clock* both depicts and exemplifies the local time, down to exact changes in minutes and seconds.

Once a spectator enters the installation's space, he/she sees images flying by on the screen, snapshots and fragments of well-known scenes and dialogues of different movies, spots of faces and actions of famous, and not so famous, actors; scraps of music pass in succession and overlap in an apparent enigmatic order. We know and remember some of these very well, while others, much less, or even not at all. Without any clear orientation about what exactly it is what we are looking at and for, we follow these moving audiovisual impulses and 'cues' in a kind of flow. Only after a while we recognize something nearly unbelievable: suddenly (and of course only if we were not informed before about it already) we discover the strict chronometric character of the installation itself. At this moment a shockingly new perspective is accessible and another imaginative route of association opens up: the exploitation of a strict chronometric tact and rhythm of a clock seems to determine the montage of the film-clips, which initially seemed to obey

another, much more poetic or aesthetic, order. The scenes, shots and jump-cuts that seemed to be wildly and associatively edited initially, suddenly expose themselves as being arranged in a strictly mechanical and logical way: the repetition of a clock-rhythm and its 24-hour progression reveals itself as the aesthetically ruling principle. This 'discovery' changes the role of things, and especially those of the clocks seen in the series of clips on-screen. Instead of playing the role of a mere prop any longer, the clock is 'promoted', one almost wants to say, just by being variously repeated, to become the main signifier of the film-installation. Another way to put it is to say: A mere prop – which is what clocks in movies normally are – figures as something completely different, namely as the polymorphous star of the whole filmic scenario. This trans-valuation of the prop and the new position it takes in the hierarchy of the constitutive network of the filmic elements in general (embracing other props, figures, speech, persons, camera-movements, furniture, rooms, places, light, sound, etc.) is mediated in *The clock* by the affectively changed perception of the beholder. And the resulting interference with the established hierarchy of filmic elements in relation to each other, which *The clock* is pushing forward, corresponds to the well-known Brechtian aesthetic of the 'alienation-effect' (Verfremdungseffekt).

Affect-formation thereby adopts a simultaneously motivational and epistemic task in the aesthetic reception and appearance of the *The clock*. The aforementioned shock-effect of the 'eureka-experience' does soon bring about an even more far-reaching irritation, which is also epistemically relevant. The commonly known function of a clock is to guarantee some orientation in time and space. However, the installation-specific way of staging and depicting the chronometer leads to a deviating result: by synchronizing real and fictitious time, two ontologically incompatible and isolated spheres and realms of reality get paradoxically merged: the realities on-and off-screen suddenly share a common rhythm of being, in the aesthetic perception and appearance of *The clock*. But precisely this merging effect on the originally separated regimes of reality and fiction counteracts any possibility of coherent orientation for the spectator. The resulting uncertainty towards what is perceived exactly can therefore also not be acted out in any straightforward way. The nevertheless concomitant energy of this affective arousal is somehow locked-in and cannot be dissipated. This affective energy needs therefore another exit-option. It may be invested, for example, in further curiosity towards the progress of *The clock*, whereby the installation attracts attention and stimulates immersive behaviour towards itself. This immersive effect can be prompted although, in its additive and incoherent style of montage, the installation seems to push forward one disturbance of the cinematographic illusion after another. The latter is normally taken to be a hindrance for the rising of immersive behaviour. Nevertheless, in this respect again *The clock* reverses the conventional methods of narrative cinema. And in refiguring

the affects it absorbs, *The clock* interferes aesthetically also with the normal adaptive functions of the affect-arousal-system. Affect-arousal normally functions to judge a situation quickly, motivate an adaptive behaviour; and ensure, finally, the dissipation of tensions through action.

All of this is simultaneously invoked and circumvented by the way *The clock* brings about affect-formation. While the film-installation triggers and disorients affects and affectivity at the same time, without offering a release for its feeling-components, what remains to be done for a body, resonating this double-binding-input, is to 'give-in', so to speak, and enjoy at least the increased excitement and aesthetically forced passivity. Because in aesthetic contexts we do not have to cope with serious existential challenges, we can only in such contexts enjoy a form of active passivity as circumscribed. The motivational force of affect-arousal is limited, in an aesthetic context, to the ludic and quite active (self-)awareness of the recipient. In aesthetic spheres, such as in the context of the reception of *The clock*, affective arousal serves no further functions anymore, including self-protection. Instead, it gains an intrinsic value in its own right. One can conclude, in line with Kant, that aesthetic formations of affect differ from other formations of affect in that they decouple affective changes from any subjectivist and instrumental forms of (self-)reference. And this decoupling is a necessary condition for any form of prompting aesthetic disinterestedness and open-mindedness. That an artificially elevated intensity of affectivity remains enjoyable, is, then, both a fundamental task and balancing act for what has to be performed by art in general. *The clock*, in its affect-(trans-)formations, is dealing and playing with these tasks by pushing them to the limits. Put paradoxically, therefore, the work *The clock* both *is* a clock, yet *is not* (only) a clock.

The contagious aspect of affect-formation can also be observed on multiple levels in *The clock*. In many moving images, the installation shows us, for example, people looking at their watches, while obviously waiting for something or someone. Without recognizing what exactly it is they are waiting for, this waiting-scenes instantaneously incorporate an emotional atmosphere of nervousness and impatience, or of suspense – even when the persons do not at all seem to be stressed or afraid themselves. The impression of the somewhat nervous atmospheres of the moving images is reinforced by the character of the places in which the waiting-people are located. These are mostly inhospitable places of passage that seem to be more or less only there to depart from with greater or lesser haste: train, bus, and taxi stations, hotel rooms, roofs, street corners, waiting rooms in hospitals, cafes, etc. are the most depicted ones. While on one hand these waiting-scenes could be taken as spatial ciphers of an urban mobility, Marclay's way of dealing with them in *The clock* – by adding and looping them in hundreds of sequences – seems on the other much more to retard movement and mobility. But despite this rhythmical acceleration, no real action

takes place, and no narrative development is being advanced. By this aesthetic strategy *The clock* repeatedly plays with the register of frustrated narrative anticipation. Narrative and acoustic traces and cues are constantly laid out – while the search for an overall meaning of the installation must constantly fail. Thus this dramaturgy of affect-formation of *The clock* leads to a constant toppling between tense-expectation, boredom, and a perplexed contemplation of the installation on the side of the beholder. Thereby the film-installation triggers mixed feelings of immersive and distancing moments in its ongoing movement.

The tactile aspect of affect-formation and affective transmission can be observed in *The clock* with particular clarity in the way it relates sound with image in its montage. In one clip that correlates to the time 12:05, for example, we see a man leaving a house as we hear extra-diegetic music rising dramatically. The protagonist is suddenly made aware of a hidden corpse by an intra-diegetic bellowing of a dog. This corpse is presented to the viewer in a subsequent shot showing the corpse with eyes wide open in a close-up. The extra-diegetic music continues and overlaps into the next scene and shot, which belongs clearly to a completely different movie. Whereas the previous scene was in black-and-white, we now see a woman approaching a window in a colour-film. She opens the window and looks out. We observe this from a low-angle shot from outside the house. That this jump-cut is not taken as such, but much more as a continuous flow, leading us smoothly from the first frame to the one with the woman at the window, is due to a moment of what Slavoj Žižek calls 'suture'. This term describes a special act of reception, whereby shots and cuts that follow immediately one after another are logically, as well as temporally and spatially, bound to one another in the imagination of the beholder. What the woman sees from her point of view while looking out of the window can only be inferred from the previous sequence or shot. We must take the image of the corpse as that which *she* is supposed to watch at this moment. Although this may be a valid inference, this is not all that is going on. Something additional occurs here, which I would like to refer to as an 'affective suture'. The imaginative completion also includes an immediate new interpretation of the mimic expression of the woman. Because we attribute to her vision the dramatic reference to the corpse, her way of looking itself is now charged with the expressive qualities of the suspect, even of the guilty, or at least of the conspirator. What we perceive in the register of the horrid, now *becomes* horrid exactly because of that perception. This is exactly the feedback-effect of all affectivity that was emphasized by James. Through affective schematization the mood or atmosphere of a filmic element or situation gets entirely transformed: robbed of its neutrality, the aforementioned scene at the window is carried, through the medium of an affective suture, into the register of the thriller.

The moving images of *The clock* reach out into our space, that of the spectator, as do their bodies via sound-qualities as well as via optical arrangements. These visual and acoustic-qualities literally get incorporated simply by being heard and seen. Here again it is useful to speak of a tactile mode for the film installation's affective qualities, and not only because they do literally touch our senses. The sound, say, of an image of a huge empty train-station that we hear and see in one clip, is also modifying the aesthetic effects of the subsequent or previous clips. Therefore we can also talk of an intra- and inter-pictorial, as well as of an intra- and inter-acoustical, contact of sounds and images – finding a place on a horizontal line of the montage of the filmic clips.

While these tactile translations of, and transmissions between, images and sounds may even dominate the aesthetic of *The clock*, the original narrative contexts of the selected moving images are more or less suppressed. So, within and between the cuts of the heterogeneous scenes and shots, the recipient's emotional memory of the movies has to fill the gaps. The interweaving of these idiosyncratic emotional memories also has a feedback-effect on the installation. The audio-visual structure of *The clock* assumes affective qualities of gradation and intensity, and these vary according to the strength or weakness, positivity or negativity, of the interwoven memories.

After the affective suture progresses for a while, the memory-triggering effect of it, and therefore that of the installation, becomes ambivalent and inconsistent again. The latter happens because every trace of filmic memory is followed by a new scene of reference, which eclipses the previous trace of memory and is, in turn, pushed aside by a new scene and memory. In this manner ever more emotionally marked memories and half-memories of films and their narratives, as well biographical situations of film-reception in certain cases, are piled on top of one another. In the intervals between digressive associations and the reentry into the trance-like tact of the flow of the film-installation, which moves forward day and night, *The clock* displaces us into a kind of *time-battle*. As was said at the beginning: that *The clock* is also a *clock*, remains always ready to be newly discovered and remembered, while we are displaced by the flow of its progression in time. The unpredictable temporal development of the installation as a whole, as well as its incoherent splitting of layers of temporality and affect, seem to share only one function: that this all – every cognitive and affective suture involved as well – is repeatedly leading to dead ends, without reaching a final ending of the whole time-flow.

### **Anthropomediality as the aesthetic reality**

As we saw in the context of the aesthetic experience of *The clock*, and its implied affect-transformation, aesthetic reception leads in great parts

away from the normal affectual logic and functioning. The latter primarily consists in the detection and evaluative distinction of the useful and harmful for our psychosomatic organism. On the basis of the bracketing of the reference to an empirical self and well-being, it becomes possible, in the aesthetic context, to place our affectivity in the service of an aesthetic playfulness and game.

Through its collage-like arrangement of moving-images and sounds *The clock* elicits a corresponding polymorphous formation of affect and affectivity. This polymorphous affect-formation also has a feedback-effect on the whole aesthetic experience in question. The main feedback-effect is that it works as a productive medium of transforming the interacting technical and organic elements involved in that process. The affect-formation (such as its operations of amalgamating, merging, translating, and distinguishing) is bringing about a *third form or level of reality*, that supervenes on the cinematographic techniques, as well as on the organic processing involved in the progression of the aesthetic reception. Therefore the installation awakens, in cooperation with its recipients, the actions and passions on- and off-screen to what can be called, with a neologism, an *anthropomedial life* of its own. And exclusively, in relation to this third ontological sphere of pure aesthetic appearance, it may be true that it is only intuitively accessible, if at all.

## Notes

1. Marie Luise Angerer indicates that there has been an especially strong interest in the theory of affects among scholars of dance, and supposedly among media theorists such as Mark Hansen and Brian Massumi (2013). She does not, however, mention the fact that a systematic discussion of the term affect, such as has taken place within the discourse of analytical philosophy, remains a desiderata in current media theory. My impression to date is that the few theoretical models that refer to affect that have been generated within media studies have continued to refer to it predominantly as a regime of non-intentional phenomena. My efforts in this field, at least, aim to add the integration of the intentional forms of affect to the picture, and to reflect on affectivity in general beyond any body-mind-dualism.
2. Compare the elaborated affect theory of Agnes Heller, who expounded her position in the monograph *Theorie der Gefühle* (1981). See also the summary of philosophical theories of affect provided by Sabine Döring in her edited volume *Philosophie der Gefühle* (2009).
3. I develop this argument in my monograph *Narrative Emotionen. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen philosophischer Emotionstheorien* (2003).

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