

# Gilles Deleuze: semiotics of shock

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**Abstract.** The article offers a new interpretation of the notion of shock in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, with respect to his conception of the sign and semiotics. My perspective is based on the presupposition that shock is the condition of experience and knowledge, and that it is an operative concept that runs through Deleuze's entire work. Deleuze argues against the idea that humans have a natural tendency to think – on the contrary, thinking occurs in a situation of violence when something forces us to think. I then move on to an account of the relation between sign, cognition and shock, focusing in particular on how Deleuze connects the notion of shock to affect: this connection is present in Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza, and also appears in his books on the cinematic image. Affect becomes an important link between the formation of subjectivity, the experience of the world and the transformation of thought. There is no shock without affect, and there is no affect that does not presuppose shock.

**Keywords:** semiotics; Gilles Deleuze; shock; experience; representation; affect

## Introduction

In the present article, I want to focus on interpreting the role of the notion of shock in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, especially in relation to his conception of the sign and semiotics. Interestingly, theoreticians and philosophers interpreting Deleuze's work hardly mention the notion of shock. For example, Inna Semetsky (2015: 215–234) develops her approach to pedagogy by synthesizing Deleuze's and Peirce's semiotics, with the notion of the diagram as a guiding principle, and shows the connections between Deleuze's concept of the sign and Peirce's taxonomies of signs. Nevertheless, the concept of shock always seems to remain aloof, or rather an implicit assumption of interpretation. Even Brian Massumi (2002a), who speaks of the relationship between affect and politics, or Gary Genosko (2008: 11–21), one of the main interpreters of a-signifying semiotics, pay little attention to shock. In Alberto Toscano's (2006) book, we do not find the notion of shock at all; John Rajchman (2000: 72) refers to it in the context of abruptions in thought

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processes; the book edited by Paul Patton and John Protevi (2003) contains only one reference to shock; in the book edited by Mark Poster and David Savat (2009) shock does not figure at all, as is also the case in Todd May's (2005) monograph.

In contrast, my interpretation is based on the proposal that shock is the condition of real experience and therefore of knowledge. Deleuze repeatedly mentions a lapse of sensory-motor capacities and an abruptness in thought, also emphasizing that for him shock is something essentially productive. If we never went through the experience of shock, there could never be any appreciation of the conditions of our existence, we could never learn anything, and nothing new could ever emerge.

The article is divided into two parts. The first section focuses on the problem of subjectivity and subjectivation because I want to show that, according to Deleuze, the (not only) human subject is not a pre-given entity but emerges through the operation of relations between forces, and that human subjectivity is thus essentially transformable and changeable. It is a plane of ruptures and contradictions, where these ruptures are the condition of becoming; and the constitution of subjectivity is based on situations that can be described as shocking. The second part thematizes the relationship between thinking and shock. Deleuze argues against the idea that humans have a natural tendency to think. On the contrary, thinking occurs in a situation of violence when something forces us to think. I provide an account of the relation between sign, cognition and shock, focusing in particular on how Deleuze connects the notion of shock to affect. Affect thus becomes an important link between the formation of subjectivity, the experience of the world and the transformation of thought. There is no shock without affect, and there is no affect that does not presuppose shock.

## On subjectivity and subjectivation

In his first book, which is about the philosophy of David Hume, Deleuze outlines several themes that, in various iterations and permutations, he will develop throughout the rest of his life. Firstly, there is an explicit adherence to the perspective of the philosophy of empiricism (see Bryant 2008: 266), which stands in opposition to both Descartes's rationalism and Kant's transcendental philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, there is an interest in analysing the emergence of the (not only) human subject; and thirdly, there is a focus on the processuality of the world, which stands

<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze can be described as transcendental empiricism. In contrast to Kant, who is concerned with the conditions of possible experience, Deleuze focuses on the conditions of real experience, which is shown in his analysis of the emergence of subjectivity and the process of experiencing and knowing the world (see Lapoujade 2017).

in opposition to the belief in the existence of immutable, ideal and *a priori* forms that lie outside the horizons of empirical space-time.

According to Deleuze's interpretation of Hume, human consciousness is not a predetermined entity that gradually differentiates and articulates itself into gaining a specific form in the course of life. On the contrary, at the "beginning" of the subject, there is nothing but chaos, a frightening, indistinct and ambiguous sequence of images. Hence, Deleuze asks, "*how does the mind become a subject?*" (Deleuze 2001[1953]: 23). In Deleuze's reading, it follows that in Hume we can distinguish between two kinds of sources from which experience comes. First, there is a "collection of distinct perceptions appealed to as source for ideas of reflection; the second is the contingent conjunctions of past objects (not impressions) that make up the individual history of the experiencing subject" (Duvernoy 2019: 465). In other words, a collection of images becomes a system, i.e. subject.<sup>3</sup> The subject is, therefore, essentially a somewhat ordered, hallucinatory entity; it is an effect, an impression of reflection (Ferrell 1995: 585–593). To put it another way: what we call the subject, and possibly what we consider ourselves and other persons with whom we come into contact to be, is nothing more than a matter of habit and experience. This means that the apparent fact that we do not seem to change radically from moment to moment and have a certain continuity in time and space cannot be relied upon: we simply believe that and what we are.

Nine years after his book on Hume (orig. 1953), Deleuze comes up with an interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (orig. 1962). The leitmotif, that runs through the whole line of argumentation, focuses on the motif of the affirmation of the differentiation of forces. According to Deleuze, in Nietzsche's philosophy the world is understood based on relations of forces, whereby force means action (Deleuze 2002[1962]: 40–43), with each force relating to another force, creating an immanent field of forces based on their relational characteristics. Indeed, force only shows itself in resistance. Deleuze (2002[1962]: 40–42) then distinguishes two types of forces in Nietzsche: active and reactive. Reactive forces are conscious forces; they are forces of regulation that seek to preserve an existing state (in particular, the state of an organism; among these forces, one can include habit or memory), while active forces are by nature beyond consciousness, they are unconscious.

Human body and subjectivity are, therefore, nothing given *a priori* but are determined by a particular topology of forces or, rather, their genesis is deter-

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<sup>3</sup> "The real importance is on the side of the impressions of reflection, because they are the ones which qualify the mind as subject. The essence and the destiny of empiricism are not tied to the atom but rather to the essence of association" (Deleuze 2001[1953]: 31).

mined by the existence of an immanent field of forces that come in contact with each other (Lash 1984: 1–17). Thus, in the case of Deleuze's book on Nietzsche, the role of the environment, which determines the basic frames and frames of subjectivity, explicitly comes into play and is essential for Deleuze's analysis of modes of subjectivation.

Deleuze works with another conceptual framework in his book on Bergson from 1966, namely the field of temporality and the so-called '*durée*' or duration. Deleuze says that, according to Bergson, experience only gives us mixtures; things are constantly mixing with each other, so Bergson considered change (happening) as a fundamental fact of existence. Movement, happening, is reality itself. Everything is in perpetual rearrangement (Deleuze 1988[1966]: 21–27).

Duration as a qualitative heterogeneous multiplicity is characterized by the fact that everything in the world is governed according to different temporalities, which, however, are not unsurpassable. In other words, duration is a condition of becoming, as Deleuze will argue in *The Logic of Sense* (orig. 1969) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (orig. 1980), i.e. the human subject can connect to non-human temporalities; human subjectivity is therefore inherently mutable and includes the potential for actualizing itself to non-human modes of life.

This is why Deleuze is so insistent on repeatedly emphasizing that a human being is a set of modular intensities and affects that are organized into a mutable and transformable whole. It is also for this reason that Deleuze extensively interprets Spinoza's statement that we do not know what the body is and what the body can do. We acquire knowledge only through experimentation with the external environment and the objects we encounter. Some expand our body's capacities, while others do the opposite, which can lead to death. This is a very specific ethology based on a taxonomy of different types of affects, which is why Deleuze (2005[1968]: 217–234) writes that the racehorse and the draught horse have little in common, while the bull working in the field and the draught horse share a whole range of affects.

The concept of emerging subjectivity and its instability is developed in *Difference and Repetition* (orig. 1968) and *Logic of Sense* (orig. 1969). In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze again draws on Hume, when he argues that if we have any sequence AB AB AB, repetitions cannot be functions of objects. If someone were to transform the sequence in some way in the process of repetition, they would no longer be the same thing that is repeated (and, therefore, in the true sense of the word, repetition cannot be spoken of). Kant's solution consists of a reproduction synthesis, but this is insufficient for Deleuze, who argues that we are already dealing with the temporal plane here purely because once we have seen the sequence AB AB AB a sufficient number of times, we anticipate B when A occurs

(Deleuze 1994[1968]: 70–72). In other words, the habitus gives us the relation between the past and the future. Habitus synthesises the succession of perceptions in consciousness by creating a domain of past moments and a domain of anticipation of the future, thereby systematizing it. This synthesis of time is also the site where the “germ” of the subject is generated; in other words, the habitus is the root of the subject, and the subject in its germ is the synthesis of time – the synthesis of the present. The synthesis of the multiplicity of time depends on a prior synthesis where notions of past and future are generated and where undifferentiated moments of sensation are connected to each other through habit (Sommers-Hall 2013: 64). This first synthesis is based on the rhythms of anticipation, which exhibit features similar to Bergson’s term ‘duration’, rather than on the succession of time. This takes Deleuze beyond the human aspect, for if the synthesis of time is the organization of time into a structure, then processes of a natural character (and even geological change, for example) must also be understood in terms of rhythm.

The first synthesis of time constitutes the actual present and reflects the repetition of the material character. The first synthesis is based on contemplation (where we combine elements that are not centralized in the mind; contemplations are relations external to their concepts and appear spontaneously before memory and reflection) and contraction, and is the initial point of the genesis of the subject, when the so-called “larval subject” is formed in a pre-individual field full of intensities (Deleuze 1994[1968]: 78–79).<sup>4</sup>

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze (1990[1969]) expands on the genesis of the subject from the state of the “larval subject”, and on the moments of transformation and disintegration of this subject. In the series “Porcelain and volcano”, Deleuze echoes Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s dictum “of course all life is a process of breaking down”. Deleuze works with the notion of ‘crack’ (*fêlure*), whereby the human being as such is interwoven with a series of bodily and non-bodily cracks that

<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, the first synthesis does not allow an explanation of the passage of time from the present to the past, for the reason that it shows the past and the future as moments of the present, and therefore transcends itself into the synthesis of memory (Mnemosyne) (Deleuze 1994[1968]: 80). Deleuze argues that the second synthesis of time forms a pure past (Sommers-Hall 2013: 70; Williams 2011: 63). These two syntheses, however, are dependent on a third synthesis, which contains the conditions for the production of the future, which Deleuze (1994[1968]: 89) calls “the empty form of time”. We have seen that the present and past coexist because they are different expressions of the form of time. Unlike Kant, who believes that the unity of time is made possible by the subject, Deleuze points out that it is a question of time itself. The empty form of time, or time “out of joint”, is mirrored in the doctrine of eternal return, or, as Deleuze (1994[1968]: 88) notes, Thanatos. It is a field of virtual coexistence, nomadic intensities and constant rearrangement.

are invisibly extended. Whether it is a traumatic event, microscopic violence or a clash with another body, the crack becomes deeper and deeper over time, gradually transforming the person until one day the crack is so deep that one can no longer live in the same way as before. The individual thus embarks on the path of becoming-other, drawing a line of flight to shed his or her previous subjectification, to become non-human (Deleuze 1990[1969]: 154–161).

At this point Deleuze speaks of counter-actualization (see Spindler 2011: 257–265). The event is characterized by its constant differentiation and repetition. We must not become prisoners of the event, submit to it, but have to become worthy of it. To be worthy of the event is to accept the difference, avoid resentment and affirm the past events in which we were created. However, we cannot be content with this orientation to the past alone; we act and desire in the present; we must not passively surrender to what transcends us. To clarify this, Deleuze comes up with the figure of ‘the actor’, which allows this character of the event to become clearer because what the actor does is not a representation of an event but an actualization of it, which would not take place on the plane of the mixture of bodies. The mime, or actor, is able to capture the event in its purity regardless of its spatio-temporal actualization in the state of affairs. The mime does not capture or represent the movements of anyone in particular, but expresses pure events, thus allowing one to focus on what characterizes the event as such (Deleuze 1990[1969]: 160–161; see Lambert 2002: 14).

Why is ‘crack’ so important for Deleuze? He refers not only to Fitzgerald, but also to Malcolm Lowry, both of whom argue that it is both the site and the “obstacle of their thought”, the place where the “source” of their thinking is (Deleuze 1990[1969]: 157). Thinking thus derives from its own powerlessness; it is not something structured, and it is always in contact with nothingness. Thinking is not without cracks because thinking, or rather experiencing events/wounds and being, depends on a crack: “If one asks [...] why the crack is desirable, it is perhaps because only by means of the crack and its edges thought occurs” (Deleuze 1990[1969]: 160). Without a crack, there is no subject.

### **What is thinking? Shock, body, semiotics**

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari (1994[1991]) raise the question of the nature of thought. Thinking is essentially creative, not primarily reflexive, and works via concepts. A concept is not something given *a priori*, but it is linked to a particular context, to the setting up of a specific problem that a given philosopher poses (and tries to solve); it is a multiplicity: no concept is univocal but contains

different components. Concepts do not arise (are not posed) in a vacuum, and therefore, concepts must be understood in terms of their reference to a problem. Still, a problem does not mean that a concept has already been founded once and can never be transformed: concepts have their movement, and concepts must be revived or drastically transformed – deterritorialized. At the same time, concepts refer and relate to one another within the so-called “plane of consistency” (or “plane of immanence”), or a certain image of thought. A plane of immanence always intersects chaos from a certain perspective (Alliez 2004: 8); the plane is an abstract machine that is populated by events/concepts that structure chaos. Indeed, the plane of immanence is made up of folds, different philosophies that may be in competition with each other at any given moment (Deleuze, Guattari 1994[1991]: 37). Even in philosophy, we always have something like a “major” way of thinking, but equally this “major” way of thinking is undermined by a “minoritarian” way of thinking (see Deleuze, Guattari 1987[1980]: 351–423). The so-called traditional or “dogmatic” image of thought, which Deleuze criticizes in all his works, has become crystallized in the Western tradition. Deleuze describes it already in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (Deleuze 2002[1962]: 103–110), when he notes that the dogmatic image of thought is based on the assumption that the thinker is one who loves truth.

Another thinker on whom Deleuze draws is, of course, Marcel Proust. Contrary to the premise that humans desire truth, Proust, Deleuze argues, comes to believe that we are lazy creatures and that thinking only occurs in a moment of aggression, only in a moment of compulsion, or we think only when we are “forced” and subjected to insistence (Deleuze 2000[1964]: 23). Although Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* is itself nothing other than a search for truth, this truth is not the truth of the dogmatic image of philosophy; it is the truth of art, in which the assumption is present that thinking is most certainly not a matter of our voluntary decision. On the contrary, we think only when we encounter something that affects us, insistently attacks us, and problematizes us. The necessity of thinking becomes apparent in moments of crisis, when we do not merely accept pre-given schemes but also set out to explore the conditions of the (hitherto) unthinkable. As François Zourabichvili (2012: 56) remarks: “Something must *force* thought, shocking it and drawing it into a search.”

The interpretation thus far has brought us, however indirectly, to the theme and concept of shock as an operative concept in Deleuze’s thought. In the first part of the present text, I suggested that the emergence of the subject is itself a “shocking” event in the sense that out of chaos, within hallucinatory associations, under the weight of a sequence of images and uncertainty, an individual is born, is formed. Still, at the same time, the constitution of subjectivity is always unstable

and prone to disintegration, whether through the influence of external forces (Nietzsche) or through connection to different durations (Bergson). Deleuze (together with Guattari) treats the moment of transformation through the notion of becoming. In *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1990[1969]), he shows that human subjectivity is full of ruptures, from whose depths arise forces and intensities that – thanks to events whose basic characteristic is that they are a radical change of everything in everything, i.e. they are situations of shock (whether physical or psychological) – shatter constituted subjectivity and develop its transformation.

In Deleuze's philosophy, the concept of shock appears explicitly in *Proust and Signs* (Deleuze 2000[1964]: 137). I do not want to discuss the taxonomy of signs that Deleuze presents here because other authors have already done so (see, for example, Drohan 2009); rather, I am particularly interested in the relationship between thought, shock and signs. As already mentioned, Deleuze is convinced that thinking does not take place in situations where we have plenty of free time and do not have to concern ourselves with mundane things; on the contrary, we think primarily when we are forced to do so, when some kind of violence is exerted on us. This violence then takes us on a journey of searching, a journey of trying to decipher the situation that is happening to us, when we try to cope with the shock through thinking. But what is this search? What are its constitutive conditions? Deleuze writes that cognition, and therefore learning (to which I will return later), is by its very nature about signs, and to cognize is to embark on a path of detective inquiry, where we decipher and interpret the signs that are sent to us by an object, event or being: we “explicate” and develop the sign (Deleuze 2000[1964]: 4, 17; see Zourabichvili 2012: 67–68). It does not, in fact, really matter whether it is the material signs or the signs of art that attack us (although each area of signs reveals a different type of knowledge); what is characteristic of all of them is that they take us out of the established clichés of our perception of the world, they send us on a risky path on which we can very easily fail.

Deleuze develops this thesis in his interpretation of Spinoza. Right at the beginning of “Spinoza and the three ‘Ethics’”, Deleuze (1997) argues that the three parts of Spinoza's *Ethics* form a coherent whole, or represent the three ways of knowing/knowledge in Spinoza. The first mode of knowledge is linked to imagination, which gives us an account of corporeality, and is linked to (inadequate) knowledge through signs. According to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, the sign is always an effect, that is, a clash of different objects or the activities and sufferings of bodies. This effect is always an affectation at the same time.

The fundamental characteristic of affectation is that it indicates the nature of a body undergoing some kind of suffering. We have knowledge of affections through ideas (as Deleuze remarks; ideas, according to Spinoza, are creations of



our minds; they are terms, concepts, expressing, unlike perceptions, the activities of the mind), perceptions, sensations. Deleuze (1997: 139) calls this type of signs 'scalar signs'.

Affections, then, express our state, the state of our body, while Deleuze adds that the state of our body is always part of our duration. At this moment, Deleuze also argues that once we are talking about the transformation of our duration, it is no longer an affection but an affect as a passage between two states. The transformation can be of a basic character; it can be either positive (joy) or negative (sadness), and at the same time it increases or decreases the capacities of my body and stand outside of representation; Deleuze thus talks about 'affects' or 'vector signs' (Drohan 2009: 120–137).

Any mixture of bodies is thus marked as affectation – note here again the similar conceptual nomenclature, 'mixture of bodies' (*mélange des corps*), Deleuze uses in *The Logic of Sense* and *A Thousand Plateaus* – which indicates the nature of the "affected" body. Every body expresses a force, and force is not a quality but an intensity, or what a thing demands is force, and therefore things are defined in terms of power (*puissance*). Chris Drohan (2009: 139) adds very aptly that, in this respect, Spinoza becomes a Nietzschean in Deleuze's view, as Deleuze understands the cosmology of both thinkers to be based on a relativity of forces, in which each force wants to affirm its own differentiation.

Let us now move on to the general characteristics of the sign: associability, variation and analogy. Affection can vary (i.e. variation) within different chains of connections between bodies (associability, and, of course, analogy allows for the "translation" of one sign line into another). These characteristics are rather general aspects of the different types of signs, but what is essential here is Deleuze's distinction between natural and conventional signs. Natural signs, as forms of expression, are fundamental, and conventional signs are conventional signs only because they act on natural signs (Deleuze 1997: 140). What follows from these remarks is crucial, and Deleuze repeats this as a mantra in an exaggerated way throughout his work: "Signs do not have objects as their direct referents" (Deleuze 1997: 141). For the sign always refers to another sign because they are either states of bodies or variations of force, that is, they have mixtures of bodies as their referents. The sign is an abruption, an expression, an expressiveness that hits us and takes us outside ourselves. The human being, therefore, comes to knowledge only through signs – as an event, an intervention.

Our encounter with signs as events is an encounter of an essentially affective nature. A sign is something that represents its object, a sign is something that the object "sends" and that affects us. A sign is, therefore, always an effect. This effect, insofar as it transforms our thinking, is also called 'affect'. Affect is the passage

through which we ourselves are transformed when we are no longer the same after encountering something unusual to us. We have changed. Our perception of the world has changed. Affect can be understood as something that cannot be expressed, as something that merely charts the route of our transformation but is itself non-conceptual. Affect is the relation between the state of one experience, when we perceive so-and-so, and the state of another experience, when our perception has been transformed.

Deleuze's thinking about the cinematic image carries the principle of the sign as an effect. Again, I will leave aside a comprehensive account of his taxonomy of (film) signs, sticking primarily to the theme of shock. In *Time-Image*, Deleuze (1989[1985]) describes the so-called sensory-motor breakdown that marks the difference between cinema produced before and after World War II. Using the example of Italian neorealism, Deleuze shows how selected directors moved away from films based on action sequences, and focused on situations, or rather events, that were so powerful for the perceiving subjects that their sensory-motor capacities broke down. These subjects are "defenseless beings" (Deleuze 1989[1985]: 12) who face a world that exceeds and affects them, without being able to escape the event: "It is a matter of something too powerful or too unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which henceforth outstrips our sensory-motor capacities" (Deleuze 1989[1985]: 18). That is why Gregory Flaxman (2000: 41) notes that film image can be described "as a shock wave that cripples its capacity to reconstitute any habitus".

Not only that, but post-war cinema also began to thematize the problem of time more and more. Thus, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994[1968]) suggests that the cinematic image, the time-image, differentiates and synthesizes different planes of time: past, present, future, and their becoming, which is often hallucinatory in nature, so that subjects confront fragmented temporal frames, and these frames also inscribe themselves, become problematized and fragmented. This duality of fragmentation is important in order for something new to happen, for the subject to become someone else, to deterritorialize and begin, through shock, to think differently. Nor do the body and the brain remain aloof in Deleuze's thematization of post-war cinema. The body undergoes changes due to events, it transforms itself, and the brain must adapt to new situations.

Deleuze (1989[1985]: 204) speaks, on the one hand, of a "physics of the body" where we feel the influence of Spinoza's philosophy, and, on the other hand, of an "eidetics of the spirit" inspired by Leibniz. As Deleuze (1989[1985]: 189) writes, the body

[...] is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life.

The brain is transforming, it is a rhizome, it is finding new forms of thought, and it is no accident that Deleuze (1989[1985]: 211) speaks of cracks, breaks or cuts in this context:

[T]he process of association increasingly came up against cuts in the continuous network of the brain; everywhere there were micro-fissures which were not simply voids to be crossed, but random mechanisms introducing themselves at each moment between the sending and receiving of an association message.

How even to understand “something new”? How to learn “something new” at all? Both presuppose a change in perception, affect, and thought – areas that generally fall under the category of ‘learning’ (however forced the learning may be, as we saw in the case of Proust). In one widely quoted passage from *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994[1968]: 165, 192) connects shock, learning, and the conditions of sensibility. This is an example of an athlete learning to swim. S(h)e has to learn new movements and adapt to a new environment, which is always a matter of shock, while at the same time these movements and adaptations go nowhere (initially); it is an asignifying break that transforms existing habits, bodily posture and thought. As Inna Semetsky (2007: 2011) writes:

The novice athlete struggles against the waves because she is facing the unknown or what Deleuze called unthought. Not-yet-knowing-how-to swim, the athlete’s movements do not resemble the movements of the wave. Nor do they imitate the instructor’s movements given while not in the water but on the shore. Theoretical knowledge is being transformed into practical apprenticeship: the swimmer is learning ‘by grasping [movements] in practice as signs’.

Signs begin to have their objects only in the situation when an individual already can swim, when (s)he has become a swimmer, which is an untraceable situation which we can call ‘having-become-a-swimmer’; simply, at a certain moment we can swim, thanks to which our whole existing world will have been transformed, and thus the semiotic structure of the world will have also been transformed: “[T]he distinction between times is subsequent to the becoming which interposes the one in the other and, at the same time, posits both the movement by which the new present is constituted and the movement by which the former present is

constituted as past” (Deleuze 1994: 236). Ronald Bogue (2004: 328) gives a very accurate summary: “By ‘learning’ Deleuze clearly does not mean the mere acquisition of any new skill or bit of information, but instead the accession to a new way of perceiving and understanding the world.” Bogue (2004: 337) continues: “[S]igns ‘cause problems’ through their disorienting shock, forcing thought to deal with experiences that disrupt the common, coordinated functioning of the senses and faculties.” We know the experience of feeling that we are no longer who we used to be; something has happened, something so powerful that it completely overwhelmed us, something that carried us away as if we were surfing the waves of the sea. This experience of shock transforms the state of our bodies, undermines our subjectivity and enhances (or reduces) our capacities.

## Conclusion

In the present article I have tried to show that in Deleuze’s philosophy any experience – any bodily experience, but also thinking itself – and its transformation, is intrinsically linked to the notion of shock. Shock, which is the effect of the events that descend upon us, is the condition of the possibility of existence, of its transformation and, at the same time, of its continuity. Without shock, there is no life; without shock, there is no knowledge.

As Brian Massumi (2002b: xxxi) says:

Thought strikes like lightning, with sheering ontogenetic force. It is *felt*. The highest operation of thought is not to choose, but to harbour and convey that felt force, repotentialized. The thinking is not contained in the designations, manifestations, and significations of language, as owned by a subject. These are only partial expressions of it: pale reflections of its flash. The thinking is all along the line. It is the process: its own event.

In one of the interviews included in the volume *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, Deleuze (1995: 143) remarks, looking back on his lifetime of philosophical work, that everything he has written “is vitalistic, at least I hope it is, and amounts to a theory of signs and events”. There is a connection between events, life, and signs, such that life undergoes a constant process of differentiation, that events descend upon us without prior warning, and that through signs we experience the world and what happens to us, always in a hint, but at the same time with incredible power. And how we go through events, how we deal with them, changes us. It is always an experience of shock, where we begin to think differently as a result of the event, we are forced to think differently: the real condition of thinking is shock.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze (1989[1985]) focuses on Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The initial discovery of the monolith requires a reconfiguration of thought: everything we have thought about the birth of life and the world must be rethought in ways that were previously unthinkable. The main character's experience of space travel is similarly jarring as it is essentially nothing else but a journey characterized by continuous becoming. His colleague and the rest of the crew have been killed by a computer, that is, something unthinkable has happened again, yet even after this experience the astronaut goes on to conquer the outer reaches of space, undergoing a change produced by a range of affects and experiences that are simply too strong for human subjectivity. Finally, he ends up as an experimental object for an alien civilization, "becomes the Other" and transcends the boundaries of humanity. Is human life not essentially of the same nature as the voyage of the astronaut? Is it not the case that we are constantly struggling with events that descend upon us, are we not constantly becoming different, transforming our thinking and ourselves?

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### Gilles Deleuze: Sémiotika šoku

Tento text nabízí novou interpretaci pojmu šoku ve filozofii Gilles Deleuze s ohledem na jeho pojetí znaku a sémiotiky. Moje perspektiva vychází z předpokladu, že šok je podmínkou možnosti zkušenosti a poznání, že jde o operativní pojem, který prochází celým Deleuzovým dílem. Deleuze polemizuje s myšlenkou, že lidé mají přirozenou tendenci myslet. Naopak, k myšlení dochází v situaci násilí, kdy jsme k myšlení něčím donuceni. Poté přecházím k výkladu vztahu mezi znakem, poznáním a šokem, přičemž se zaměřuji zejména na to, jak Deleuze spojuje pojem šoku s afektem: jednak je tento výklad přítomen v Deleuzově interpretaci Spinozy, jednak v jeho knihách o filmovém obrazu. Afekt se stává důležitým pojítkem mezi formováním subjektivity, prožíváním světa a proměnou myšlení. Není šoku bez afektu a není afektu, který by nepředpokládal šok.

### Gilles Deleuze: šoki semiootika

Artiklis pakutakse välja uus tõlgendus šoki mõistest Gilles Deleuze'i filosoofias, arvestades tema arusaamu märgist ja semiootikast. Minu vaatenurk tugineb eeldusele, et šokk on kogemuse ning teadmise eeltingimus ja et tegu on operatiivse mõistega, mis esineb läbivalt terves Deleuze'i loomingus. Deleuze vaidleb vastu ideele, et inimestel on loomupärane kalduvus mõelda – vastupidi, mõtlemine esineb vägivaldsetes olukordades, mil miski sunnib meid mõtlema. Seejärel liigun edasi ülevaate juurde märgi, kognitsiooni ja šoki omavahelistest suhetest, keskendudes eriti sellele, kuidas Deleuze seostab šoki mõistet afektiga. See seos esineb nii Deleuze'i Spinoza-tõlgenduses kui ka tema filmikujutistele pühendatud raamatutes. Afektist saab oluline ühenduslülis subjektivsuse kujunemise, maailma kogemise ning mõtlemise teisenemise vahel. Ei ole olemas šokki ilma afektita ning pole afekti, mis ei eeldaks šokki.