

Sensation, Networks, and the GIF: Toward an Allotropic Account of Affect

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The GIF file type was created in 1987 by Steve Wilhite, then an employee of CompuServe, as a “standard defining a mechanism for the storage and transmission of raster-based graphics information” (CompuServe 1987, n.p.). GIF stands for Graphic Interchange Format, a type of compressed digital image file that was one of the first image files widely used on the Internet. GIFs can be either static images or animated to display a short looping sequence. Animated GIFs acquired popularity in the early 1990s, when users were first able to create and host their own web pages and decorate them with animations such as a flag blowing in the breeze or a light flashing. The content of GIFs began to change in the late 1990s with the rise of online video-hosting sites such as YouTube, which provided a proliferation of ready-made raw material for GIF makers to edit and remix.

While it was once principally a part of the vocabulary of coders and technology-savvy consumers, the term GIF has gained wider cultural prominence. In 2012 it was named the Oxford University Press US dictionary word of the year and defined as a verb meaning “to create a GIF file of (an image or video sequence, especially relating to an event): he GIFed the highlights of the debate” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012). One of the panelists involved in adjudicating the word of the year, Katherine Martin, explained its selection:

GIF celebrated a lexical milestone in 2012, gaining traction as a verb, not just a noun. The GIF has evolved from a medium for pop-cultural memes into a tool with serious applications including research and journalism, and its lexical identity is transforming to keep pace (Martin 2012, n.p.).

As Martin suggests animated GIFs have many uses and applications, from displaying animated charts in a work presentation to short comedic skits or clips. For instance, the 2012 presidential debates in the US were “live GIFed,” with key moments between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney edited into looping animations. Animated GIF’s are now widely used in a variety of Internet settings, including social media, web pages, and message board forums. Specific websites, such as gifbin.com and ohmagif.com have also been set up to collect and create particular types or genres of GIFs, from film and television to news items and home video footage.

Considering the prominence of the GIF in online and Internet culture, there has been almost no examination of it as a cultural phenomenon from either a technical or sociological perspective.

When GIFs have been discussed in a media and communication context, the discussion has usually been part of a broader argument around Internet memes. In Michael Dieter's work, GIFs are considered from a critical perspective as part of "the churn of Net flotsam ... indicative of ... accelerated conditions of communicative capitalism" (Dieter 2011, n.p.). Discussions of GIFs often revolve around the nature of a GIFs "virality," its capacity to travel across time and space and reach a large audience (Fernback 2003; Burgess 2008; Berger and Milkman 2010), or its role in participatory culture (Knobel and Lankshear, 2007, Lessig 2008). Little has been said, however, about how and why GIFs circulate around the Internet. To invoke a more robust discussion, I consider GIFs as "informational entities" (Goddard and Parikka 2011) in their own right, with an autonomous power to shape and manipulate users' capacities on an affective level. Mark Hansen describes affect as opening the "in-between of emotional states ... to some kind of embodied yet intentional apprehension" (Hansen 2004, 589; also see Hansen 2004b). New media, he suggests, can operate on this in-between level "to broker a technical enlargement of the threshold of the now, to intensify the body's subject-constituting experience of its own vitality ... to expand the thickness of the pre-objective present" (Hansen 2004, 589). Hansen is concerned with how media technologies act on the body and shape its capacities to sense time. Moving in a related but slightly different direction, I am interested in how the potential for affect travels around and through networks before it reaches a human body, as well as an object's capacity to influence that body once contact is made. What is important about Hansen's argument is his insistence that to understand the type of affect a media object generates, one needs to pay detailed attention to its material specificity. Paying attention to the specificity of the GIF as a digital file type, I argue, allows us to consider how the potential for affect travels through networked environments.

To understand how a GIF's potential for affect travels within a digital network, and at the same time remain open to different emotional responses by different viewers, I develop Gilles Deleuze's work on Francis Bacon to theorize the relationship between sensation and affect as allotropic. Briefly, sensation refers to the organization and transmission of forces between entities, and affect to how these forces alter and shape the capacities of bodies as they encounter and are encountered by these forces. As such, I argue that what makes a GIF successful as a means for generating novel forms of affect is related to its particular properties and capacities as an object, as well as its content, because its particularities as a file type frame and organize the types of sensation transmitted within it.

Organized forces such as electricity or sound are allotropic in the sense that they express either sensations or affects, depending on how they travel and what they encounter. My account seeks to show that no simple distinction can be made between organic (human) and inorganic (digital) forms of sense, and that these translations of sense in the inorganic realm are central to framing the potential for affect generated in human users. Sensation, then, primes the context of affective encounter, and the affects generated by exteriorized sensations (such as paint brushed onto a canvas) are not reducible simply to an individual's personal and historical contexts.

Using Deleuze to examine the GIF as a particular digital object also allows me to reflect upon recent debates regarding the negative possibilities of digital grammatization. Grammatization refers to the translation of information or media from temporal to spatial registers through the creation of a series of discrete marks. An example of grammatization would be writing, in which the temporal flow of speech is translated into a series of discrete letters or symbols on a page or a screen. Another example would be a CD, in which the temporal flow of music is recorded and stored as digital data on a plastic disk.

Bernard Stiegler (2012) argues that a key outcome of the processes of grammatization is the production of what he terms “tertiary memory.” Tertiary memory is exteriorized or materialized memory, different in kind from primary memory (human perception) and secondary memory (human recollection). Stiegler suggests that tertiary memory is key to changes in human culture, because when information is stored outside of human memory it can be reliably recalled in the future. This has huge benefits, as it allows information to be created and transmitted across time and space in ways that would be impossible if that information remained in the form of fleeting words from a mouth or sound from a musical instrument (see also Ong 1982).

Stiegler also argues that digital grammatization can have negative consequences for society at large. It is particularly problematic in today’s networked computational environment, he suggests, because content is policed and controlled by a series of cultural industries, whose aim is to manipulate the temporal consciousness of those who engage with such content to sell products and generate profit (Stiegler 2009, Stiegler 2010). This leads to what he terms a fundamental disaffection on the part of people who become oversaturated by the media that swamp their lives. This saturation “particularly affects the higher functioning of the nervous system: conception (understanding), perception and imagination, that is intellectual, aesthetic and affective life—the mind in all its dimensions” (Stiegler 2012, 86). He points to television and its advertising as forms of constant distraction that encourage viewers to endlessly shift their attention, which causes them to become unable to concentrate for long periods of time when engaged in activities such as reading. This inability discourages critical and creative thought, and further locks viewers into cycles of mindless consumption (Stiegler 2012, 88).

It follows that the GIF’s short, looping, and often hypnotic nature can be understood as encouraging short attention spans as well as exemplifying Stiegler’s claims about the problems of digital grammatization. I offer a different take, however, and suggest that GIFs do not necessarily lead to a mindless form of disaffection, but instead can actively amplify the potential for affect through their technical structure. To unpack these points, my discussion is divided into three sections. The first turns to the question of networked affect explicitly to argue that sense should not be considered as an exclusive property of human beings, but also as distributed and modulated across technical networks. In the second section, I argue that a GIF’s capacity for affect is based upon three aspects of its technical structure—duration, color, and repetition. In the third section I suggest that processes of grammatization create the potential for excessive forms of affective experience that cannot be reduced to cognitive saturation, distraction, or disaffection. GIFs thereby demonstrate how simple forms of technology can undermine the supposed control

that the ‘cultural industries’ (Stiegler 2012) of film, television, and other media have over the content they create, for GIFs work only by exceeding the context of their production.

Modulating Sensation and Affect in a Network

Writing about the work of painter Francis Bacon, Deleuze (2003) develops a theory of sensation as irreducible to organic life. Deleuze suggests that sensation is not just a product of a living nervous system but a basic capacity of any object, entity, or system. In this model, sensation is a matter of force, or more precisely, “sensation is vibration” (Deleuze 2003, 32). On this basic level, every object has a capacity to sense and be sensed, because it also has a capacity to vibrate or be perturbed by forces traveling from another object, either directly or indirectly. As Deleuze puts it, “Force is closely related to sensation: for a sensation to exist a force must be exerted on the body, on a point of a wave” (Deleuze 2003, 41). Sensations are, therefore, not contained within the nervous system, but can be exteriorized synthetically in a medium such as paint or photographic paper; “sensation[s] ... [are] ... like arrests or snapshots of motion, which would recompose the movement synthetically in all its continuity, speed and violence” (Deleuze 2003, 29). The capacity of a sensation is inherently linked to the body or object that organises that sensation. In Deleuze’s words “every sensation...is already an ‘accumulated’ or ‘coagulated’ sensation” (2003, 27). In the case of painting, dipping a paintbrush in a paint pot organizes the distribution of paint on the bristles of the brush and allows the paint to be applied to a canvas. The sensation a blob of paint generates is therefore the outcome of the event of encounter between the brush, paint and canvas. But, for Deleuze, that sensation can also remain accumulated or coagulated on the canvas after the brush and the human using that brush have left the scene.

This is not to say that sensations are organised by the static structure or properties of the objects involved in an encounter alone. Rather, Deleuze proposes that sensations are linked to the rhythms enabled or set in motion by the objects involved in an encounter. Deleuze (2003, 32) defines rhythm as an arrangement of vibrations or ‘a wave that traces levels or thresholds in the body according to the variation of its amplitude’. It is not only the thickness of the bristles or coarseness of the canvas that creates the sensation of the paint, but also the motions and movements of hand on brush and brush on paint and paint on canvas that transmits and translates forces into sensations. In this regard, sensation is a two way process. Objects and bodies sense and are sensed through an encounter between the organizations of their vibration: ‘sensation has one face turned toward the nervous system...and one face turned toward the...place, the event’ (Deleuze 2003, 25). Exposed to sensation, both humans and non-humans are altered. In Deleuze’s (2003, 25) words: ‘I become in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other’. Returning to the paintbrush example one final time, we can say that the paintbrush’s encounter with the canvas affects the composition and shape of the brush as well as the thickness and color of the paint which is applied using that brush.

In his work on Francis Bacon, Deleuze does not clearly delineate between the concepts of sensation and affect. For the purposes of this chapter, sensation can be understood as the rhythmic organization of organic and inorganic forces and the transmission of these forces. Affects can be understood as the encounter of those organized forces with other bodies, which in turn shapes what these bodies are and the sensations they can generate. Sensations are, therefore, constantly being reorganised through events of affective encounter, which in turn generate new sensations, and thus new contexts for the occurrence of affective encounters.

Developing Deleuze's definition of sensation, and creating a link between the concepts of sensation and affect, is useful because it allows us to account for how sensations travel through networks and prime the context in which affective encounters take place. Rather than considering the network as a passive set of objects for transmitting information that becomes sense when it is experienced by a human body, we can consider the whole network as transmitting and translating sense itself, which in turn generates affects as these sensations encounter bodies. Computational objects and networks are not an instrumental tool for accessing information; their very structure, and the objects that power that structure, are central to the types and qualities of sense generated, and thus structure the affects that a particular object can potentially generate.

In this case, sensation and affect are not different in kind from one another, but are linked through an allotropic relationship. In Francis Bacon Deleuze mentions the concept of allotropy on a number of occasions, but does not elucidate it in any detail. For example, he says that "sensation is not qualitative and qualified, but has only an intensive reality, which no longer determines with itself representative elements, but allotropic variations" (Deleuze 2003, 32). In chemistry, the term "allotropy" refers to the different forms some chemical elements can take in the same phase or state, when exposed to different external conditions. Allotropy, then, refers to the changes in physical properties that can occur in some elements without a change to their overall substance. For example, depending on the temperature and pressure of the environment in which carbon is placed, it can take the form of either graphite or diamond. In Deleuze's language, allotropy involves the modulation of sensation as a form of intensive difference. According to Bonshek's (2003) reading of Colebrook (2002), intensities are pure forms of difference that cannot be sensed directly, but only through the qualities that emerge from them. Giving the example of human vision, 'she suggests that we experience the pure difference of white light (which creates the colour spectrum), only through the 'intensity' of a single colour, such as a shade of red (ibid). She writes, our eyes do not perceive 'the difference of each vibration of light', but 'contracts complex data into a single shade or object' (ibid, 28)' (Bonshek 2003, n.p.). For Deleuze, allotropic modulation might be defined as how pure forms of difference (such as white light) come to be experienced as a particular quality (the color red) through the way this difference is encountered by a body or object.

Modifying Deleuze's use of the term, I will define allotropy as the process through which a force is modulated and expresses itself as a sensation or an affect, and vice versa, dependent on its encounters with other objects within a digital network. For example, when pressing a key on a keyboard, a finger creates a force that generates a sensation for the user (perhaps a feeling of

solidity or give), that is shaped by the properties of the plastic, metal, and the type of springs used in the keyboard. At the same time, this force becomes reorganized into a different sensation for the capacitive circuit underneath the keys that is activated when the key is pressed. This sensation, understood as a different organization of vibrations, completes an electrical connection and sends a signal to the computer's processor, which registers it as a keystroke. Nonetheless, the sensation and affect of the keystroke is linked to the sensation of the finger in the sense that without the force created by the finger there could be no sensation to affect the capacitive circuit and register a keystroke. Through this process the rhythmic force of the finger typing generates sensations that travel through the various components of the computer and are modulated into affects as they encounter other components, generating further sensations, which may be very different from the original. This same process can be applied to all manner of objects in a digital network, such as a router, an Ethernet cable, and so on.

The allotropic modulation of forces extends to the human accessing the network, and can generate a further series of modulations in the user's body that, in turn, create new associations among different senses, thoughts, and memories. These associations can take many forms, such as synesthesia, or what Deleuze, following Marcel Proust, terms "involuntary memory." Synesthesia is the stimulation of sense organs by alternate sensory inputs. For example, people with extreme forms of synesthesia can "taste" color, or "see" sound. Involuntary memory involves the coupling of "two sensations that existed at different levels of the body, and that seize ... each other like two wrestlers, the present sensation and the past sensation, in order to make something appear that was irreducible to them" (Deleuze 2003, 47). Involuntary memories might entail a strange sense of nostalgia, generated as a result of a sound or smell recalled from a different part of an individual's life.

Within a digital network, associations such as synesthesia and involuntary memory can be created through the connection of various pieces of content (such as the mixing of a sound and an image in a video on YouTube) or the linking of technical elements or affects to particular pieces of content (such as a feeling of physical drag when a web page fails to load). The resonances of sense involved in the particular tone of a sound or resolution of an image can create new modes of affective experience. In the networks of the Internet as well as the network of the body, forces allotropically modulate between sensations (the organization of forces) and affects (what those sensations can do) as they move and encounter other objects within these networks.

Following Deleuze's account of sensation as vibration, in which organic and inorganic matter alike have a capacity to sense, I argue that GIFs organise sensation in order to modulate affects and that these modulations are shaped by the technical specificity of the file types and networks through which GIFs travel. To understand the affective potentials of GIFs, the next section examines three forces that frame a GIF's potentiality to create sensations and affects: movement, color, and repetition.

Affective Potentialities of the GIF

In this section I concentrate on a variety of GIFs from different sources, some made using photos taken by the GIF's creator and others using preexisting content from television, film, and fan-made material. It is important to note that these GIFs have been created for a variety of purposes, such as comedy value, to amaze or dazzle the viewer, or as a response on a message board or forum in place of a textual reply. While the content may radically differ from GIF to GIF, a set of common material features shapes their potential for transmitting forces and modulating between sensations and affects that can be shared by multiple viewers. Here I want to concentrate on just three of a GIF's material features: its short temporal duration, its limited color palette, and the way it can be programmed to continuously loop and repeat.

Short temporal duration

GIFs' animation times are generally short; they might typically run for two to five seconds before looping and repeating. This short duration is key to the way in which they allotropically modulate the sensations from which they are composed into affects. For example, consider the dramatic "Prairie Dog" GIF originally taken from a segment of a Japanese television show, Hello Morning, in which the show's hosts are shown learning about the creature. The GIF is a five-second animation of a prairie dog standing on its rear legs in a glass cage (figure 8.1). The animal suddenly turns toward the camera, which zooms in on its seemingly intense stare (figure 8.2). The "Prairie Dog" GIF achieved widespread online popularity around 2007, and is often used on message boards to signal a surprised response or feigned shock to an earlier post or event.

[Figure 8.1 here]

[Figure 8.2 here]

On one level, this particular GIF is an anthropomorphic take on an animal's actions. As viewers of the GIF, we are asked to ascribe human features, intentions, and emotions to the prairie dog, namely that it is shocked or surprised by something that has just taken place. Indeed, the editing of the GIF is designed to create and enforce this narrative. Thinking through how the GIF communicates sensation and generates affect, however, suggests that its power to amuse or excite cannot entirely be reduced to the arbitrary narrative that one may apply to the images themselves.

Like all GIFs, the prairie dog is a form of compressed image, created in a raster format that uses a type of lossless compression to reduce the image's file size, while keeping an exact copy of the original uncompressed image. A raster format is a dot matrix data structure in which an image is created from a rectangular grid of pixels. The prairie dog's seeming capacity for movement is generated through linking a series of raster images to give the appearance of animation. GIF creators can customize the animation by defining the number of frames it will contain and the number of frames displayed per second. These factors determine the animation's speed of movement and the length of time it takes to play. The prairie dog GIF consists of forty-five

frames of animation and lasts five seconds before it repeats. Its short duration is a product of the necessity to keep its file size small. The longer the GIF, the larger the file size. Larger files take longer to load, something that is especially noticeable on web pages that have many GIFs embedded within them. The technical need to keep GIFs small influences the editing decisions made when a GIF is created.

These technical limitations mean that in all GIFs the action shown is necessarily removed from a broader context that would give the viewer clues about its original source (often a film, television program, or news report). Indeed one of the first questions asked about a successful or popular GIF is often, “Where did it come from?” This decontextualization helps remove any narrative that may be present in the original clip. However, the GIF does not simply impose a new narrative through its reediting. Rather, the very editing of the GIF creates new resonances and rhythms of sensation, which can potentially generate new affects. Reframed into GIF format, the zooming camera of the “Prairie Dog” GIF takes on a more intense force because the original television show’s presenters who discussed the prairie dog no longer precede the shot. The fact the clip loops over and over also encourages viewers to focus on the glint of light in the prairie dog’s eyes, which they may have missed had they watched the original clip. By editing the original clip into a short repeating loop, the GIF emphasizes the incorporeal forces involved in the relationship between prairie dog, its backdrop and the camera. In other words, the GIF organises sensation in a new way to prime the types of affect that might occur upon viewing the image, which were less likely to emerge when viewing the original television show from which the GIF was drawn. In the case of the prairie dog GIF, sensations of movement and zooming can become allotropically modulated into an uncanny affect of shock or amusement.

Color

GIFs utilize a red, green, and blue (RGB) color palette that contains space for 256 entries, which allows a single GIF to display a maximum of 256 colors. This limited palette means that most images gain a graininess absent in the original source image. In the “Jack Nicholson Nodding” GIF (taken from a single shot in the 2003 film *Anger Management*), for example, graininess enhances the obsessed and slightly maniacal grin on Nicholson’s face and works to associate his already famous celebrity grin with a creepy kind of menace (figure 8.3). The loss of color between the image as displayed in the film and the GIF can be understood as a reorganization of the forces that constitute the image as a sensation. Rather than presenting a simple lack of visual detail or information to the viewer, the limited color palette of the GIF provides it with a capacity to allotropically modulate an affect that is potentially different from what might be experienced when viewing the original film. Posted on forums and message boards, the Nicholson GIF is often used to communicate that a forum user has a strong (often sexual) desire for an object, an individual, or a practice. The limited color palette of the GIF give it a dirty, unwashed look, which works to communicate a lewd form of aggressive desire through allotropically modulating the sensations of the GIF to potentially generate such affects in other viewers of the GIF (even as the GIF itself remains able to generate different affects, dependent on its individual viewers, such as revulsion or disgust).

[Figure 8.3 here]

Repetition

Animated GIFs embedded in web pages or deployed on social media can be set up to run automatically as soon as they have loaded. Many of these GIFs are also set to run in an endless loop, whether the user is paying attention to it or not (although they can also be set to run once, or a fixed number of times). The fact that GIF makers can set GIFs to run in an endless cycle, autonomous of the viewer, gives them a power to capture and hold attention. Their looping nature leaves the “before” and “after” of the GIF tantalizingly beyond the viewer’s reach. Unless they can find the source material from which the GIF was drawn, viewers can only guess at what goes on in the full clip. Indeed, this curiosity is amplified by the contextual clues that may be partially visible at the beginning or end of a loop. With no simple way of stopping the loop, however, one can only concentrate and try to catch sight of a recognizable object.

In the same way that repeatedly speaking a word causes that word to sound strange and foreign, because it is uttered outside the context of familiar use, constantly looping GIF images alter the capacity for affect that the original images possessed, by reorganising the images into new rhythms of sensation. In the case of the “Prairie Dog” GIF, resonances of sensation are translated from the original video clip and reduced to 647 kilobytes of data displayed with a palette of 256 colors. This does not simply result in a loss of detail. Instead, the reorganization of movement and color, and the introduction of repetition, give the GIF a different capacity to affect compared to the GIF’s source material.

[Figure 8.4 here]

Deleuze’s account of synesthesia and involuntary memory is useful in considering how GIFs might allotropically modulate force into sensations that are experienced as affects on different sensory levels in human viewers. For example, the designer Micaël Reynaud uses photos and graphics he has made to create complex time-lapse GIFs, such as pizza being cooked in an oven⁵ or a cat yawning on a lawn (figure 8.4). Synesthetically, these GIFs might invoke proprioceptive feelings of stickiness or warmth in the viewer’s body as the dough thickens and rises, changing density, shape, and texture. The constant looping of the GIF can induce affects of grip, grab (see Senft, this volume), and holding in the muscles, as viewers try to examine, grasp, and visually immobilize the organized sensation of the constantly repeating image. The yawning cat GIF might also work on the level of involuntary memory, uniting past and present sensations into novel combinations. Past experiences of touching animal fur, or particular experiences with grass, might unite to generate a new affect of tiredness, as viewers watch the cat yawn while it sits on the grass. Yet one cannot be sure of the particular emotional response that might arise in any single viewer’s body when watching an animated GIF before it actually takes place. As Paasonen (2011) argues, affective resonances are open ended, and the kinds of affect a sensation generates will be relative to the particular biographical, historical, and social context of the viewer. The specific technical structure of GIF animations, which organize the sensations it

generates, however, primes and frames the moment of encounter and, therefore, also shapes the particular affects that can emerge. The fact that popular GIFs proliferate and become Internet memes suggests that while the affects that they generate are not assured; the organisation of sensation can and does produce equivalent affects in multiple viewers.

Toward an Allotropic Account of Networked Affect

I have examined the GIF as a digital file type in order to develop an allotropic account of how the potential for affect travels through digital networks. Modifying Deleuze's account of allotropy to think about the way forces express themselves as sensations or affects, depending on their mode of transmission and encounter, also contributes to broader debates around how affect travels. I have argued that affect itself does not travel, but the potential for an affect to occur is framed by the particular forces and sensations that enable an affective encounter to take place. This broad point follows the classic statement of Marshall McLuhan (1964) that "the medium is the message," proposing that the medium in which it is presented influences how a message is interpreted. This chapter expands that argument around technological mediation through an exploration of the affective realm. Concentrating on the affective realm destabilizes the concept of a message simply as a piece of content with intentional meaning, as well as the idea that interpretation only operates on the level of conscious awareness.

Developing an allotropic account of affect is useful for thinking about the ways in which capacities for affect are multiple, open, and linked to the particular properties and structures of the objects and software that make up a network. An allotropic account avoids the conceptual divides, generated in recent literature, that distinguish between contextual accounts of affect on the one hand, and precognitive accounts of affect on the other (for example, Leys 2011; Papoulias and Callard 2010). Simplifying things somewhat, from a contextual perspective, the affects experienced by humans are ultimately shaped by an individual's social and historical situation. From a precognitive perspective, affect works on an autonomic level, shaping bodily capacities and experiences with minimal interference from mediating historical and social factors.

Thinking allotropically alters the terms of debate between contextual and noncognitive accounts of affect by introducing a distinction between sensation and affect. Creating this distinction also alters the site from which we consider affects to emerge. Affects do not simply germinate at a point of encounter between two bodies, but are intimately tied to sensations, which travel via human, technical, and nonhuman means. Even if affects shape human bodies on a precognitive level, the affects themselves are always already shaped by social and historical forces because they emerge from environments that precede particular individuals and objects. To understand how affects emerge, one has to follow forces and sensations as they travel and consider how such sensations are allotropically modulated as they meet with, and are translated into, affects by all manner of entities.

Earlier I introduced Stiegler's account of grammatization. Reflecting on the GIF as an object with a series of affective capacities calls this account into question. Steigler's account of grammatization, central to his critique of the digital cultural industries, concerns the exteriorization of information into some durable form, whether the form of information be writing, drawing, or digital code. Developing Deleuze's notion of force and sensation to think about digital networks suggests that digital objects are anything but durable or fixed; instead they actively resonate alongside other objects to create rhythms of sense. As the example of the "Prairie Dog" GIF demonstrates, these resonances and rhythms always exceed any particular process of grammatization. While "Prairie Dog" and "Jack Nicholson Nodding" are technically lower quality versions of the original video clips, these GIFs gain a quality of excess through the way they modulate between sensations and affects as they move within a network.

GIFs therefore contest a narrative in which digital grammatization is about the creation of disaffection through repetition and cognitive saturation. GIFs point to the ways in which images have, and always have had, an excessive quality beyond their production (see Hillis 2009). The dramatic "Prairie Dog" GIF, for example, takes on an affective life beyond Hello Morning and the Japanese television station that owns and runs the show. Rather than leading to a rise in disaffection, the hypnotic nature of GIFs can intensify the potential to experience affect precisely because of their automated, grammatized, and cyclical nature.

Notes

1. While the content of a GIF as well as its cultural context are key components in their affective response, the focus of this essay is on the GIF's technical attributes.

2. The "Prairie Dog" GIF can be viewed at <http://gifsoup.com/view/129865/dramatic-prairie-dog.html>.

4. The "Jack Nicholson Nodding" GIF can be viewed at <http://replygif.net/163>

5. The yawning cat GIF can be viewed at <https://plus.google.com/117576570968762597633/posts/8eKFAC8sqdi>;

The rising pizza GIF can be viewed at <https://plus.google.com/photos/+michaelreynaud/albums/6020488297409604961/6020488301734667602?pid=6020488301734667602&oid=117576570968762597633>.

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Figure 8.1

Still of “Prairie Dog in Glass Cage” GIF.

Figure 8.2

Close-up of “Prairie Dog” GIF.

Figure 8.3

Still from “Jack Nicholson Nodding” GIF.

Figure 8.4

Still from Micaël Reynaud, “Cat Yawning on a Lawn” GIF.