

Are we “insensitive” to the ongoing devastation? From “sensitive ecology” to the fight against desensitization apparatuses

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Abstract: A growing body of work approaches the current environmental devastation from the perspective of a “crisis of sensitivity”: our inability to care for the living around us is said to be a failure of perception and feeling. The article explores several versions of the narrative of modern insensitivity through a study of Günther Anders and Jane Bennett, highlighting the limitations of such approaches. I suggest the notion of a desensitization apparatus to specify and politicize the diagnosis of a “crisis of sensitivity”.

Where to locate the obstacles?

"One of the things we're missing in climate policy is sensitivity," said Bruno Latour at a Harvard conference. In a similar vein, philosopher Baptiste Morizot regularly speaks out in public to explain that the ecological crisis is a "crisis of sensitivity", i.e. "an impoverishment of what we can feel, perceive, understand and weave as relationships towards the living". Far from being isolated, these positions are part of a growing trend to approach environmental devastation from the angle of the crisis of attention, or sensitivity: our lack of sensitivity towards other living beings is said to be one of the main causes of our inability to care for them. The teeming field of environmental humanities, in particular, is driven by the conviction that creating new forms of sensitivity is a political priority. Living like a bird, thinking like an iceberg, or like a forest –if these stories are so important today, it's because they "open up to something else entirely, to other stories and other affects", explains Vinciane Despret: "another 'doing-feeling' is going to be put to work".

From this point of view, the sustainable world that ecologists are calling for would not only depend on more just laws, ethical principles and political-economic constraints: it would also depend on an increase or broadening of our sensitivity and affects. The call for greater "sensitivity" refers in this context to the senses and sensations (the sensory order), to an increased capacity to register phenomena ("a sensitive sense of smell"), to a certain

predisposition to allow oneself to be affected and disturbed ("a sensitive soul"), and to take new things into account and give them importance ("being sensitive to, a sensitive subject").

Such hypotheses are attractive at first glance, as they seem to be blazing new trails at a time when many traditional political levers and concepts have failed to promote the changes in trajectory that seem necessary. As a result, they are becoming increasingly popular, even with the general public and major cultural institutions. The popularity of these reflections nevertheless calls for particular attention to their political implications: where do these analyses lead, and to what kind of political ecology do they contribute? Indeed, while it seems important to take into account the micropolitical obstacles and vectors of change, the difficulty of these narratives in developing coherent chains of causality (why are we "insensitive" and how exactly could we be sensitive in our own right?), in identifying patterns of responsibility (Because of whom? Through whom?), and in identifying margins for manoeuvre other than artistic ones, casts a shadow of aestheticizing depoliticization over them. Indeed, traditional left-wing forces have often greeted these elucidations on the sensible with disdain, seeing them as a diversion from tackling the material and economic causes of the destruction underway.

In what follows, I'd like to explore the question of sensitivity as the problematic core of the ecological crisis. Under what conditions could the diagnosis of a "crisis of sensitivity" contribute to a critical and emancipatory political ecology? I begin by distinguishing two major accounts of the impoverishment of the senses in the traditions of political ecology: on the one hand, a catastrophist tradition, which deplores our "blindness" in the face of apocalypse, and on the other, an enchanting tradition, which deplores our insensitivity to the beings and things around us (I). I then outline the limits of what might be called these "narratives of lack", without invalidating the analysis of the role of sensitivities in the maintenance and reproduction of a given political order: while the rehabilitation of the sensible as locus of the political seems relevant, I show that the diagnosis needs to be specified in order to be more offensive. I propose an analysis of desensitization apparatuses as a means of politicizing the diagnosis of the "crisis of sensitivity" (II).

I. In search of lost sensitivity?

While the hypothesis of an "information deficit", according to which climate inaction is sustained by a lack of knowledge on the part of citizens, has been beaten back, this type of argument is now making a comeback, in the form of a narrative of a "deficit of affect". Under these new guises, the reading of ecological disaster as a crisis of affect and perception is in fact a long-standing one. We can recall the gesture of one of the first thinkers on the ecological crisis, Günther Anders, who sought to reconnect with the emotions and imagination, particularly fear, in order to overcome what he called "blindness" in the face of the nuclear apocalypse.

Fear to see better: the heuristic powers of anxiety in the forerunners of political ecology

According to Günther Anders, who developed these theses as early as 1956, the obsolescence of our predictive knowledge – which is both structurally underdeveloped in relation to our products, and incapable of eliciting reactions in human beings – should prompt us to place greater value on imagination and emotion. As Anders explains, the worst dangers are invisible (I would add: invisibilized); and as such escape our knowledge, understanding and moral consideration. In an age of unbridled technical advances, Anders calls supraliminal

(überschwellig) "events and actions that are too great to be conceived by man ". Whether it's nuclear power or other polluting industries, their impacts can occur dozens or even hundreds of years later, several hundred kilometers away from where they are consumed. For Anders, our problem lies in the fact that the imagination and emotion that make ethical action possible are lacking today. If "the volume of what we can produce is extensible ad libitum", "imagination is incomparably less so, and feeling is one of the most rigid", deploras Anders. Our ethical problem is thus rooted in the gap between our production (herstellen), and our capacity for affective representation (vorstellen) of the consequences of our actions. "We can murder thousands of people, and represent to ourselves perhaps a dozen deaths; but at most, we can weep or repent for having killed a single one". Our "'blindness' to the apocalypse" is thus rooted in a lack of perception and affection.

Thus, to "be able to see what they see", human beings must call on their imagination and feelings. Anders invests all his hope in the "*capacity of our sensitivity to understand*". Oxy-moronic in appearance, this formula is intended to emphasize that our "sensitivity" sometimes gives us access to truths beyond the reach of our cognitive faculties. Fear, in particular, he argues, is a particularly heuristically and ethically powerful sentiment. Faced with the unbridled deployment of our technical capacities, we urgently need to "make ourselves capable of feeling". If emotions, as Anders puts it, are "rigid", they are not set in stone. Anders is even convinced of the opposite: alongside a history of events and a history of ideas, there is also a history of feelings. In his diaries, entitled "loving yesterday - notes for a history of feeling", he writes:

We are so ill-equipped to cope with the enormity of the world we have ourselves "fabricated", and especially with our power to destroy it, that, to survive, we must imperatively subject our feelings (and therefore their "history") to forced transformations.

Anders thus supports the thesis that emotions can change, and more crucially, that we can "come to the aid of sensitivity" in order to deliberately bring about their change. This Andersian thesis of what he calls the "plasticity of feeling" underpins his entire philosophy, and is his only hope of bridging the yawning chasm of the Promethean gap between production and imagination.

Anders invites us to "give greater extension to the usual operations of the imagination and of our feelings" through "*techniques of self-transformation*" to access "states, regions or objects from which we would otherwise remain excluded". These "exercises in moral elongation [...] to transcend the supposedly immutable human measure of imagination and feeling" would "deliberately extend the capacity of our imagination and feeling".

Our daily lives are already punctuated by such techniques, "even if we don't always identify them as such and never designate them as such". For Anders, who attempted to gain accreditation at Frankfurt University with a study on the phenomenology of listening, music, for example, represents an exercise in the deliberate enlargement of feeling: certain pieces would thus have the effect of "an instrument we have made to enlarge the capacity of our soul". At a time when products are outstripping our capacity for representation, artists could be called upon to play a crucial role. Unfortunately, Anders feels that these experiences "evade description" and does not elaborate on the concrete modalities of these "*exercises that have become necessary today*".

We find a similar rehabilitation of the sensible for ethical and ecological purposes in Hans Jonas twenty years later, when he defends his (in)famous "heuristics of fear". In a footnote to the *Principle of Responsibility*, he makes clear the key role of emotion in the possibility of responsible, ethical action:

To want something, it [the will] (or the judgment it agrees to obey) needs precisely the feeling that floods this something with the light of what is worth choosing.

As "the faculty of judgment instructed by feeling, reason evaluates possible ends according to their dignity and prescribes them to the will", he adds. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, he argues: "It is far more likely that fear will achieve what reason has not achieved, and that it will achieve what reason has not been able to achieve. "It is "the lucidity of the imagination" that can guide us. The "factual gift of feeling, probably a universal human potential, is therefore the cardinal datum of morality", he concludes, advocating a "personal readiness" to increase our "readiness to let ourselves be affected" to compensate for this inadequacy. Despite a series of differences, the two philosophers thus offer a philosophical rehabilitation of the emotions, and more specifically of fear, whether in the form of Jonas's "heuristics of fear" or Anders's "duty of anguish". Half a century on, and 50 years of the failure of catastrophism, enlightened or otherwise, to mobilize the masses, few philosophers are still banking on fear or anxiety to break insensitivity. Criticizing the "catastrophist rhetoric already underway, which is inhibiting, emotionally unbearable, and induces denial and resignation", many thinkers in the field of ecology are conceptualizing an ecology of wonder and enchantment, which, while diametrically opposed to the proposals of catastrophists, in fact mobilizes the same discourse of lack of affect.

"Re-enchanting the world": how can a sense of wonder nourish the ecology of the 21st century?

As Baptiste Morizot recently told *Le Monde*, "we need to politicize wonder". By re-enchanting the world, i.e. by discovering the diversity, ingenuity and multiplicity of the beings around us, and becoming aware of our irreducible dependence on them, we would be moved to defend them. Far from being an exception, this kind of talk is part of a whole series of public and academic statements to the effect that political ecology cannot do without an "enchanted materialism" (Jane Bennett), a "charming anthropocene" and "environmental politics of desire".

Against this backdrop, the notion of re-enchantment is currently enjoying particular success, whether in press interviews, academic publications or symposia: re-enchanting the world, re-enchanting our relationship with the living, re-enchanting ecology; in the face of a darkening future, re-enchantment seems capable of fuelling resistance to the destruction underway. What all these proposals have in common is that, firstly, they bring other entities into the field of what deserves our attention, and secondly, they invest these new entities with positive affects: nature, and a fortiori its protection, must become desirable. Faced with what is perceived as the failure of a flurry of figures and scientific reports, and of catastrophist rhetoric (an ecology that could be described as rational and negative), a growing number of authors are exploring the path of a sensitive and enchanting ecology.

A number of voices from the world of political ecology are working to challenge the grand narrative of disenchanted modernity. If most agree that the average Western subject is "disenchanted", they believe that the world itself has never been so, and remains susceptible to wonder and enchantment. Jane Bennett's work, both in terms of the response it has received and its breadth, seems particularly essential to a better understanding of what an "ecology of enchantment" might look like. Largely unknown to the French academic world and untranslated, the work of this professor of political theory at Johns Hopkins University played a key role in the creation of new materialisms, a current of Anglophone thought united around the desire to rethink the role of matter – human bodies, non-human bodies and objects – in politics. In her books *The Enchantment of Modern Life* and *Vibrant Matter*, she delivers an ardent plea for the wonder and enchantment of the world's vitality. Her work thus represents one of the few

systematized formulations of a set of statements that have been saturating the media and academic field for some time.

In Bennett's sights, a double disenchantment: on the one hand, that of the world, described by many critics of modernity after Weber. In their writings, she detects a general "disenchantment tale" that caricaturally contrasts our modern world, characterized by instrumental rationality, calculation, the atomization of individuals and the inertia of matter, with an ancient, magical or holistic cosmos that arouses feelings of both superiority and nostalgia.

The other disenchantment challenged by Bennett is that of critical works themselves, when they conceive of their work as an "enterprise of demystification". Bennett sees in this a naïve overestimation of the power of criticism as such, "a faith inherited from the Enlightenment in the efficacy of demystification, in the idea that a clear understanding of injustice carries with it its own impetus to repair evil and promulgate good".

In her view, political theory must overcome this double disenchantment (as a critical methodology and as a diagnostic of modernity), which is neither truthful nor mobilizing: on the one hand, the world has never ceased to be enchanted (it just is in another way, I'll come back to that), and secondly, these narratives undermine our power to act: "the grand narrative's acceptance of disenchantment, combined with a keen sense of injustice coming from the left, too often produces an exhausting cynicism". Bennett is thus convinced that "ethical politics requires more than rational demystification".

To answer the question of what an ethical policy requires, and how to bridge the gap between principle and action, she brings affect into play. For Bennett, ethics rests on the one hand on a "moral code", which synthesizes metaphysical ideals and principles into clear rules, and on the other hand, and above all, on an "embodied sensitivity", which organizes affects and generates the impetus needed to implement the code:

Whether the ethical code is conceived as a divine commandment or as a pragmatic rule, if it is to be transformed into deeds, affects must be engaged, orchestrated and libidinally linked to it - a code alone cannot bring about its own implementation.

It is within this framework that she defends an ethics of wonder:

Enchantment implies a state of wonder, and one of the characteristics of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in an encounter that momentarily immobilizes; it is to be pierced, bewitched [...] Thoughts [...] come to a halt, while the senses continue to function at full speed. You notice new colors, discern previously ignored details, hear extraordinary sounds, while the landscapes of the familiar senses sharpen and intensify. [...] The general effect of enchantment is a feeling of fullness, abundance or vivacity, a sense that nerves, blood circulation or faculties like concentration have been retuned and recharged.

The reason why the affect of wonder is so interesting for an eco-ethic, according to Bennett, is that it leads to a feeling of connection, and the impression of receiving "gifts" from our cultural and natural environment, leading to a willingness to offer in return. A similar argument is made by Baptiste Morizot, for whom wonder, defined as "intensified attention to something new that is colored with importance", "weaves together feeling and thinking, and as a passion, it also weaves together affiliations towards what it explores, which spontaneously makes it a political passion, a movement of commitment to it and against what destroys it", allowing "access to a form of enlarged self".

The problem, however, is that narratives of disenchanting modernity, according to Bennett, cut us off from our capacity for wonder. As she explains, "the representation of nature and culture as orders no longer capable of inspiring deep attachment induces a self as a creature of loss, and discourages discernment of wondrous vitality". Hence the absolute urgency of what she calls "enchanted materialism": a theory of politics that takes non-humans and objects seriously, without reducing them to inert matter, as has been the case within various tendencies of historical materialism. Effectively, she argues, "human generosity can be reinforced by the image of a vibrant, eccentric and overflowing material world [...] [which, through] sometimes chimerical descriptions, aspires to increase our real attachments to the world".

Far from being a purely somatic and spontaneous phenomenon, wonder and enchantment can therefore be deliberately aroused, not least by our ways of describing the world: "Enchantment is something we encounter, something that strikes us, but it is also a component that can be encouraged by deliberate strategies". In an age of unbridled environmental destruction, Bennett calls on theorists and philosophers to make the effort to enchant the world, rather than engage in a competition to see who can make the most acerbic demystification. She shows that what we have always taken to be inert matter or our "environment" – nutrients, objects or storms – actually have the capacity "not only to impede or block human will and purpose, but also to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, pro-pensions or tendencies of their own". For her, it's clear that "the contemporary world contains the power to enchant humans, and humans can train themselves to feel this effect more keenly". There's no need to resurrect past or distant cosmologies for this purpose: Bennett draws on the writings of Thoreau, Deleuze and Guattari, for example, to learn to be attentive to matter as something "vibrant, vital, energetic, alive, quivering, evanescent and efflorescent". Drawing on Foucault's preoccupation with the self and Guattari's "new aesthetic paradigm", she advocates "arts, techniques and strategies applied by the self to a bodily sensitivity below the level of direct intellectual control" to make ourselves sensitive to the world around us. Similar assertions are made by Will Connolly, when he explains that in our context of unbridled destruction, "the need to expand our modes and sites of awareness, sensitivity and attachment through artistic means becomes acute".

Where some might be tempted to make a binary opposition between Benettian and Andersian ecologies (embodying respectively an "ecology of fear" and an "ecology of wonder"), it would be more fruitful to insist on the similarities between these two eco-thinkers. It is indeed striking to note that both situate the ecological problem at the level of a perceptive and affective deficit, and locate the response on the side of artistic and aesthetic sensitization techniques. One deplures our inability to imagine dangers, the other our insensitivity to the swarming of other species around us. For one, we have a duty to fear, for the other, we have to be capable of wonder. As we can see, there's a long tradition of revalorizing sensory and affective registers with the aim of promoting more ecological ways of being and knowing, without excluding certain categories of affect out of hand on the pretext that they would be demobilizing.

And yet, how can we translate into concrete, political action the seductively vague formulas of "politicizing wonder", "making oneself capable of feeling" or "re-enchanting the world"? Are they not part of a sympathetic but harmless attempt to renew the practices and experiences of a certain category of individuals, without tackling the systemic causes of the current crisis?

II. Targeting desensitization apparatuses

Is micropolitics no great shakes?

Are these proposals – which, let's not forget, are presented as remedies for apathy and demobilization – likely to lead to emancipatory ecological thought and practice? While it's easy to see how a sense of wonder can serve as a breeding ground for more ecological futures, the question of how these notions contribute to a better political understanding of the situation remains unanswered.

Certainly, it seems entirely relevant to propose alternative paths to the hermeneutics of suspicion, and to conceptions of critical theory conceived as an enterprise of *demystification*. Following in Spinoza's footsteps, making ethics a history of affects also seems a promising way to understand and respond to the generalized impotence that characterizes our times, by ridding ourselves once and for all of a misplaced faith in the mobilizing power of IPCC reports. In this sense, the proposal to place affects at the heart of an ecological ethic seems more than necessary. However, the way in which affects are approached by the authors cited above sometimes verges on the petition of principle: if we thought of nature (or its ravages) in such and such a way, then we would give it more consideration – which amounts to postulating that if we were more affected by our environment... then we would be more affected. So how can we politically translate the proposal to think differently about our links with others, and to change our ontology? The few philosophical and practical avenues proposed to make ourselves "sensitive" are mainly in the arts, which, while saying a lot about the social milieu and the sensitivity of the authors, leaves us politically hungry. Is it possible to "politicize wonder", as Morizot suggests? Aren't the proposals around enchantment and wonder, and also those around heuristic fear, too aesthetic and inoffensive to be part of a renewed ecological politics?

Criticisms addressed to sensitive ecologies such as Bennett's are manifold, and there is not enough space to develop them here. One of the main criticisms levelled at these authors is that of depoliticization, both in terms of the substance of the proposed policy (by insisting on the multiplicity of interconnected agentivities, we lose sight of the power relations between human beings, and who must fight against whom), and in terms of the means advocated to implement it (can the proposal to "change ontology" lead to anything other than a quest for individual ethical improvement?)

It has been pointed out that the desire to deconstruct all dualisms sometimes turns into a refusal to conceive or advocate certain separations and forms of distancing that are necessary for political struggle, resulting in a "postpolitics". Indeed, we may well hypothesize that the cultivation of awe-struck or anxious affects, and a sense of the intimate ties that bind us to ecosystems, will not directly slow down the actors of the ongoing destruction. More broadly, the question of whether granting power to non-humans invisibilizes power relations between human beings is central to many critiques.

In terms of method, the question arises as to the scale of the desired political change. Indeed, the diagnosis of the crisis of sensitivity suggests a scale of intervention that is both too vast (how can we make politics if it's our very "way of feeling" that's at stake), and too individualistic (does the political translation of these philosophies imply that each of us should work in our own corner on our "ways of paying attention" to what surrounds us?) Does the effort to alter the experience of everyday life and the environment through micro-political exercises constitute a political horizon? As Thomas Lemke explains, "there is a tendency in [Bennett's] work to relegate political considerations by invoking new ethical responsibilities and sensitivities". It is indeed striking to note that many of the authors who speak of a crisis of sensitivity are influenced by a political imaginary of "techniques of the self" designed to make us sensitive again. It would obviously be anachronistic to speak of Foucauldian inspiration in Anders, but his elaborations in the appendix to *L'Obsolescence de l'Homme* on "techniques for the enlargement of feeling" include many parallels with the work of the last Foucault, a series of

studies on "the arts of the self", i.e. on the aesthetics of existence and the government of self and others in Greco-Roman culture. Bennett, for her part, quotes him clearly. Each in their own way evokes the "arts of existence", which Foucault defines as "exercises of the self upon the self, through which one attempts to elaborate, transform and access a certain mode of being". Such an approach, while rich and promising in terms of shaping sensitivities, is necessarily limited from a political point of view. By looking too much to the "arts of existence and techniques of the self" for solutions, we end up conceiving emancipation not as the abolition of oppressive structures, but as subjects to be converted. This risk had already been identified by the Hellenist Jean Pierre Vernant, from whom Foucault drew his inspiration, when he feared that "by focusing his interpretation exclusively on the culture of the self, on concern for the self, on conversion to the self, and in general by defining his ethical model as an aesthetics of existence, Michel Foucault was proposing a culture of the self that was too purely aesthetic [...] a new form of dandyism in the late twentieth-century version" .

It would be pointless to confine ourselves to the criticism of "depoliticization", in the sense that such an approach is precisely part of a desire to influence the definition of what is political. As numerous passages attest, Bennett is well aware of these criticisms:

Some in the field of political theory have criticized this turn, seeing it as a retreat into "soft" issues of psychocultural identity, to the detriment of the "hard" political issues of economic justice, environmental sustainability and democratic governance. Others have responded that the bodily disciplines through which ethical sensitivities and social relations are formed and reformed are themselves politics, and constitute a whole (underexplored) micro-political field, without which any principle or policy risks being no more than a heap of words.

Morizot anticipates the reproaches in a similar way when he argues that "these arts of attention are political, for the discrete and pre-institutional essence of the political is played out in the shifts of the threshold that command what deserves attention".

It should also be stressed that taking affects and sensitivity as an object of research can be seen as political, in the sense that it is part of a long tradition of feminist and ecologist epistemology. The idea, notably present among ecofeminists, is that "at the foundation of the discontinuity and alienation of human beings in relation to nature, lies an alienation of human beings in relation to those qualities which, from within the human, ensure continuity with nature". In this sense, reconnecting with and taking an interest in our devalued qualities would be a first step towards a closer bond with what is called "nature". In this context, experiential and situated knowledge are rehabilitated: breaking out of the ecological impasse and developing alternatives to mechanistic worldviews would mean revaluing the body of vernacular, oral, affective and sensitive knowledge discredited by modern science.

To reproach thoughts that aim to modify the definition of what is political with not being political therefore seems somewhat tautological. Thoughts such as those of Bennett and Anders have the merit of taking seriously the ways in which our ways of feeling and being affect reproduce or destabilize the status quo. They highlight the fact that a given political order is actualized and reinforced by an infinite number of individual and interpersonal gestures, performances and dispositions, in addition to the institutions traditionally studied in political science.

If the rehabilitation of the sensitive as a site of politics does indeed seem relevant, the diagnosis must nevertheless be specified in order to be operational. If "the sensitive" and "the affective" constitute a critical locus for maintaining and destabilizing a given system, how can we politically influence them? As Léna Balaud and Antoine Chopot have pointed out, the challenge is simultaneously "to attack the causes, but also the frameworks of inherited experience, [...] at the

same time, to target the elements deemed responsible for the disaster and to displace the dominant frameworks of experience". Under what conditions can the recent proposals that are coalescing around "sensitive ecology" hope to contribute to a critical political ecology? This implies responding to the critical points made above, in order to issue a diagnosis of the crisis of sensitivity that is more radical (in the sense of being more curious about the roots of insensitivity) and more specific (in the sense that the target must be something other than some "narrative" or "ontology" of modernity). In terms of proposed solutions, these must be on a more collective and confrontational scale than the arts of attention.

Silencing the earth: the factory of insensitivity

One wonders whether theorizing our current problems as a "lack" of affects and percepts doesn't reproduce exactly the same gesture as the outdated belief that people need "more information". In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, anthropologist David Abram hypothesizes that it was the transition to self-referential alphabetical writing that rendered us insensitive to other living beings and to the physical world around us. Earth has never stopped "talking" – Abram rather analyzes how humans render other species mute, becoming, through the intermediary of a precise tool, "deaf" and "blind" to them. In his view, it's writing, and the level of abstraction it authorizes in relation to the lived world, that's to blame. We can extend this theoretical gesture, while specifying it, by asking what human operations and mechanisms are aimed at silencing the earth. To put it more concretely, it's not that we "are" insensitive, but that we've made ourselves so. These narratives, in which we are "cut off" from our sensations, as if deprived of our ability to vibrate with other living beings, or to be aware of dangers, take the form of a narrative of lack, which tends to account for the destruction underway not as a wall to be destroyed, but as a gap to be bridged. This raises the question of whether the narratives of lack do not insidiously tend to invisibilize the operations, actors and institutions that actively aim to reproduce these affective gaps.

One of the problems with the approaches to sensitivity proposed by Bennett, Morizot and Anders is that, even if they make some effort to historicize and politicize our sensitivity, they still fall into the trap of confusing cause and symptom, and by the same token, problem and solution. They defend respectively "wonder" and "fear" as solutions, whereas our crisis arises precisely from their absence. The urgent question, then, is what causes this absence. It would be far more politically fruitful to ask what it is that has made us so "insensitive" in the first place, and take this as the object of our struggle, rather than explaining that we destroy through lack of sensitivity. If these intuitions are to be anything more than yet another tale of impotence in the face of ecological crisis, they can't simply be about a lack of fear or wonder. Lack of fear or wonder doesn't explain anything: it's what needs to be explained. Indeed, to speak of an "impoverishment" of the range of affects (Morizot) and percepts, or of "blindness" (Anders), is to make invisible the operations consciously orchestrated to hide, silence and make other things count instead. How, then, do we fit these experiences and absences of affective experience into an explanatory scheme capable of leading to political intervention?

It seems to me that a better (or at least complementary to the arts of the self) way of approaching the question of sensitivity is to be found in Foucault's earlier works, notably through the concept of the apparatus. He uses this notion in *La volonté de savoir*, where he speaks of the "sexuality apparatus" to refer to all the discourses and medical practices devised to restrict certain deviant practices, and then in *Discipline and punish*, where he explains that "the exercise of discipline presupposes an apparatus that constrains through the play of the gaze; an apparatus where the techniques that allow us to see induce effects of power, and where, in return, the

means of coercion make clearly visible those on whom they are applied". Wouldn't it be high time to study what we might call desensitization apparatuses, to enable an analysis of the way in which a whole series of elements such as discourses, laws, expressions and institutions are arranged in such a way as to inhibit, stifle and delegitimize certain types of sensitive experience, affects and feelings? The gesture of "politicizing affects" cannot be confined to valuing the percepts and sensations that orient our ways of doing politics: politicization must necessarily involve analyzing and criticizing the political ways in which affects are orchestrated and stifled in the first place. The condition of the average European human being is not that of someone who "doesn't know", or "doesn't feel": it's that of someone who, structurally, affectively, corporeally, sensually, is driven to act irresponsibly and ecocidally by a set of arrangements. This is what led Isabelle Stengers and Philippe Pignarre to speak of "capitalist sorcery": "being blinded implies that one sees badly, which can be corrected", they note, "but being captured implies that it is the power to see itself that is affected", before concluding that "it is not enough to denounce a capture, as one might denounce an ideology. Whereas ideology operates as a screen, capture takes hold, and it takes hold of something that matters, something that makes the captured person live and think". The ways in which we analyze the current disaster are important, because responding to an ideological offensive is not the same as extracting oneself from an affective capture.

Why aren't we afraid of nuclear power? How can we see a prairie as nothing more than an empty expanse, where an entire society of living beings dwells, teems and grows? Certainly, the grand narratives of disenchantment described by Bennett don't help us to perceive our non-human acolytes, and the supraliminal nature of technological evolutions like nuclear power, described by Anders, inhibits our affects. Yet one wonders if the narrative of insensitivity as a general product of ontology, disenchanting critical theory isn't too immense to be politically useful. Wouldn't such diagnoses of our inability to feel things deserve more finesse? Bennett, Anders and Morizot are right to assert that the ways in which we are affected, bewitched and, above all, desensitized are profoundly political: political because they are shaped by political structures, and political because of the kind of (in)action they engender. We still need to equip ourselves with the right conceptual frameworks, and integrate these analyses into a broader general diagnosis, otherwise the "sensitive" turn in ecology would effectively be doomed to remain a series of introspective and aestheticizing considerations, despite its political ambitions.

Taking desensitization apparatuses as a target and object of analysis is thus part of a shift from a narrative of lack of sensations to one of orchestration of insensitivity. In contrast to ontological or affective-anthropological explanations, such an approach is in keeping with the desire to provide grips and identify concrete adversaries. The study of desensitization apparatuses inherits from the history of technology and science the conviction that "rather than insisting on the most impressive causes", it seems "historically more interesting and politically more efficient to discover the small, sufficient causes, because they are the result of historical processes that we can hope are reversible". As historian Jean-Baptiste Fressoz explains in an interview, "the problem with these rather idealistic grand narratives" is that, by calling everything into question, they don't tackle anything. Another legacy, formed by authors who can be summed up schematically under the concept of the "economy of attention", deserves to be mobilized to think about ecological insensitivity in a more political way. Following in the footsteps of the Frankfurt School and the Situationists, various authors have focused their analyses on the attentional capture of the culture industry and, later, of information and communication technologies. We can thus revive Bifo Berardi's reflections, according to which "the power of the media is no longer based on the capacity of the media to produce conformity in the field of opinion, but on the capacity of info-stimuli to occupy and shape the space of social attention". The topicality of the question of insensitivity demands that we pay particular attention to this

intellectual legacy, which reminds us that talking about sensitivity is not necessarily a navel-gazing, aestheticizing whim.

It seems to me that the almost exclusive focus of these analyses on the digital media sphere and information technologies overlooks other equally effective desensitization apparatuses. Admittedly, their analyses highlight the psychopathological and affective consequences of the media sphere, and thus provide a welcome complement to the intellectual traditions of "simple" ideological critique. It seems to me, however, that they remain trapped in an exclusive focus on discourse and images. Doesn't the manufacture of insensitivity arise as much from certain modes of spatial organization, from the form of certain objects, as from media discourse? Isn't the effect of what we sometimes reductively call "propaganda" all the more powerful when it interferes with the affective constitution of subjects?

The notion of a desensitization apparatus is intended to render problematic other forms of attentional capture... particularly in their psychic, bodily and affective aspects. It seems to me that the concept of radiophobia, and the car, constitute two desensitizing apparatuses.

The practices and discourses of nuclear-industry institutions, and in particular those built around the concept of radiophobia, effectively illustrate what I have in mind when I speak of a desensitization apparatus. The notion was mobilized by scientific experts and industry specialists after the Chernobyl disaster in Ukraine in 1986, to describe the reaction of citizens, judged to be disproportionate to the real risk of the accident. Thus, at the 1987 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Conference on the Performance and Safety of Nuclear Power Plants, two professors at the Institute of Bio-physics of the Moscow Ministry of Public Health described the people living near the Chernobyl accident as experiencing "tension and a chronic state of stress [which] is causing a syndrome of radiation phobia in part of the population". According to them, this phobia represents "a more serious threat to health than exposure to radiation itself". From then on, the need to "manage" the fear of nuclear power is at the heart of the concerns of the industry and its advocates. The manufacture of consent around nuclear accidents relies on affective orchestration, and mobilizes a range of expert reports, doctors and psychologists to discredit the emergence of legitimate anxieties and doubts as pathological "radiophobia". To manage nuclear power, the atomic industry must first manage affects. In France, too, an internal CEA memo refers to "a fairly high level of public concern", which is "much more a problem for psychologists and sociologists than for technicians". In fact, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, nuclear companies called on the advice of semiologists and publicity specialists, who recommended replacing the terms "catastrophe" and "accident" with "event" and "incident". It was then decided to use Curie units rather than Becquerels to measure radioactive activity, in order to display less impressive numbers, "with fewer zeros". In a publication ten years later, the International Energy Agency maintained the same line, with psychologist R. Lee arguing that :

It is necessary and urgent to convince the population of "contaminated" regions that most of their symptoms cannot be attributed to radiation, but to the physiological consequences of their stress. [...] There is a general consensus among psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists that the physical and mental effects of stress are the main problem.

The use of psychologists to individualize and pathologize state failures is not insignificant. The fears and anxieties of citizens, considered excessively emotional, are discredited and even scorned. Leaders and scientists derive their legitimacy from not being affected, and from their confidence in the future, reproducing the opposition between clear-sighted scientists in a position to govern, and emotional laymen. Far from being a historical parenthesis, the term radiophobia continues to be mobilized. It reappeared, for example, in the mouth of Lukashenko, in a speech intended to legitimize the development of nuclear power in Belarus: "the decision to

build a nuclear power plant should not be influenced by scientific and economic calculations, and not by radiophobia and other fears ". In Japan, following the Fukushima accident in 2011, the government and industry strategy is based on similar desensitization measures, primarily targeting the resistance of women and young mothers. As one team of researchers explains:

One of the strategies [to inhibit doubts and fears] is to say that the source of these concerns is unfounded, dismissing these fears as dangerous "rumors", and accusing the people from whom they emanate - often women - as being guilty of spreading this harmful information. [...] Once the public expression of fear is discredited as "harmful rumor", it's only a short step to labeling the women who spoke out as selfish or stupid [... The expression of fear of radiation is portrayed as the result of an unstable and unreasonable nervous personality type, as the consequence of hypersensitivity to one's environment [...] Many mothers have complained of being labeled "crazy" for being allegedly "excessively nervous" (shinkeishitsu sugite atamaga okashikunatta).

The pathologization of resistance is made all the easier by a long history of gendered stereotyping of women as "emotional" and "hysterical". Invalidating the feelings and experiences of a certain segment of the population has repercussions not only on the credibility of the people in question. Studies of *gaslighting* at an interpersonal and political level in other contexts (and in particular in the case of domestic violence) have shown, for example, that mobilizing sexist stereotypes in a context of structural and institutional inequality to discredit women's feelings leads to an intimate re-questioning of their sense of reality and self-esteem.

The example developed above prompts us to clarify and even qualify Anders's hypothesis that we are incapable of feeling a fear equal to what is at stake because of the supralimilarity of "the" technique. The manufacture of insensitivity and the discrediting of all those who are concerned are one of the pillars of the manufacture of consent, and one of the main objectives of the nuclear industry's communication techniques. Insensitivity is the result of a vast but identifiable range of concepts, expert interventions and diagnoses, such as radiophobia, designed to inhibit fear of nuclear power or make it laughable in hindsight. It could be argued that manipulation is first and foremost a matter of discursive artifice, a battle for information and its control, such as those evoked by attention economy thinking. Nevertheless, approaching the whole thing as a desensitization apparatus, rather than through the prism of the ideological battle, highlights the heterogeneity of the actors and components involved in this desensitization (not just "communicators", but also doctors, psychologists, etc.). The term also underlines the extent to which the effects of power are lodged at the level of feelings and of what is possible or acceptable to feel: ideological capture always implies an affective factory – the battle of ideas is therefore always also a battle on the level of affects. Thus, in the face of nuclear power, the problem is not that we are "incapable" of being afraid (Anders goes so far as to say that we are "illiterate in fear"). It's rather that we're caught up in a set of mechanisms designed to stifle and ridicule the slightest concern about the deadly technologies that surround us. Disinhibiting nuclear "progress" can only be achieved by orchestrating *affective inhibition*.

In a very different way, the car can also be approached and analyzed as a desensitization apparatus. There's no longer any need to demonstrate that the car is an ecological and health aberration. In France, for example, air pollution is responsible for 48,000 deaths a year, and emissions from transport (75% of which are caused by heavy goods vehicles and cars) account for 29% of greenhouse gas emissions, with much higher rates for fine particles. This is the most polluting sector, ahead of agriculture and manufacturing in particular. To understand the extent of the harmful effects of the car, however, we need to look further afield. We might recall André Gorz's invitation to "never pose the problem of transport in isolation, but always link it to the

problem of the city, the social division of labor and the compartmentalization it has introduced between the various dimensions of existence". The private car," he brilliantly described, "embodies, alienates and reproduces a whole model of society. I'd like to show that it also represents a particularly powerful desensitization apparatus. Indeed, driving is part of a very particular (and particularly anti-ecological) way of perceiving and interacting with the world.

The car, and the experience of driving it, intimately interferes with the way we conceive of the physical and natural environment around us, and modulates our sensitive, visual and olfactory capacities to interfere with it. In the words of sociologist Mimi Scheller, "we don't just feel our cars, we feel through and with them". "The bodily dispositions of motorists and the visceral feelings associated with car use", she explains, "are as essential to understanding the stubborn persistence of car-based cultures as more technical and socio-economic factors". The representation of "nature", in particular, is shaped by the experience of SUV driving for a number of Americans:

Gliding through sun-dappled green woods, heading towards the endless horizon of a vast desert or plain, or spinning along hedge-lined country lanes; driving has long been a way of "getting out into nature".

The omnipresence of imaginations and practices of "nature" that value the exploration of remote, difficult-to-access regions from the shelter of an all-terrain vehicle often comes at the expense of daily attention to the living beings around us: it entrenches the myth of the courageous adventurer in the face of wild nature, invisibilizing the less spectacular but undoubtedly more necessary practices of naturalists, agro-ecologists and gardeners who take care of the living beings that surround them on a daily basis. The car is a machine for producing insensitivity to what surrounds us: a device for desensitization. This insensitivity is not an anecdotal consequence of motorized transport; it is one of the primary qualities of this device, the reason why many of us choose it: to avoid smelling the smells of public transport, to avoid being exposed to the rain, to avoid being dirtied, to avoid hearing all those beings likely to approach us. And as public space becomes more polluted, unlivable and overcrowded (not least because of the increase in car traffic), this insensitivity becomes even more desirable. Aren't the most expensive and popular cars the ones that are the highest and furthest away from the road, the ones that best cushion bumps, that offer their own purified and conditioned air and perfectly isolate the smells and noises around them ≠ all while contributing to making life even more unbearable for everyone else around? In this respect, anyone who decides to practice walking as an art of existence, as a way of "becoming sensitive", will quickly face obstacles. Kilian Jörg's analysis of the subject of the automobile (Auto-subjekt) is very telling, and I'd like to take the liberty of quoting a long fraction of it:

Driving is made for Cartesian subjects: navigation is based on visual and textual information, through guardrails, demarcation lines on the ground and signs. From the outset, the other senses are excluded: no smell, no sound, no taste, no sensation. The ego drives through the city. Behind the windshields sit people - more often men than women - staring forward, their gaze blasé, hidden by sunglasses. Sociability and communication skills are drastically limited. They listen to their own music, breathe their own air-conditioning, and don't even feel the headwind produced by their deadly tempo [...] The automotive subject feels irritated by people and by his environment. Anything that gets in their way disrupts their freedom of movement, threatening their self-referentiality. Although they are the ones who put all other road users in mortal danger, as masters, they accuse above all those in danger [...] the body of the car is the hyper-functional shield of the Cartesian subject who doesn't have to be aware of

his body. [...] The freedom of the automotive subject is radical individualism, with no possibility of consideration for the environment.

If the concept of a desensitization mechanism seems promising, it's because it allows us to get away from an overly intentionalist vision of desensitization, which would always be the product of a clear strategy, emanating from an actor. Indeed, in the case of nuclear power, we can, with a few nuances, be content with the conceptual tools offered by Frankfurtian and even Gramscian approaches: we're dealing with an intentional strategy, which follows the classic pattern of "manipulation", aiming to make a certain number of representations and affective states "hegemonic". However, the notion of a desensitizing apparatus also allows us to include in our analyses ideological and affective captures that are not explicitly intended and produced by actors whose primary intention it was to do so. The mass introduction of cars as the primary means of mobility is certainly the result of long political and ideological battles, and the libidinal investment of certain people in their means of locomotion is not accidental. Yet the car creates forms of desensitization that are not its primary function, nor the result of intentional orchestration on the part of the car industry (but contribute to reinforcing it nonetheless). It seems essential to understand how this desensitization operates, and how it contributes, even indirectly, to the ecological devastation underway.

Conclusion

Crisis of sensitivity, or rather capture of sensitivity? In the current situation of ecological devastation, narratives and diagnoses count. Indeed, the ecological emergency painfully updates the question of what are the effective political consequences of thought. It insistently renews the question of which power(s) to act will be fed by which theories, which paths will be sketched out or confirmed, which schemes reproduced and which closures operated.

At a time when the story of an "insensitivity" or affective deficit of the moderns underpins more and more writings on the ecological crisis, it's worth asking how this assertion can nourish more ecological ways of living and acting. I have chosen to take the question of affects and sensitivity seriously, without dismissing it out of hand, while asking myself how this diagnosis could be completed and refined to participate in a critical and emancipatory ecology. The examples I've used show that talking about affects is not a futile, aesthetic exercise, nor is it necessarily opposed to more materialistic ecological critiques: affects are indeed a material force insofar as they are the product of material forces and institutions, with effects that are also material. Their analysis contributes to a finer understanding of the capture mechanisms to be unravelled in the ongoing battle. To speak of desensitizing apparatuses is to gain specificity and, above all, political concreteness in relation to the narrative of the insensitive "modern man" or disenchanted modernity.

If the arts of existence and naturalistic narratives are essential to become sensitive (again), we also need to take on board all those discursive, affective, material and institutional arrangements that cut us off, on a daily basis, from what matters (while at the same time make other things matter). Otherwise any "technique of the self" seems doomed to failure. Indeed, to connect differently and to more living things implies having loosened other ties beforehand, and the cultivation of new sensitivities cannot do without separations, clean breaks and struggles.