

Dying Virtually in War: The Affective Logic of Heroism in *The Red Badge of Courage*

Zicong Fan
Hebei University, China

For the following decades after the American Civil War, most American literature works presented the war in a romantic or sentimental manner. However, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* gave it a naturalistic touch to tell the story of Henry Fleming, the main character, overcoming cowardice and becoming a hero. Through its revolutionary criticism of psychoanalysis and capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari contributed a legacy to postmodern philosophy with their affect philosophy, with virtuality at its pivot. Using the Deleuzo-Guattarian affective philosophy as a scope, it is clear that the maturing of Henry is in fact a sequence of two attempts of deterritorialization in the war, one failed and the other successful. The heroism Henry acquires is demonstrated in the form of virtual death and disconnection with meaning; nonetheless, his return to the society makes it an incomplete destratification, which, at the same time, indicates the opportunity to be a true hero is forever lost to Henry, lost on the battlefield.

Keywords: Stephen Crane, affect theory, Gilles Deleuze, body without organs, virtual death

Introduction

The Red Badge of Courage is a naturalist war fiction written by Stephen Crane in 1895, which discusses questions of war, maturation, cowardice, and heroism through its main narrative line of Henry Fleming, the protagonist's participation of the American Civil War as a soldier of the north. The story tells about the development of a war hero who is at first an unsophisticated country boy fascinated by ancient wars, cannot handle his fear, and finally flees from the battlefield. However, after seeing the miserable death of his friend Jim Conklin, Henry returns to his regiment as a "hero" due to the wound made by a fleeing friendly soldier. In the coming battles, Henry fights relentlessly and feels he is a hero at last. The thesis argues that war is a desiring-machine which produces useful labor for the social machine and studies the process of Henry becoming a hero in war through a virtual death. However, his flight from the organism is ephemeral because by returning to society to play his role as a hero, Henry failed in his own war of attaining virtuality. This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the research, including the life trajectory of Stephen Crane, background of the completion of *The Red Badge of Courage*, foreign and domestic studies on the novel, objective of the research. The second chapter is meant to be a framework for teasing out the main theory structure, clarifying and defining terms, keywords, concepts that are going to be used in the research. The third chapter is the initial analysis of the text, which puts Henry Fleming on two plateaus and formulates the war as a desiring-machine. The fourth chapter looks at the desertion of Henry, which is to be argued as his first attempt of building the BwO,

which turns out to be an empty BwO rather than a full one. The fifth chapter illustrates the second and final attempt of Henry to build his BwO, which is approached by him temporarily through his virtual death, but soon lost due to his return to society. He is victorious in the final battle but defeated in the war—a war for the virtual. As a hero, he will not be allowed by schizoanalysis to return to his society. When he chooses to return, he is no hero anymore. The final chapter serves as a conclusion, which discusses why Henry fails this war for the virtual and where his salvation really is—on the battlefield. The only chance for Henry to become a true hero is on the battlefield; thus once the battle is over, the chance is forever unattainable.

Desire in Schizoanalysis

Deleuze and Guattari revolted against psychoanalysis with their schizoanalysis by renovating the idea of the unconscious, which, according to Sigmund Freud, lends itself to be considered as “a rowdy guest one has ejected...who continues to hammer on the door...causing such a ruckus that one is compelled to post a guard”, making it possible that the unconscious can “produce desire in harmony together” with the Ego and the Id (Buchanan, 2008, p. 28; Kolyri, 2020, p. 483). Sharing similar indifference with Crane, Deleuze and Guattari thundered that actualization was pivotal in desire. Taking *A Thousand Plateaus (ATP)* as an instance, Deleuze and Guattari clarified: “we will never ask what a book means, as signifier and signified; we will not look for anything to understand in it; but we will ask what it function with...” (1988, p. 4). Instead of what desire is, the question that should matter is how desire gets actualized, which constitutes desiring-machines.

Mentioned also as assemblages, since they are assembled desire, desiring-machines are “existing forms of desire” (Jordan, 1995, p. 126). The Deleuzo-Guattarian desire is not Oedipally repressed, but rather is autonomously assembled. “There are”, Deleuze and Guattari reaffirmed, “no internal drives in desire, only assemblages” (1988, p. 229). The production of desire, or desiring-production, Deleuze and Guattari (2009) pointed out:

is immediately consumption and a recording process (enregistrement), without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production...since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced. (p. 4)

Like desire, which, if not assembled, does not exist, an assemblage is meaningless on its own as well. Brian Massumi emphasized in his notes on translation that affect is “an ability to affect and be affected...implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. xvi). “[A]ll things in the world”, Deleuze and Guattari contended, “including humans, desire to flow unconstrained” (Ibrahim, 2015, p. 13). The body, or put another way, desiring-machine, can function only in a co-existential manner, whereby each can flow into the others. When desiring-machines are flowing into each other, the flow is what schizoanalysis defines as the affect, generating creative power by travelling along passages between different assemblages. Thus the primary problem of our body is how to construct it into a BwO.

The Construction of BwO

To construct is to become virtual. To construct a BwO one needs to disconnect from the signifying order. In his monograph *Parables for the Virtual*, Massumi mentioned a psychological study conducted by a group of researchers headed by Hertha Sturm. The study, preferably called as “Massumi’s snowman” within this thesis, was inspired by a broadcast accident that happened in Germany, which is caused by a short fill-in film between

programs. The film goes like this: A man builds a snowman on his roof garden. It starts to melt in the afternoon sun. He watches. After a time, he takes the snowman to the cool of the mountains, where it stops melting. He bids it good-bye, and leaves (Massumi, 2021, p. 25). Complaints were made by parents about their children feeling frightened of the film. Hertha Sturm and her team used three different versions of the film to scrutinize the differences of influence these films can wield upon the audience. These researchers asked different groups of nine-year-olds to rate the films, among which one version is the original wordless one, one with factual voice-over, and the other with emotional voice-over, on two scales of happy-sad and pleasant-unpleasant. The result turned out that the subjects of the study rated the sad scenes the most pleasant, with the originally silent version rated slightly happier than the emotional one. As a matter of fact, “the sadder the better” is what researchers learnt from the outcomes, demarcating a “gap between content and effect” of affects (Massumi, 2021, p. 26). The gap is described by Massumi in the title of the first chapter of his book as the autonomy of affect, which is exactly the disconnection from signifying order just sketched. However, the connection here, according to Massumi, is not a conventional indexing of the image received by the subject. As a matter of fact, it does not mean that there is no connection at all. Similar to the Deleuzo-Guattarian lobster God, the autonomy of affect demonstrates its sequencing of meanings on, if not multiple, a parallel level of intensity where sadness is registered as pleasantness.

To draw is to produce difference in itself, or put in another way, pure difference. If we think of, for instance, a leaf on an oak tree, we are generalizing an idea of it from many different-looking oak leaves, which is the combination of the one and the many. “The one and the many are”, however, merely “concepts of the understanding which make up the overly loose mesh of a distorted dialectic which proceeds by opposition” (Deleuze, 2014, p. 240). The virtual is the essence. It is nothing but a generalized emptiness. “Contraries may be combined”, Deleuze claimed, “contradictions established, but at no point has the essential been raised: ‘how many’, ‘how’, ‘in which cases’” (2014, p. 240). Therefore, we get “a twin but not symmetrical event: a side in pure difference and a side in actual things” (Williams, 2013, p. 11).

Henry on Two Plateaus

The growth in war manifested in Henry Fleming is to be argued as a constant process of attaining the BwO. For purpose of preparation of that argument, Henry Fleming should be located on two plateaus first. On the first plateau, Fleming is the body. He is the plane of consistency where everything happens; on the second plateau, Fleming is interacting with other bodies on another plane where they all become organs of that larger assemblage, or desiring-machine.

Before Fleming joins the army, his attitude towards the Civil War is distrustful. He regards the war as “some sort of a play affair” and although he always has this desire of witnessing a Greeklike struggle, he admits to himself that “[s]uch would be no more...Men were better, or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions” (Crane, 2009, p. 4). Though Fleming gives more credit to the ancient wars than this war that is being fought between the north and the south, still, he “had burned several times to enlist” (Crane, 2009, p. 4). The reason is pretty simple. War, as said in the first chapter, makes men. What John Anthony Casey Jr. described as “a sense of belatedness” and the “glorious burden” is not at all the same thing for Fleming (Casey, 2011, pp. 43-44). He is not a custodian of legacy. He is, or will soon become, the legacy. As depicted in the novel, “[t]he newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturings had aroused him to an uncheckable degree” (Crane, 2009, p. 4). Is not his picturing of war that exists in Fleming’s mind, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, a product of the state-machine? Yes, there are, to some extent,

some causes that are Henry's own problem. For instance, his romantic phantasy of the Greek wars. But, as reiterated before, the state has been propagandizing the war for a long time, and for many years to come, it is still going to do just that. Within the multiplicity that forms the reciprocal relation between the state and the war-machine, Deleuze and Guattari maintained that "[w]e are continually stratified" (1988, p. 159).

When the first battle comes, Henry is

like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box, only there [is] furious haste in his movements. He, in his thoughts, is careering off in other places, even as the carpenter who as he works whistles and thinks of his friend or his enemy, his home or a saloon. And these jolted dreams [are] never perfect to him afterward, but remain[s] a mass of blurred shapes. (Crane, 2009, p. 37)

On the blazing battlefield, Henry falls asleep. He is in some sort of day-dreaming, a state that "communicate how the youth is bodily present to but mentally absent from the events that surround him" (Croxall, 2015, p. 109). This state, when it communicates the youth's absence of his mind from the battle, is exactly what demarcates the presence of organism. As mentioned before, Deleuze followed Spinoza's ideas of monism. They are "not choosing either mind or body, but merging them into one, into the affect" (Wang, 2017, p. 118). Right now, Henry is unable to have his mind and body converged into one. He can still do his job as a soldier, shooting his rifle restlessly, to be frank. But the job is being done in an exact way that the state wants him to do, or put in another way, a way that the state wants the organism to extract useful labor from the body.

War as a Desiring-Machine

Before the first battle, the rumor that causes Henry to be in a state of astonishment turns out to be true. Marching towards the frontline, Henry gains a moment of calm that allows him to reflect. The landscape seems dreadful to him, and he is very sure that the generals do not know what threat lies ahead of his regiment. For one moment, Henry feels like he's going to step forward and harangue his comrades and he feels "shrill and passionate words" are coming to his mouth (Crane, 2009, p. 25). However, the youth is soon discouraged by the scene of his comrades being "deeply engrossed in this march" because he fears that the men are not as worried and thrilled as himself and they may mock him for his warnings (Crane, 2009, p. 26). Similar to what happens within Henry himself, it is obvious that there are blockages among soldiers as well. Like everyone in the world, Henry cannot avoid interaction with other human beings. After all, "[a] plateau is a piece of immanence. Every BwO is made up of plateaus. Every BwO is itself a plateau in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 158). If the essence of the world is multiplicity, then everything is always in communication, to some extent, with another. Bear in mind that in schizoanalysis, desire is "celebrated as the potential source of transformation and freedom" (Jordan, 1995, p. 126). Desire exists in forms of desiring-machines, which is the reciprocal relationship mentioned above. Therefore, war is a desiring-machine, an assemblage of guns, gunpowder, humans (not to mention humans themselves are already complicated assemblages), uniforms, flags, thundering shots, cannons, horses, wagons, etc. Also, Brian Massumi placed the claim that "affect is individual" as the first misconception that he wanted to clarify in *Parables for the Virtual*. Instead, it is transindividual, "ontogenetically prior to the distinction between the individual understood as separate unit and the collective understood as a molar aggregate of separate unites. It is 'collective'..." (2021, p. XLIII). It is self-evident that the regiment is being blocked in terms of its transindividual flows. The desire is the raw material of production. The desiring-machine is the actualized form of desire, which is the War. Then where

is the BwO? It is where everything is meant to happen, where desire is assembled into assemblages and redirects us to the virtual genesis of desiring-production. The BwO is the collective body of the soldiers. All the elements that converge into the assemblage of war play on it. All the impediment of flow happens within it.

Henry's communication with the other bodies (soldiers) on the plane of consistency is hindered by the organism—for an army that is about to go into battle, or is already in battle; thoughts of fear, desertion, etc., are undoubtedly impermissible and must be forbidden; otherwise, the soldiers will not be perfect docile subjects which the social machine extracts useful labor from. However, all desires to flow unconstrained. This desire is driven by the affect, the capacity of affecting and being affected by other bodies, which “emerge in the course of the new relationships that engage them” (Read, 2008, p. 222). Let's not forget that before his desertion, Henry is always failing to form communication with others. In desperate need for destratification, Henry forms new relation with his regiment during the fight.

A man near him who up to this time had been working feverishly at his rifle suddenly stopped and ran with howls. A lad whose face had borne an expression of exalted courage, the majesty of he who dares give his life, was, at an instant, smitten abject. He blanched like one who has come to the edge of a cliff at midnight and is suddenly made aware. There was a revelation. He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit. (Crane, 2009, p. 45)

It seems that the novel passages between the organs of this BwO; this collective body is finally not blocked any more. What's the output, though? A disaster. A massive desertion. Why is that? Or, to raise the question in a way that is more in line with the Deleuzo-Guattarian theory, how does it work to get that result? To answer that we need to think about the risk of constructing the BwO. Of course, when constructing the BwO we are taking everything away, by that we are talking about “the phantasy, and signifiances and subjectifications as a whole” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 151). But what if we take them away too fast? What if the removal is too sudden that not only the organization of organs are gone, but also the organs themselves. When building the BwO, one is risking. The potential outcome may be an empty BwO, rather than a full one. Deleuze and Guattari said that there are three types of BwOs: the full, the empty, and the cancerous. What we are looking at here is exactly an empty BwO. Imagine that there is a wonderful party, for instance, a party with a hundred people that constitute a BwO inside the room—perhaps including background music, crowd chanting, and even lights, making it a desiring-machine. Thus, the empty body without organs would not just remove the blockages between the organs, but would remove all the organs, leaving us an empty party, a room with nobody in it. In pure schizoanalytic terms, “power is the anti-energy and freedom the negation of this energy”, which makes it so that the BwO is where “bodily organs resist their normal functioning” (Gilliam, 2017, p. 131; Zevnik, 2016, p. 91). Surely, there is resistance by the soldiers against the normal functioning required by the organism. Pitifully, it happens too suddenly.

The Virtual Death of Henry

The watershed of the story is when Henry meets Jim Conklin, his hometown friend and comrade, during his desertion. By this time, Henry is jealous of the wounded soldiers—in Henry's case, he needs a wound—a “red badge of courage”. This desire for a wound as a badge is still the organismic influence the social machine wields on the subject to extract useful labor. However, the encounter with Jim is going to change it. Jim, the tall soldier, now with his face bearing “a semblance of gray paste”, begs “in a lowly way” for fear of being run over by artillery wagons if he dies on the road, which makes Henry “[reaches] an anguish where the sobs [scorches] him” (Crane, 2009, pp. 62-63). Then, the sorrowful scene develops into something that touches Henry at the deepest

and most tender part of Henry. Jim, all of a sudden, stops the pleading and “[goes] stonily forward” and refuses to stop until he finally finds his death place in a clump of bushes. Crane follows and watches the death of Jim with his face

twisted into an expression of every agony he had imagined for his friend. He now sprang to his feet and, going closer, gazed upon the paste-like face. The mouth was open and the teeth showed in a laugh...The youth turned, with sudden, livid rage, toward the battlefield. He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a philippic. (Crane, 2009, p. 66)

Henry’s decision to return to the battlefield rather than flee from it is to be argued as a result of Jim Conklin’s miserable death. Death, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms of the Lobster-God, also has two faces: the virtual and the actual. We all die. When it comes, we will not have our hearts pumping in our chests or minds wandering inside the brain. Meanwhile, we all experience, before the inevitable final death, numerous small virtual deaths in our life, for instance, “[a]s I became more hardened, the child in me died...as I became older, the adult in me died and the adolescent returned” (Williams, 2013, p. 10). It is fair enough for us to make the judgement that Jim has experienced the actual death whilst Henry has been through the virtual death, which is a sort of becoming. Henry virtually goes through death as the old Henry, and he makes a step closer to the final one. Remember that the relation between the virtual and the actual is reciprocal. Therefore, Henry’s becoming of the virtual death makes “a life that must end in death one that participates in intensities” (Williams, 2013, p. 10). We’ve talked about the misconceptions teased out by Brian Massumi. Affect is, in no means, individual. It is transindividual, which means “to solve the problem of excluding the organism from oneself is to make oneself a singular being” (Carrier, 1998, p. 200). And this singularity Henry needs to attain is beyond the actual limitation of the human body—it is virtual.

The Disconnection With Meaning

Henry returns to his regiment and is by mistake taken for a war hero for the cruise he gets during his desertion. It is actually caused by a friendly soldier who is running for his life and too nervous to listen to Henry’s questions. He is received and recognized for his red badge of courage. But he still needs his salvation in war to ease his conscience, to let his inner self acknowledge that he deserves the honor. And it will not take too long for him to have the chance. The enemy’s offensive comes in waves. It is so exhausting for Henry and his comrades to repel the incoming attack that Henry develops “a wild hate for the relentless foe” (Crane, 2009, p. 109). During the fight, Henry “[is] not conscious that he [is] erect upon his feet. He [does] not know the direction of the ground...he even lost the habit of balance and fell heavily. He [is] up again immediately” (Crane, 2009, p. 111). He is fighting in monstrous hatred and wrath. He is fighting with instincts. He is an animal. Even the lull of battle does not make him stop for he is too engrossed to even notice. Later, in the final battle, Henry fights like “an insane soldier” (Crane, 2009, p. 120). He is light-footed and advancing without being conscious of it. His fear of death, the ultimate cause of his cowardice, is met with some kind of delirium. What delirium? The delirium “to forget our attachments to any particular self and body—forget” (Williams, 2013, p. 10). The autonomy of affect has its own logic. It “[occupies] areas of ‘inbetween-ness’, lying undetermined between immediate perception and cognition” (Hadjiyiannis, 2015, p. 59). To escape the human body that is restricted by our fear of actual death, to attain the capacity of experimenting with our body so that it is open to new connections and intensities, it has to be done. It is what that is described as “a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness” by the novel, and what that is depicted as “outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration,

as it is from vital function” by Brian Massumi (Crane, 2009, pp. 122; 27). The autonomy of affect, as sketched earlier in this thesis, demonstrates its sequencing of meanings on, if not multiple, a parallel level of intensity. It is like “why we are not always capable of proving why we love another person despite being certain of our love for them” (Hadjiyiannis, 2015, p. 66). When Henry goes to the front for the first time, his actual body is present, but the virtual mind is absent. This time, the virtual is present, whilst the body is, in a schizoanalytic sense, forgotten. Henry’s being able to perform this interplay of the actual and the virtual manifests to the audience that he has constructed his BwO upon which “the body is opened to new pathways, new vectors; the subject is better able to realize its already nomadic nature, becomes more fluid, increases its power of action, increases its joy” (Horton, 2012, p. 126). He has established new connectivity. He is a man.

Henry’s Return as a Hero

Henry’s maturation in the war is acquired through deterritorialization. By escaping the limitation of organism, he becomes a true hero, or at least according to the criteria of himself. War, in this novel, is argued to be a desiring-machine. By experiencing a virtual death that is caused by the actual death of Jim Conklin, he disrupts the organismic patterns of this machine, as well as the patterns within himself. But his job of approaching the BwO is not finished yet. After the final battle, Henry “[sees] that he [is] good. He [recalls] with a thrill of joy the respectful comments of his fellows upon his conduct” (Crane, 2009, p. 153). After fighting like a mad man, or in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, fighting as a schizoid, Henry returns to the original path where he continues to judge himself in a way the state-machine wants him to. His elation is swept away by a sudden recollection of the tattered soldier, who, during his desertion, mistakes Henry for an injured fellow rather than a deserter. It is a reminder of his mistake, though it is conducted in the dark—no one except himself knows it. Nonetheless it deprives him of the mood to join the chatter of his fellow soldiers. Sometimes he even has “sudden suspicion that they were seeing his thoughts and scrutinizing each detail of the scene with the tattered soldier” (Crane, 2009, p. 155). He is no hero, not in a traditional way at least. The joyful judgement Henry makes about himself and the sudden suspicion that his secret is exposed make him a hero who returns to the society, rather than a traditional American hero that, according to Hu Yamin, “will quietly retire after saving the society, and even if he stays in the society for various reasons, he is going to be nothing but a depressed loner” (Hu, 2014, p. 96). Bear in mind that the state can sometimes become a war-machine. In this case of Henry Fleming, the singularity he achieves is eventually reterritorialized into another assemblage that continues the job to serve the state, just as the example of the opposition between the police and the criminal sketched earlier. Furthermore, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam J. Frank, when they were talking about the effect of fear, accentuated that “fear itself can be controlled by fear. One can frighten the soldier out of cowardice by making him more afraid of cowardice than of death” (1995, p. 57). Henry Fleming is too afraid about his cowardice being exposed, so he chooses to continue to be the hero in people’s eyes. He is still a coward.

Conclusion

During several centuries, the argument about whether or not Henry Fleming has achieved maturation and become a hero has never ceased. The conclusion to be argued in this thesis is that Henry does not become a hero in the novel. He is victorious in the final battle but defeated in the war—a war for the virtual. The heroism demonstrated by Henry Fleming is two-sided, just as the two pincers of Deleuze’s Lobster-God. During his approach towards the BwO, the actual death enables his virtual death. Through the monstrous delirium he

transcends his bodily restriction. He transcends the fear of death and many other organismic patterns in the assemblage. However, on the other side, though he forgets even why he is on the battlefield when he is becoming intensive, he recollects it soon afterwards—he wants his salvation. He wants to be a hero. Being a hero means being a subject from which the state-machine can extract useful labor. Every being that is stratified is being extracted from of its labor. Ironically, it is just that in the case of a hero the amount of extracted labor is more tremendous. The more capable you are, the more likely you are to become a victim of the state. Remember the full allegiance of pure difference Deleuze and Guattarian resorted to and the political indifference of difference their functionalism stance brought about in the second chapter. We've already concluded that the fruit of Henry Fleming's destratification is still a product of the state-machine. Thus, from a Deleuzo-Guattarian point of view, it is what the schizoanalysis should oppose. The only chance for Henry to be a true hero is, probably, that he dies on the battlefield, connecting the two faces of the asymmetrical event of death. One actual, one virtual. Deleuze tried to formulate suicide as the attempt to amalgamate the two faces of death. The conclusion he came to was negative. However, the philosopher at last chose to end his life by suicide after a long illness, as his last attempt to release new intensities, given the circumstance that his actual body is too limited to intensify anymore. In the novel, it is impossible to erase the mistake made by Henry Fleming. Though his actual body is in good condition, his true salvation lies, as said by himself, on the battlefield. At the moment when the battle is over, the chance of salvation for him is forever lost. In a word, the schizoanalysis will not allow the hero to return to his society. When he chooses to return, he is no hero anymore.

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